

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness
By Michelle Alexander. The New Press; \$19.95. 312 pages.

Two striking street scenes frame Michelle Alexander's courageous expose of the War on Drugs. In the first, it's Election Day 2008. Alexander sees a handcuffed black man on his knees surrounded by cops. The author, an Ohio State law professor and former ACLU attorney, says she wondered at that moment what Obama's victory would mean for African Americans in the 'hood. In the second scene, just about to board a bus, Alexander sees a bright poster that proclaims, "The Drug War Is the New Jim Crow." On the spur of the moment, she tells herself, "Yeah, that's crazy." After gathering data and amassing evidence, she changes her mind 360 and concludes that the Drug War is in fact today's streamlined version of yesterday's hoary, color-coded discrimination. In *The New Jim Crow*, Alexander analyzes Supreme Court cases, presents statistics about sentencing, and unmasks cops, judges, and prosecutors who have deprived and denied citizens of Constitutional rights. Then, too, she shows that when it comes to drugs and African Americans, Obama is no different than Bush, Clinton, and Reagan. Beyond the proverbial shadow of a doubt, she finds the Obama White House guilty of racism masked as a righteous crusade against crime and addiction. Alexander's legal brief and call-to-arms also offers evidence of rampant racial profiling, blatant prejudice in state and federal courts, and an on-going vendetta against African Americans arrested for possession of piddling amounts of crack and weed. Alexander wails against the inhumanity of the law without wallowing in rage or sinking into despair. In the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bob Marley, she pleads for a radical restructuring of society and the legalization of marijuana. No wonder that in his Foreword, Princeton Professor Cornell West calls *The New Jim Crow* "the secular Bible for a new social movement."

Jonah Raskin