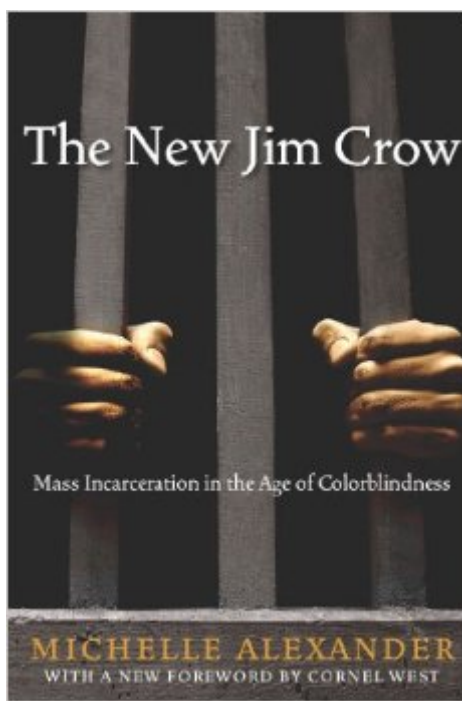


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The New Jim Crow



Synopsis

Once in a great while a book comes along that changes the way we see the world and helps to fuel a nationwide social movement. The New Jim Crow is such a book. Praised by Harvard Law professor Lani Guinier as "brave and bold," this book directly challenges the notion that the election of Barack Obama signals a new era of colorblindness. With dazzling candor, legal scholar Michelle Alexander argues that "we have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it." By targeting black men through the War on Drugs and decimating communities of color, the U.S. criminal justice system functions as a contemporary system of racial control—relegating millions to a permanent second-class status—even as it formally adheres to the principle of colorblindness. In the words of Benjamin Todd Jealous, president and CEO of the NAACP, this book is a "call to action." Called "stunning" by Pulitzer Prize-winning historian David Levering Lewis, "invaluable" by the Daily Kos, "explosive" by Kirkus, and "profoundly necessary" by the Miami Herald, this updated and revised paperback edition of The New Jim Crow, now with a foreword by Cornel West, is a must-read for all people of conscience.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Thirty years ago, fewer than 350,000 people were held in prisons and jails in the United States. Today, the number of inmates in the United States exceeds 2,000,000. In this book, Alexander argues that this system of mass incarceration "operates as a tightly networked system of laws, policies, customs, and institutions that operate collectively to ensure the subordinate status of a group defined largely by race." The War on Drugs, the book contends, has created "a lower caste of individuals who are permanently barred by law and custom from mainstream society." Mass incarceration, and the disabilities that come with the label "felon," serve, metaphorically, as the new Jim Crow. The book develops this argument with systematic care. The first chapter provides context with a brief history of the rise, fall and interrelation of the first two racial caste systems in the United States, slavery and Jim Crow. Subsequent chapters provide close scrutiny of the system of mass incarceration that has arisen over the past thirty years, examining each stage of the process (e.g., criminalization, investigation, prosecution, sentencing) and the many collateral consequences of a felony conviction (entirely apart from any prison time) and how and why each of these has operated to the detriment of African-Americans. The book also explores how the caste system Alexander identifies is different and not-so-different from Jim Crow, the many political and economic forces now invested in sustaining it, and how it has been rendered virtually immune to challenge through litigation.

I'm a white man and I carry with me the cultural legacy of racism. I know I'm not alone but I don't find many other white people who are willing to venture into this uncomfortable territory and own up to our own racism. And while I've had a few conversations about race with black men, I must say I feel like I'm venturing into dangerous territory - how do I transcend the privilege I've had as an socio-economically advantaged white man to connect to those who rightly see me and my kind as an oppressor? This was a hard book to read. I said that about "Slavery by Another Name" as well which is the companion book to this one as they both address a white power structure that uses prisons to humiliate, degrade, diminish and control black people. "Slavery by Another Name" addresses this phenomenon during Jim Crow and "The New Jim Crow" addresses how we've been doing this for the past thirty years. To the extent white people and non-black minorities I know talk about race, it's about why blacks continue to languish at the bottom of the American barrel. If other ethnic groups that have experienced discrimination manage to overcome it and prosper as Americans, what is wrong with blacks? I've always said it was slavery and its legacy, the Jim Crow era and its deprivations but now I realize that the story is even more complex, black men have been

disproportionately single out for prison time, causing entire families to suffer the economic loss, the social stigma and family shame that accompanies such imprisonment. I remember the O.J. trial and how whites were "shocked" that blacks had such a different take on the police and criminal justice.

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