

The New Jim Crow and US Mass Incarceration – Michelle Alexander

"The future of race in America": **The overwhelming systemic racism in the judicial system and the mass incarceration of Black men. Michelle Alexander** is a writer and civil rights advocate. She is the author of the 2010 book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*

Link: <https://youtu.be/SQ6H-Mz6hgw> [2013 (24 minutes)]

Michelle Alexander's TedTALK is about an incarceration system unparalleled in the history of the world—the United States' system now. Alexander came, over time, to an understanding that we did not end slavery, "we have redesigned it," and we have a racial caste system. Our criminal justice system is, "not just another system in our country infected by bias;" mass incarceration functions as "racial and social control" versus crime control. Children—Black and Brown—in segregated and ghetto-ized areas grow up believing that they too will someday go to prison. Alexander uses statistics: more Black men today are under the correctional control system than were enslaved at the end of the Civil War; more Black men today can't vote than was the case when slavery ended; in many large urban areas, more than half of Black men have criminal records and "permanent second class status." The drug war targeted Black men in ways that it has never targeted other racial or ethnic groups. In the decades after the 1970s the prison population quintupled; but that growth did not correlate with crime rates. (If we wanted to get back to the numbers of the 70's we would have to release 4 out of 5 people.) "Black incarceration rates have soared regardless of whether crime is going up or down in any community or in the nation as a whole." After being overly surveilled and then jailed, ex-prisoners must "check the box" on job applications greatly reducing the chance of getting hired. They also often must pay "fees, fines, court cost, and accumulated child support"—all of which leave a yoke around those who serve time, positioning them without few supports or options to live "on the outside". Michelle Alexander describes this world of the New Jim Crow and calls on us all to create a major social movement to attack our American racial caste system. This would be a movement that demands that we recognize the racism at its core and the 'dignity and humanity' of the incarcerated who deserve "jobs not jails".

Additional Resources:

2016 documentary film "13th" by Ava Duvernay (Netflix): If You Paid Your Debt to Society, You Should Be Allowed to Work <https://nyti.ms/3luNFW4>

[Mass Incarceration: The Whole Pie 2020 | Prison Policy Initiative](#)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rockefeller_Drug_Laws

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/scans/Rock.pdf>

<https://www.prisonpolicy.org/rocklawfact.html>

[The Auburn System - Cayuga Museum of History and Art](#)