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**Review of *The New Jim Crow in the Age of Colorblindness*.
Michelle Alexander. Reviewed by Marguerite G. Rosenthal.**

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of postmodernism in social work by two decades. Third, the authors' argumentation is sometimes seriously flawed. They occasionally cherry-pick statistics and posit dubious cause/effect relationships between discrete phenomena, such as the lack of scholarships among deans and the predominance of a "social agency model" in schools of social work.

Finally, in virtually every chapter they insert gratuitous and often speculative asides—which, ironically, have little or no foundation in data. This detracts from the book's worthy points and gives the impression the authors are more interested in settling personal and professional scores than presenting a serious critique. Space limitations preclude citing the numerous examples of such excesses.

The book concludes with a series of "radical reforms" to save social work education. Some are eminently sensible, others quixotic, nearly all have uncertain consequences. They include the deregulation of CSWE; imposing restrictions on program growth and reducing the number of low quality Ph.D. programs; raising admission standards, primarily through standardized tests; instituting "performance-based accreditation" (although specific criteria are not suggested); recognizing the Ph.D. as the terminal degree; and enhancing the profession's leaders, primarily by asserting the primacy of scholarly productivity in selecting them. Although many social work educators will take umbrage at its tone and substance, *A Dream Deferred* may stimulate a conversation the profession has ignored for too long. That alone would be a worthy outcome.

Michael Reisch, School of Social Work, University of Maryland

Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow in the Age of Colorblindness* (2010). New York & London: The New Press. \$27.95 (hardcover).

Two-thirds of the way through her powerful analysis of the criminal "justice" system, Alexander asks: "If someone were to visit the United States from another country (or another planet) and ask: Is the U.S. criminal justice system some kind of tool of racial control?" In the same paragraph, she answers her question:

Because mass incarceration is officially colorblind, it seems inconceivable that the system could function much like a racial caste system. The widespread and mistaken belief that racial animus is necessary for the creation and maintenance of racialized systems of social control is the most important reason that we, as a nation, have remained in deep denial (p. 178).

Alexander, who holds joint appointments at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity and Ohio State's Moritz College of Law, has scrutinized every aspect of the criminal justice system to conclude that, since the 1980s, it has become a vehicle for the suppression of African American males that renders at least one third of African American men virtually stateless.

Building on recent scholarship that has tracked the dramatic rise in the U.S. prison population—up from 300,000 in the early 1980s to 2.3 million at last count—Alexander convincingly shows that the War on Drugs, initiated most aggressively by Ronald Reagan in 1982 (but with antecedents in Nixon's presidential bid), was used as a tool to gain political advantage by appealing to whites' prejudices and as a way to counter the successes of the Civil Rights Movement. She notes that the "war" was announced when fewer than 2% of Americans stated that drug use was the most important problem facing the country, yet during the Reagan administration, the drug enforcement apparatus received huge budget increases while funding for research and treatment declined dramatically (p. 49).

Alexander is sensitive to the structural changes—principally deindustrialization and its consequent dramatic loss of employment opportunities for urban Blacks—that occurred simultaneously with the spread of drug use. But her focus is primarily on the legal and social consequences of the War on Drugs that have treated non-violent crack cocaine users, who are primarily African Americans, much more harshly than the equal or greater numbers of whites who use powder cocaine. She cites research that demonstrates how African Americans are convicted of and imprisoned for drug offenses at rates that vary by state but are as high as 57% greater than those for whites (p. 96). Changes in state and federal sentencing laws and practices dating from the 1970s, especially "three strikes" laws

that result in a life sentence for a third conviction no matter how minor the crime, and mandatory minimum sentences have contributed to the explosion of the prison population.

Where Alexander's analysis excels is in its unveiling of the evisceration of presumed Constitutional protections that have occurred as a consequence of the drug war defendants' powerlessness in the face of aggressive and discretionary police practices, an insufficient and inadequate criminal defense bar, and court decisions that allow racial profiling to continue, although race is legally a suspect (protected) category. Thus, despite the 4th Amendment, police routinely stop and frisk young male suspects; in New York City in 2006, there were nearly 1400 of these every day (p. 132). Though indigent criminal defendants are technically entitled to a lawyer, the public defender system is so under-staffed that most defendants take, or are encouraged to take, a plea bargain—a mis-step that can lead to a long imprisonment, especially for repeat offenders.

What Alexander labels "collateral consequences" of having a prison record contributes to her conclusion that millions are relegated to a second-class or caste assignment. In many states, former felons cannot vote. Criminal background checks and denial of some licenses prevent many if not most from employment. Many federally supported benefits—food stamps, public housing, section 8 housing vouchers, education assistance—are denied to ex-offenders. These prohibitions make it almost impossible for ex-offenders to survive outside of prison and render them stigmatized and socially excluded. This form of social stratification, the author states, is "a form of branding by the government" (p. 148).

The topics discussed above are brief summaries of some of the major areas covered in this book that should be of interest to anyone concerned about the direction of contemporary social and legal policies as well as social stratification. Too often, social welfare academics ignore the far reach of the American "justice" system. *The New Jim Crow* provides compelling reasons for why they need to pay attention.

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