May 2015

Dear Students,

On Monday, September 7, as part of your orientation to Brown, you will participate in a seminar about a book that you and all new Brown students will read this summer. The book we have chosen is *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, by Michelle Alexander. It has been purchased for you by the Office of the Dean of the College and the Brown Alumni Association. Think of it as a welcome gift from Brown and your first official college reading assignment.

*The New Jim Crow* investigates the complicated relationship between America’s perceptions of race and the U.S. criminal justice system. Citing legislative actions and policies throughout recent U.S. history, Alexander argues that racial discrimination is perpetuated by the legal system under the guise of addressing other broad concerns, including public safety. *The New Jim Crow* asks us to question our assumptions about equity, justice, and freedom and to reevaluate our understanding of racial discrimination. As you join Brown—a diverse community that is committed to social justice and inclusion—we hope that *The New Jim Crow* will prompt you to reflect on what informs your perceptions of others and to consider how progress can be made to end injustice of all kinds.

We would like you to read this book and to tell us your reactions. What aspects of the author’s argument did you find most compelling? Were there any particular cases that surprised you or bothered you? Have you or someone you know ever experienced discrimination or an unjust situation, racial or otherwise, reminiscent of the examples within *The New Jim Crow*? For some resources to help you think about the book and your response to it, please visit http://library.brown.edu/firstreadings/. There you’ll find more information about the book, its author, and its context, as well as short videos featuring Brown faculty and students discussing their own views of *The New Jim Crow*.

Write up your reactions in the form of a brief reflective response. This is not a formal paper, nor should it be long – a few paragraphs will suffice. Your written response will serve as a point of entry into the discussion you take part in during orientation. Your seminar leader and peer facilitator will read your response before the seminar and may use some of your ideas to prompt discussion. For this reason, we ask that you give this first college reading assignment some careful attention and thought. You will need to submit your response online no later than August 15th by logging into ask.brown.edu and clicking the “Orientation” tab.

When you arrive on campus, you will receive a move-in packet containing information about the time and location of your seminar on *The New Jim Crow* and the names of your discussion leaders. We hope this opportunity to meet new friends and discuss ideas will make your orientation to Brown even more meaningful.

So enjoy your reading, and don’t forget to bring your book when you come to Brown this fall!

See you soon,

Maud S. Mandel
Dean of the College
Professor of History and Judaic Studies