

## The New Jim Crow Virtual Book Study and Discussion

### Chapters 4 and 5

#### 1. *Dehumanization*

Re-read the quote by Frederick Douglass that opens up Chapter 4.

**What happens when we begin to view people as less than human, as shameful or characterless? Are there parallels to the treatment of those thought to be “illegal aliens”?** Many of the same human rights—such as access to education, food, and work—are denied to people who have committed the “crime” of entering the country without proper documentation. **What are the parallels between the “get tough” movement aimed at immigrants and the “get tough” laws aimed at African Americans?**

#### 2. *Human Rights*

Laws that authorize discrimination in employment, housing, education, and public benefits make it difficult, if not impossible, for people to find work in the legal economy, and greatly increase the likelihood that they will be arrested again. **But are any of those laws necessary? Should employers and housing officials ever have the right to discriminate against people with criminal records? Under what circumstances? In certain professions? For how long? Are community safety, human dignity, and racial justice advanced or undermined by the positions you take on these questions?**

#### 3. *Shame*

Chapter 4 discusses the shame and self-hatred that consumes a great many people labeled criminals and felons, and notes that “gangsta rap” is an expression of desperation—an attempt by young people to carve out a source of pride that despises them. **What can we do to address the severe shame and self-hatred that keeps communities impacted by mass incarceration divided, often shaming and blaming each other? Are there sources of identity and pride that young people can embrace, even as they are targeted for incarceration and demonized by the larger society?**

4. *White Privilege*

Re-read Martin Luther King's quotation pertaining to the "white moderate."  
**Is it still true today that whites prefer "order" to justice? What can be done to bring about a fuller acknowledgement of white privilege in our society and its far-reaching, often devastating consequences? What can be done to cultivate more concern, understanding, and cooperation across racial lines?**

5. *Racial Indifference*

Many would argue that mass incarceration is different from Jim Crow because of the lack of overt racial hostility. Alexander acknowledges that, unlike the days of Jim Crow, few people today are proud to call themselves racist. In chapter 5, Alexander writes "This difference in public attitudes has important implications for reform efforts." But on the whole, Alexander maintains that mass incarceration depends far more on racial indifference than racial hostility. **Do you agree that mass incarceration is rooted in racial indifference—a lack of care and concern across lines of race and class? If so, how do we inspire greater compassion and care? Do stories of those trapped in the system need to be told and heard? What else can be done?**

6. *A New Underground Railroad*

In numerous speeches, Alexander has argued that we should commit ourselves to building an "underground railroad" for people returning home from prison. In addition, Alexander argues that Movement building requires working for the abolition of the system of mass incarceration as a whole, as well as providing desperately needed support and love to people at risk of incarceration, families with loved ones behind bars, and people returning home from prison. **What can we do individually and collectively, to offer greater support, resources, and love to people struggling to survive the system of mass incarceration?**