

### ***MYTH: the people incarcerated are the reason prison is dangerous***

Lifers spend an extensive amount of time inside a system that is defined by heavy regulation, control, and punishment. The dangers lies in the destructive and restrictive environment of the prison, not in the prisoners themselves. According to the office of the Chief Coroner, between 1986 and 1995 only 9% of all the deaths in custody in Ontario were attributed to homicide. This statistic also does not distinguish between who committed these homicides whether it was guards or other prisoners. According to the same stats, prisoners were 4 times more likely to commit suicide than to be murdered. By concentrating on the “inherent” dangerousness of prisoners sentenced to life, the focus of public discussion often veers away from the brutality and violence of the prison system and its personnel.

### ***MYTH: the people incarcerated are the reason prison is dangerous***

If you have been sentenced to life you will be routinely categorized by the Canadian state as a “risk” to this conception of the “public” which you are now excluded from. You’re inevitably assumed to be a threat, yet parole conditions mean you have to be perfect: a kind of super-citizen. However, lifers on parole accounted for only 0.5 percent of the reported homicide deaths in Canada during the past 31 years. In contrast, in Montreal over the past 23 years, 60 people have been killed at the hands of the police. None of them have been convicted of either voluntary or involuntary manslaughter (this is called police impunity). Yet, who are we still encouraged to trust, and who are we lead to stigmatize and outcast? •

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this brochure is a CURE project for *re-con*.

### **subverting higher education: teaching environmental justice**

*kathryn lennon & asha philar*

We are students in Environment and Resource Studies at the University of Waterloo, Ontario, who developed and led a student-driven seminar course on environmental justice. This presentation will address the process of planning and facilitating an environmental justice course. It will also focus on the challenges and successes we’ve encountered, and how to start discussions about difficult topics in an environmental studies context. We also hope to share resources and ideas with interested participants.

#### *how and why we created the course*

As students in Environment and Resource Studies at the University of Waterloo, we encountered the assumption that everyone comes to environmental studies with the same understandings of the environment. As women of colour, we found this frustrating, and were especially concerned about the lack of discussion of race in relation to power and environmental decision-making.

We began with the questions: How can we talk about the “environment” as something universal when there are so many different ways of seeing the world”? Why is discussion of race issues absent in our environmental classrooms?

From here, we decided if nobody was teaching such topics, we would have to teach ourselves. We created Environmental Justice, ERS 475/675 as a student-led, for-credit seminar course. It ran at the University of Waterloo from January to April 2010. We had 15 students in the class, and one faculty supervisor. Our class met for 3 hours sessions, once a week.

#### *course description (excerpt from our syllabus)*

Environmental justice explores the way that environmental actions, policies and perceptions interact with social inequities. Environmental justice calls for an examination of the way that individuals and communities with less power are disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation, and are left out of environmental decision-making.

*lennon & philar: subverting higher education*

this article is taken from a workshop given at Study in Action 2010, Montreal.

Environmental justice is a movement; an analytical framework; a state of being; a conversation for community understanding, advocacy and mobilization; and a political principle. This course offers an overview of environmental justice in theory and practice, and will introduce students to marginalized voices in the environmental movement, and examine ways in which identity shapes our understanding of environment.

The purpose of this course is to create a community of learners who will explore environmental justice topics that are often overlooked in other university courses. This is a peer-taught pilot course. The content of the course will be shaped by the knowledge, experiences and contributions of participants. We will focus on a Canadian context, using local examples. Weekly meetings will model anti-oppressive and interactive ways of learning, and will include guest speakers, readings and student-led activities.

#### *course objectives*

1. To gain a working knowledge of key concepts including: environmental justice, environmental racism, privilege, power, and oppression
2. To introduce participants to skills and research methods useful for environmental justice work including: indigenous research methodologies, participatory action research, and facilitation skills.
3. To develop critical thinking skills and use them to analyze environmental issues with an environmental justice framework.
4. To examine and challenge our own assumptions.
5. To hear from voices at the margins of environmentalism
6. To build course content and resources collaboratively.
7. To connect to a greater body of environmental justice research, knowledge and action.

Our learning in this course will be supported by discussions, lectures, group and individual work, readings, and activities. Through theory and reflection, case studies, and real world examples and application, we will explore micro and macro components of an environmental justice analysis. This is a very interactive and col-

laborative course. Participants must take responsibility for their own learning and are expected to: relate and apply concepts from the class to their life outside of the classroom, to contribute thoughtfully to class discussions, and to actively listen to their peers. Participants will contribute to course learning objectives through readings, discussions and projects, help build a course resource list and lead one activity during the semester.

Course themes include:

- history of environmental justice, and the canadian context
- race, class, and gender
- power, privilege, and oppression
- representations of environment and wilderness
- personal position and identity
- communication and consultation
- doing accountable research for and with communities not our own
- rights and laws
- decision-making and policy

#### *definition gallery*

To give you a taste of the activities we use in our classroom, we will now do an activity called the 'Definition Gallery'. The purpose of this is to critically examine definitions of words such as environment, justice, environmentalism and wilderness. This exercise illustrated how language frames our understanding of the world.

Materials: chart paper, pens

1. Write the words *environment*, *justice*, *environmentalism*, and *wilderness* on sheets of paper.
2. Ask participants to add definitions of the words to the sheet of paper, either their personal definitions, or commonly used definitions.
3. Discuss the definitions, using questions such as: What were our sources of knowledge? How had we come by our understandings of these words? How had our personal identities shaped our understandings of these words?

### *discussion questions*

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of teaching environmental justice as a for-credit university course, within a post-secondary institution, rather than as a free community-based course, or informal discussion group?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of working within a system to create change?
- What is your current understanding of environmental justice, of how social inequalities fit in with environmental issues?
- Have you had a chance to learn about environmental justice in university classes?
- Do you have experiences with alternative education?
- Can teaching be a form of activism?

### *more resources*

Andil Gosine and Cheryl Teelucksingh. 2008. *Environmental Justice and Racism in Canada: An Introduction*. (Emond Montgomery Publications: Toronto).

Julian Agyeman, Peter Cole, Randolph Haluza-DeLay and Pat O'Riley Eds. 2009. *Speaking for Ourselves: Environmental Justice in Canada*. (UBC Press: Vancouver).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith. 2005. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. (Zed Books: London).

"Green is Not the Only Colour", <http://briarpatchmagazine.com/514/>

The Green Justice Kit  
<http://www.youthactioncentre.ca/English/actionresources/guides.htm>

Interview with Robert Bullard, one of the pioneering scholars and activists in the environmental justice movement.  
[http://www.sundancechannel.com/thegoodfight/projects/robert\\_bullard](http://www.sundancechannel.com/thegoodfight/projects/robert_bullard)

Kevin DeLuca. "A wilderness environmentalism manifesto: Contesting the infinite self-absorption of humans".

William Cronon, "The trouble with wilderness: Or, getting back to the wrong nature".

"Why are Greens so white?" Toronto Star- June 2, 2007 by Peter Gorrie, <http://www.environmentaldefence.ca/pressroom/viewnews.php?id=78>

Buzzelli, Mark. "Environmental Justice in Canada: It Matters Where You Live". <http://www.cprn.org/doc.cfm?doc=1969&l=eng> •

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