‘New Jim Crow’ author, attorney Michelle Alexander kicks off Black History Month at Chicago State

Alexander: ‘In Chicago, young black men are more likely to go to prison than to college.’

Jan. 31, 2012 — Acclaimed author and civil rights lawyer Michelle Alexander kicks off the Revolutions, Reels & Rhythms Black History Month observance at 10 a.m., Wednesday at Chicago State University's Jacoby Dickens Center gymnasium.

Chicago State invited Alexander to participate in its student lecture series highlighting social justice, leadership and entrepreneurship, core components of the university's mission. In Alexander’s latest stop on her national tour of “The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness” (The New Press), she deconstructs the American prison system and how it has come to resemble past systems of racial control.

Alexander has taught at several universities, including Stanford Law School and Ohio State University. She launched the anti-racial profiling campaign called Driving While Black. As part of this educational outreach, the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference offers study guides and teaching materials based on Alexander's research.

From “The New Jim Crow”:

“The impact of the new caste system is most tragically felt among the young. In Chicago (as in other cities across the United States), young black men are more likely to go to prison than to college. As of June 2001, there were nearly 20,000 more black men in the Illinois state prison system than enrolled in the state's public universities. In fact, there were more black men in the state's correctional facilities that year just on drug charges than the total number of black men enrolled in undergraduate degree programs in state universities. To put the crisis in even sharper focus, consider this: just 992 black men received a bachelor's degree from Illinois state universities in 1999, while roughly 7,000 black men were released from the state prison system the following year just for drug offenses. The young men who go to prison rather than college face a lifetime of closed doors, discrimination and ostracism.”

“Exposing students and the extended community to this type of scholarship is an integral part of the -more-
college experience,” said Kwesi Ronald Harris, Director of the African-American Male Resource Center, a unique retention CSU program aimed at black males, and sponsor of this event with Student Activities. “Taking an introspective, scholarly approach to Black History Month underscores CSU’s values of intellectual development, dignity, responsible choices, and pride in self, community and school.”

Alexander has been widely interviewed since publishing ”The New Jim Crow,” including a recent feature on NPR. Alexander has also appeared on “The Bill Moyers Journal” and C-SPAN’s “Washington Journal,” among others. She is a 2011 NAACP Image Award recipient for nonfiction.

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