

THE PROGRESSIVE FORUM

Great Minds, Great Answers

For release:
June 18, 2012

Contact:
Randall Morton
President, Progressive Forum
713-664-0020 office or 713-702-2245 cell
rrmorton@progressiveforumhouston.org
More at www.progressiveforumhouston.org

Michelle Alexander at the Progressive Forum October 2, 2012



Highly acclaimed civil rights lawyer, advocate, and legal scholar, Michelle Alexander, will speak at The Progressive Forum on Tuesday, October 2, 2012 at the Wortham Center, Cullen Theater at 7:30. Her program is entitled “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,” the same title of her book released this year in paperback. She will sign books and greet fans at the end of the evening.

Tickets range from \$14 to \$54. A limited number of \$74 tickets are available, which includes a pre-event, green room reception with Alexander at 6:15 PM and center-front seating. Tickets are available at ProgressiveForumHouston.org or by calling 832-251-0706. There is no physical box office except at the theater on event night.

The event is produced in association with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Texas. The event sponsor is Berg & Androphy.

Alexander argues that “we have not ended the racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it.” *The New Jim Crow* examines how the mass incarceration of African American men, primarily through the war on drugs, has created a new racial under caste, a group of people defined largely by race that is subject to legalized discrimination, scorn, and social exclusion.

Alexander says that the criminal justice system functions as a contemporary system of racial control. She challenges the conventional wisdom that with the election of Barack Obama as President, our nation has “triumphed over race.” She asserts that although Jim Crow laws were wiped off the books decades ago, today an astounding percentage of the African American community is warehoused in prisons or trapped in a permanent, second-class status, much like their grandparents before them who lived under an explicit system of racial control.

-More-

As reported in *The New York Times* of March 6, 2012:

Professor Alexander, who is black, knew that African-Americans were overrepresented in prison, though she resisted the idea that this was anything more than unequal implementation of colorblind laws. But her work as director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Racial Justice Project in Northern California opened her eyes to the extent of the lifelong exclusion many offenders face, including job discrimination, elimination from juries and voter rolls, and even disqualification from food stamps, public housing and student loans.

"It's easy to be completely unaware that this vast new system of racial and social control has emerged," she said. "Unlike in Jim Crow days, there were no 'Whites Only' signs. The system is out of sight, out of mind."

In her book, she says, "Studies show that people of all colors use and sell illegal drugs at remarkably similar rates... In some states, black men have been admitted to prison on drug charges at rates twenty to fifty times greater than those of white men. And in major cities wracked by the drug war, as many as 80 percent of young African American men now have criminal records and are thus subject to legalized discrimination for the rest of their lives."

Alexander says that old forms of discrimination are suddenly legal once you're labeled a felon. Examples include discrimination in employment, housing, education, and public benefits; denial of the right to vote; and exclusion from jury service.

Alexander challenges the civil rights community, and all of us, to place mass incarceration at the forefront of a new movement for racial justice in America.

In 2005, Alexander won a Soros Justice Fellowship, which supported the writing of *The New Jim Crow*. The book received rave reviews, and won the NAACP Image Award for "outstanding literary work of non-fiction" in 2011. In his forward, Cornel West calls it "the secular bible for a new social movement" and "an instant classic." At the time of this press release, *The New Jim Crow* ranks 11th on *The New York Times* bestseller list. It was released in paperback in January of this year.

Michelle Alexander holds a joint appointment at the Moritz College of Law and the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, both at Ohio State University. Previously, Alexander was on the faculty of Stanford Law School, where she served as Director of the Civil Rights Clinic. Before entering academia, she served as the Director of the Racial Justice Project for the ACLU of Northern California. In that position, she helped lead a national campaign against racial profiling by law enforcement known as the "DWB Campaign" or "Driving While Black or Brown Campaign."

Alexander graduated from Stanford Law School and Vanderbilt University. After law school, she clerked for Supreme Court justice Harry A. Blackmun. In addition to working in the non-profit sector, Alexander has worked as a litigator at private law firms. As an Associate at Saperstein,

Goldstein, Demchak & Baller, she specialized in class action suits alleging race and gender discrimination. She now lives outside of Columbus, Ohio.

The Progressive Forum is a nonprofit 501(C)(3) civic speaker organization presenting its events at The Wortham Center. It's the only civic speaker organization in America dedicated expressly to progressive values. Its purpose is to enrich our democracy and culture by striving to present the greatest minds from all the fields of human endeavor, the sciences and the humanities as well as politics and public affairs, great minds it believes are advancing the success of individuals, our species, and life on the earth.

The Progressive Forum premiered on June 13, 2005, with Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and then Houston Mayor Bill White in a program called "Our Environmental Challenges." Al Gore launched *An Inconvenient Truth* at The Progressive Forum June 7, 2006, his first U.S. book event for that title. On September 17, 2008, Gloria Steinem celebrated the 30th anniversary of the historic National Women's Conference held in Houston. On March 27, 2008, Robert Redford introduced a film he produced and narrated, *Fighting Goliath: Texas Coal Wars*, a documentary about 32 Texas cities banding together opposing coal plant permits.

In June 12, 2009, Nancy Pelosi became the first sitting U.S. House Speaker to make a public appearance in Houston in modern times. On December 7, 2009, The Progressive Forum produced the national launch event for the first book by premier climatologist James Hansen of NASA, *Storms of My Grandchildren: The Truth about the Coming Climate Catastrophe and Our last Chance to Save Humanity*. On November 16, 2010, The Progressive Forum presented John Paul Stevens, the first U.S. Supreme Court Justice to appear in a public event in Houston.

In a multi-year series, The Progressive Forum has presented the leaders of the food movement, Eric Schlosser September 30, 2010; Michael Pollan October 27, 2011; and Alice Waters February 27, 2012.

In seven years, the Progressive Forum has produced 38 theater events.

Other speakers have included Karen Armstrong, Lester Brown, Ken Burns, Gail Collins, Richard Dawkins, Jared Diamond, Sylvia Earle, Elizabeth Edwards, Tim Flannery, Jane Goodall, Brian Greene, Arianna Huffington, Seymour Hersh, Molly Ivins, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., George Soros, Edward O. Wilson, Frank Rich, Garrison Keillor, Joe Klein, Anna Deavere Smith, George Lakoff, Richard Leakey, William McDonough, Bill McKibben, Bill Moyers, T. Boone Pickens, Ken Robinson, Larry Wilmore, and Edward O. Wilson.

The Progressive Forum originated a new model for civic speaker organizations in Houston, designed to deliver a larger audience in a theater with a higher quality experience, compared with hotel luncheons by traditional speaker organizations. The Progressive Forum model is similar to that of a performing arts company. It uses the finest theaters, pays speaker fees to present top intellectual stars, and markets throughout the region with public media. It offers convenient box office services through its website and traditional phone sales.

Founder and president, Randall R. Morton has owned Randall Morton International, Inc. for 36

years, an advertising and public relations agency whose clients have included the leading oil equipment companies in the U.S., Japan, Mexico, and Europe. Morton co-created, co-produced, and co-hosted the Oilfield Breakfast Forum from 1994 to 2003, another speaker series, which is still the largest in the oil industry. He earned a B.A. degree in government from Georgetown University, and attained a national ranking of three as a pass receiver in nonscholarship football. While at Georgetown, he served as an issue writer for the Democratic National Committee. Later, he earned a second B.A. in communications from Tulsa University, serving the following year as adjunct professor teaching advertising design and copy.

###