

Sustainability Series #1 - Environment + Justice: Voices of Prisoners

Title: Prison Ecology: Incarceration, Nature, and Environmental Justice

Summary: This talk explores the relationship between environmental and social justice issues particularly as it pertains to the lives of prisoners in California prisons. It will show how the failure on the part of state officials to consider ecological justice issues has led to sickness outbreaks and death in prisons from contaminated air and water. The lives of prisoners could be vastly improved if state policy makers looked through an environmentalist lens in their consideration of the quality of life and basic human rights of the prison population. Not all gloom and doom, the talk will also show how nature behind bars can be inspirational. The speaker will read from her edited volume, *Perspectives from the Cell Block: An Anthology of Prisoner Writings*, to show how contemplation of nature, as it breaks and creeps from the cracks in the concrete, allows for prisoner some precious moments to enjoy the varied lives of plants and animals as they scratch out an existence alongside them. The speaker hopes participants will bring prisons and prisoners into their future discussions on ways to raise awareness around environmental justice and the fight for a healthier, safer, and more beautiful world.

Quote: "Prison ecology is a human rights issue!"

Speaker Bio: Joan Parkin is Professor Emeritus and the author of *Perspectives from the Cell House, An Anthology of Prisoner Writings*. She received her Bachelor of Arts from Boston University and PhD in Comparative Literature from The Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York. She was the coordinator in Chicago for the Death Row Ten, a group of wrongfully convicted death row prisoners who were tortured by former police commander Jon Burge and railroaded to death row, many of whom won pardons by Governor George Ryan in the victorious abolition campaign that led to historic death row commutations. She is the co-founder of Feather River College's Incarcerated Student Program and has taught English to college students in and outside of the prisons for over a decade. Today she continues to do anti-racist, social justice work. Dr. Parkin is President for Incarcerated Allied Media, a nonprofit auxiliary organization for the Mule Creek Post, a newspaper written by men and women prisoners and about their experiences behind bars. She writes a regular column for the paper called "Free Your Mind" and is always looking for new ideas and experiences.