

Elizabeth Williamson The Evergreen State College



Stern Hand, Kind Heart: Women Writing from and about Prison

Course description

The title for this course is taken from a description of a workhouse where labor, charity and reform were the pillars of the institution. Courts and governments have historically been squeamish about imprisoning women, but due to tough drug sentencing laws, the population of women in prison is on the rise. Besides the impact on individual offenders, the absence of mothers and caregivers from communities on the outside can have devastating consequences. In this course, we will read a series of poems, short stories and essays about women living--and working--in prisons, examining the ways in which gender does, and does not, affect their experience of incarceration. Toward the end of the course, we will focus more closely on the experience of female prisoners in America, and individual seminar participants will design their own research presentations on a narrow topic relating to this larger one.

Course texts

Franklin, *prison writing in 20th-century America*
Norton, "Arrival"
Angelou, "Still I Rise"
Jones, "Prison Letter"
Metzer, "The Manipulation Game"
Gilman, *The Yellow Wallpaper*
Davies and Cook, "The Sex of Crime and Punishment"
Ancrene Wisse, selections
Hutchinson, selections
Morgan, "The violence of women's imprisonment"

Grimwade, "Diminishing Opportunities"
Owen, "Women and Imprisonment in the United States"
Gurley Flynn, selections
Madame Roland, selections
Jeanne D'Arc, selections
Harlow, "On Trial: The United States"
Davis, selections
Gilbert, "Crime, Sex and Justice"
Deming, selections
McConnell, selections
Wozencraft, selections
Corthron, *Cage Rhythm*
Prejean, Dead Man Walking
Boudin, "For Mumia: I wonder"
Clark, "Write a poem that makes no sense"