**The Connection between Jim Cow and The New Jim Crow**

**Open Your ~~Eyes~~**

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Jim Crow laws are about power, power of one race over another. These laws significantly highlight the flaws and weaknesses of human nature: one group of people asserting power over another, for the pride and vanity of a system of politics, paid in the cost of thousands of American lives.

The Jim Crow era in the mid- 1900’s foreshadowed the “ New Jim Crow ,“ the United States Prison systems, as both systems build on racism and oppression that keeps African Americans at the bottom of the racial hierarchy in American society.

The Jim Crow laws were state and local laws in the United States. From 1876 to 1965, Jim Crow laws mandated “separate but equal “public facilities for African American and whites. Although the 15th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States prohibits federal or state governments from infringing on a citizen right to vote “on account of race, color, or previous conditions of servitude,” a plethora of insidious methodologies for preventing African Americans from exercising their voting rights were successfully implemented by racist whites who dominated the paths leading to voting booths. This racism lead to literacy tests, discriminatory enforcements of registration rules, poll taxes, and outright racial gerrymandering which successfully stopped African Americans from reregistering and voting. It counteracts the 15th Amendment, which is a Constitutional right, yet literacy tests and poll taxes were just some of the few devices that stood between African Americans and their basic and fundamental right to participate in democracy.

“Ever since Barack Obama lifted his right hand and took his oath of office, pledging to serve the United States as its 44th president, ordinary people and their leaders around the globe have been celebrating our nation’s ‘triumph over race.’  Obama’s election has been touted as the final nail in the coffin of Jim Crow, the bookend placed on the history of racial caste in America,” states scholar Michelle Alexander. In Alexander’s view, the country erroneously believes that since Obama’s election, racism has ended. However, society has been trapped into “colorblindness”. Racism still thrives, and The New Jim Crow has taken over. Many young black men in large African American cities are warehoused in prison. As of 2004, more African American men were disenfranchised (due to felon disenfranchisement laws) than in 1870, the year the Fifteenth Amendment was ratified, prohibiting laws that explicitly deny the right to vote on the basis of race. Sounds familiar? A colorblind explanation for all this: crime rates.  Our prison population has exploded from about 300,000 to more than 2 million in a few short decades; it is said, because of rampant crime.  We’re told that the reason so many black and brown men find themselves behind bars and ushered into a permanent, second-class status is because they happen to be the bad guys. In the end it’s all a cycle. The new system, mass incarceration of people of color, takes away voting rights, just as the old system did in the mid- 1900’s.

When I pull back the curtain I take a look at what our “colorblind” society has created. I see “racial control”, taking over the prison systems and African Americans. The entrance into this new caste system can be found at the prison gate. Open Your ~~Eyes.~~

**Work Cited**

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**Author Biography**

**Nakirah Salaam** was born in 1995 in Oakland, California. She currently attends East Oakland School of the Arts, and will soon graduate from Castlemont Highschool. She is a critical thinker and she enjoys school, and is succeeding in two Advanced Placement classes, AP English and AP US History. Her plans for the future is to attend a 4 year college and become a veterinarian.