

Michelle Alexander. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press, 2010. Pp. 312. Paper. \$11.99.

Michelle Alexander, a civil rights litigator, examines the unconscious bias that U.S. officers and law enforcement officials have against people of other races. She discusses race-related issues specific to African American males and the mass incarceration they face in the United States. Although she explains the discrimination that African Americans experience, she explains that this issue is also prevalent among other minorities and socio-economically disadvantaged populations.

A “racial caste system” is a type of classification where people of color are kept in an inferior position, which Alexander believes was a direct response to the Civil Rights Movements. Alexander begins by reminding us that racial caste is nothing new in America, both slavery and the original Jim Crow Laws were racial caste systems. She describes the way that these systems have evolved as historical circumstances changed. As you take a look into each era it shows how the racial caste system is challenged and loses its equilibrium, creating a kind of existential crisis for the white elites that it serves. In order to regain that equilibrium, the system needs to adapt, and it does so through manipulation of the fears and resentments of poor and working-class whites. For example, the original Jim Crow segregation was an adaptation to the emancipation of enslaved Africans and the progress made during the era of Reconstruction.

Many considered that systematic racial discrimination ended with the civil rights movement reforms of the 1960s, but Alexander explains that the United States criminal justice system used the War on Drugs as a primary tool for enforcing traditional and new modes of discrimination and oppression. These new forms of racism have led to not only the highest incarceration in the world, but also a large rate of imprisonment for African American men. In fact, it has been proven that whites are more likely to commit drug related crimes than people of color. The illegality of drugs such as marijuana tends to result in black and minority users being imprisoned or apprehended for use or possession, while white users get warnings or fines. Similarly,

traffic violations perpetrated by minority offenders are treated as a problem for the racial group as whole, while white offenses are seen as a single aberration in the law, not an epidemic issue.

The War on Drugs began in 1982 during the Reagan administration as a response to a crack cocaine crisis in black ghettos. During the mid-1980s the use of cocaine increased in these neighborhoods; and federal drug authorities publicized the problem using scare tactics in order to generate support for their escalation. With the use of media, they succeeded in their campaign and an expansion of law enforcement activities in America's urban neighborhoods began. She goes on to explain how African American and whites are treated differently by law enforcement to this day. Alexander writes about a very tough subject that many try to avoid. It is an issue that has brought to life the Black Lives Matter movement. People have grown tired of the abuse that law enforcement has forced upon them for years. As it is a sensitive topic, Alexander does a great job in explaining why so many avoid talking about it, and the changes that should be made in order to better our system. The book opens people's eyes to systematic racial injustice perpetrated by law enforcement for years, which has created an under-cast where upward mobility is severely constrained in a country that says it offers opportunity to all.

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