

SOC 100 Fall 2017 *The New Jim Crow* Paper Prompt

Introductory materials provided to students on: September 28, 2017.

Paper prompt provided to students on: October 6, 2017

INTRODUCTION TO READING *THE NEW JIM CROW*:

Your second paper is on the book *The New Jim Crow: Mass-Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander. If you're having trouble, don't panic -- it is a dense book. Alexander is a civil rights lawyer and a legal scholar, so her perspective is one that is looking specifically at the history of the legal system in the U.S. and how incarceration (i.e., putting people in prison) acts as a form of social control of certain populations.

When you're reading through the book, here's some things to think about when you're going through it:

1. Identify a book's primary thesis: what's the overall point of the book; what argument, situation, or concept is Alexander trying to prove to you?
2. Identify the sub-thesis for each chapter and recognize that the intent of each chapter is to provide supportive evidence for the main thesis of the book: once you've figured out what the overall point is, thinking about how each chapter is connected to that point. For example, in the first chapter, how might talking specifically about the concepts of race and racism be connected to the broader theme of the book? If you read through the introduction, as well, Alexander provides a "roadmap" or "layout" of what each chapter will cover that can provide some insight as to the sub-thesis for each chapter.
3. Identify specific arguments that the author uses to support the thesis of this chapter: what evidence is being used to support the point of each chapter? For example, what evidence does Alexander use to try and prove that "racial caste" exists historically within the U.S. (something that's covered in chapter one)?
4. Identify strengths & weaknesses of the chapter: think critically about the material, including deciding whether the evidence provided supported the author's stated thesis: does Alexander's argument make sense, is the evidence enough support, to convince you of her argument?
5. Discuss how this material informs the sociological imagination & supports material we have learned in class: what connections to other concepts or ideas from across the semester do you see?

Take your time when you're reading the book. Take it in "bitesize" chunks or chapter by chapter. If you go through with those five general questions in mind, the book won't be as overwhelming. I've also got some resources I'm going to link below that might help you. If you have Netflix, you might also try watching the documentary *13th*, which is about the same topic AND uses some of the research from Alexander's book (as well as interviews with her)

Finally, if there's a specific concept or chapter you're struggling with, feel free to contact me and I'll do my best to help. However, I ask that you be *specific* as the more general you are in terms of what you're having problems with, the less helpful I can be. I'll also add all of these resources to a sub-module in the table of contents section later today. Finally, to put things in perspective,

this paper is only worth 6% of your grade -- that's the smallest amount of all the assignments other than the 10-point syllabus quiz.

Your paper prompt will go live in D2L on Friday October 6 and will be due Friday October 13.

The New Jim Crow Paper Prompt:

In a minimum of 500 words, answer ALL of the following questions:

- (a) Examine how race and the criminal justice (CJ) system are connected in Alexander's book using specifically analyzed examples. Be sure to address all three parts of the CJ system: policing, courts, and the penal system.
- (b) How are gender and class connected to the racial discrimination Alexander describes? Would the system of "racial caste," as Alexander calls it, have worked if any other groups were targeted?
- (c) Explore the role of ideology in creating the system Alexander describes. What type of beliefs or ways of thinking are required to create such a system?
- (d) Do see any other examples of racial caste in the U.S. or globally? Do you see signs that ones might be developing for different groups?

Your paper should be turned in by 9am Friday October 13 through Dropbox. Your document should be in PDF or Word (.doc/.docx) format. No other formats will be accepted! If you are having problems with your submission [email me](#) **PRIOR** to the due date with a copy of your paper. I also **highly encourage** everyone to take a look at the attached document "Paper Rubric," which details more specifically what I am looking for in a paper over four criteria and how those criteria are weighted in your grade while still following the general guidelines set forth by the rubric in the syllabus. You might also want to check out the attached audio file where I go over the prompt (especially if you weren't in class on Friday).