

A Beacon of Hope on the Border

By Fr. Edwin L. Gros, S.J., Pastor, Sacred Heart Parish, El Paso, Texas

In my three years as Pastor of Sacred Heart, last year, 2009, was especially challenging, both because of the acute economic crisis felt around the globe, as well as the horrible violence which has exploded in our sister city across the border, Ciudad Juárez, where the major Mexican drug cartels are caught up in a bloody turf war that results in 10 to 15 violent deaths each day. Juárez is now one of the most dangerous cities in the world, much more so than Baghdad. And our parish is located three blocks from the major pedestrian bridge linking us together.

El Paso has increased in population by an estimated 30,000 people in the past 12 months—many fleeing the violence, and many looking for better employment than that offered by the super abundant maquilas or sweatshops in Juárez. As a result, we have seen increased numbers here at Sacred Heart, both in church attendance as well as in visits to our Pastoral Center, where we receive countless requests for financial aid to pay utilities and rent, or just to buy food. We have two Jesuit Volunteers who work in our Pastoral Center, along with three paid staff and a handful of very generous volunteers from the city. Because of the increased number of requests for financial assistance, our pastoral office, especially through the work of our Jesuit Volunteers, has secured some new grant money so as to make more funds available to help families.

Our Centro Pastoral offers direct help through our food pantry, as well as through a program for helping people either find a job or be better prepared to land one. This job-seeking program has undergone some development in the face of the recent economic crisis. Since jobs are even scarcer than before, we have decided to change the focus of the program. We now call it “*capacitación laboral*”, which helps people become better prepared to navigate the waters of the job search market by teaching participants how to write resumes, dress and present

themselves for job interviews, and maintain positive attitudes throughout the search. Since we couldn’t always find jobs for the clients, we decided at least we could help to better equip them to find jobs themselves.

We have an adult education program at Sacred Heart called La Plaza Comunitaria, which helps over 300 adult students each semester with classes in ESL, GED on the primary and secondary level, citizenship in Spanish and in English, and Computer Literacy—a class that helps adults learn basic computer skills. The teaching force for La Plaza Comunitaria is all volunteer.

The Church operates a restaurant on the weekends that helps provide jobs, as well as good food at reasonable prices. The restaurant also provides many free meals to people who are in need.

On Wednesday evenings we have a program for children and their families. This provides a wholesome alternative to roaming the streets. In this program we offer faith formation, physical activities, and a time to socialize.

Our Church also has a home for women called Villa Maria. Located two blocks from the Church, Villa Maria provides shelter for 22 women who need a place to stay for a short period of time while they are getting on their feet or simply recovering from traumatic events in their lives. Two Sisters of Loretto work full time at this house giving loving attention to the residents.

There are a number of other Catholic and non-profit centers near Sacred Heart that also reach out to immigrants in need, including a center for migrant farm workers, Annunciation House rescue mission, the Opportunity Center, and the Centro Mujeres de Esperanza. Needless to say, all of these facilities, just like Sacred Heart Church, are run on shoestring budgets and many are staffed fully by volunteers.



Sacred Heart Church, El Paso, Texas
Three blocks from the border

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Fr. Gros blesses parishioners after Mass.



Exterior view of Sacred Heart's tortilleria.



Interior view of tortilleria.

Despite all of the programs we offer, there are still many more needs than we can handle. But we always try to give something—whether it is just a small part of what a person is requesting or just a caring human heart to listen to their stories. We believe that a gesture to relieve their pain and stress will let a suffering pilgrim know that the church cares and wants to give them hope and encouragement.

Immigrants are facing unprecedented hostility these days, something that was never envisioned by our founding fathers and mothers. It seems that, today, the statue of Liberty should read instead: *“If you are tired, poor, or huddled masses yearning to breathe free, homeless, or tempest-tossed people: you need to go elsewhere.”* Here at Sacred Heart Parish, we try to be true to the welcoming spirit upon which our nation was founded. In this way we are truly patriotic.

As pastor, I have had to take bold, public stands to challenge city planners, reminding them that revitalizing Downtown El Paso as well as our neighborhood, el Segundo Barrio, can easily displace thousands of powerless, undocumented people—our parishioners. I believe that we as church have managed to maintain the people’s trust and confidence because they have seen us stand up for them and call for their just treatment.

Sacred Heart Church is the first stop for many of the 20,000 people who cross the Santa Fe Bridge into El Paso. They walk those three blocks and stop to pray before a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe outside the church. I am always reminded that the Church is THE beacon of hope for most Mexican people. This makes us so much more than just a social agency. They look to us to preach and live the Gospel, and to give them a safe haven to gather with their families, in a loving community, in a FAITH community. Unless one understands the high regard the Mexican people have for the church, as well as the centrality of faith in their lives, one will never totally capture the mission of Sacred Heart Church.

In our mission statement we say:

We strive to build the Reign of God as we implement a pastoral program that seeks to evangelize in a complete and comprehensive way. Our ultimate goal is the formation and education of the whole human person: body, mind and spirit.

We believe that the Society of Jesus, or Jesuit order, calls us to minister on all these levels, and that all Jesuit institutions need to ask themselves what they are doing to address the needs of the poor and marginalized members of our society.

That being said, everything we do to help people is ultimately grounded in the proclamation of the Reign of God. And in a world so full of despair, we believe our mission to be a Beacon of Hope for all those who come to our doorstep.

SEE: Jesuit Conference website on Social Research and Analysis at <http://www.jesuit.org/index.php/main/jesuits-worldwide/social-justice/what-do-we-do/social-research-and-analysis/> and its section on serving inner-city populations.



Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and Social Analysis¹

by the Rev. Fred Kammer, S.J.

Social analysis in Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is one-half of the answer to the question, “What is really going on in this situation?” Beyond mere description, the focus here is on trying to understand and analyze a situation, problem, or dilemma more carefully. Holland and Henriot define social analysis as “the effort to obtain a more complete picture of a social situation by exploring its **historical and structural relationships.**”²

This could seem a complex task. Brazilian Francisco Ivern says social analysis requires use of philosophy and the social sciences, including not only economics, sociology, and political science, but also social psychology, religious sociology, and cultural anthropology.³ One Vatican source speaks of a “plurality of methods and viewpoints, each of which reveals only one aspect of reality which is so complex that it defies simple and univocal explanation.”⁴ The Holland-Henriot approach to social analysis seems to me to be shorthand for “socio-economic-political-cultural-religious-historical analysis.”

Such a broad task suggests the need for experts to do analysis. It also implies transcending any particular expertise in ways that return social analysis to the hands of each of us as concerned citizens. Thomas Clarke concurs:

Social analysis is not the prerogative of an elite. If a participatory, democratic way of life is to be a possibility, it requires a basic confidence and skill on the part of ordinary people in making critical and informed judgments regarding the social contexts of their lives. To say this is not to deny the importance of specialized knowledge, or the difficulty which most of us have in being reasonably well informed on scores of major and complex issues, and in deciding just what sources of information and analytical helps to critical judgment deserve our trust.⁵

Clarke argues that specialists in the various disciplines are “helpful mentors,” but not substitutes for our own judgments. These judgments have to be built upon experience and combined with values and commitments that are unique to each one of us.

Social analysis, however, helps us “move beyond personal experience of the milieu and to provide us with the

Our first task is to apply our senses, understood broadly, to reality around us. It is scientific inquiry; it is doctors diagnosing patients; it is a child asking, “Why, Mommy?”

empirical and analytical basis for the evaluative judgments and the pragmatic decisions which will represent our response of faith to the needs of our times.”⁶ Without such analysis, Clarke adds, we risk “visionary, romantic, or simply misguided and irrelevant” decisions. With such analysis, Joseph Daoust adds, we can “gradually remove the limitations of our cultural blinders, and make us more critically aware of the social structures which must be transformed to ‘make clear the way of the Lord.’”⁷

I like to think of social analysis as asking the journalist’s questions: who, what, why, when, where, and how? The first paragraph of a news story often answers all these questions. The point of social analysis is to ask those same questions about whatever we are involved in, whether it be something in the local news or a matter of national and international public policy. Social analysis, while the phrase may initially put us off, is just that—asking the right questions. Our first task is to apply our senses, understood broadly, to reality around us. It is scientific inquiry; it is

doctors diagnosing patients; it is a child asking, “Why, Mommy?”

When many people hear about social analysis, they protest: “Oh, I can’t do that; I’m not an economist or a political scientist.” The reality is that we are all doing social analysis, and others in the media or on talk radio are trying to do it for us. CST promotes explicit social analysis to call attention to the fact that we do analysis already, and thus to improve what we do in the future.

The Evangelical Importance of Social Analysis

The complement to social analysis is **theological reflection.** It is the second part of the answer to what’s happening; it builds upon analysis and asks, what are the values here? How do I and my faith community judge what is graced or sinful? What is freeing or enslaving people? What promotes or destroys human dignity and covenant community? We do social analysis to better understand our part in bringing forth the reign of God in history, to better know what is graced or sinful. Peter Marchetti uses the traditional Ignatian spiritual term *discreta caritas* for this endeavor: discerning love.⁸ To engage in the art and science of social analysis is to try to love wisely, an exercise in natural and supernatural prudence. This is not just love, but discerning love. It is not just enough to say we love, to feel love, or even to give my body over to martyrdom. This is especially true when we dare to say, “I love the poor,” for whom misguided love is too often like one more instance of deficient housing, second-class medical care, hand-me-down clothing, or shoddy merchandise.

Social analysis says my love is serious enough to want to know, “What is really helpful in this situation?” Social analysis

—Continued on back cover

U.S. Jesuits, social analysis, and the urban poor



By Edward B. "Ted" Arroyo, S.J., JSRI Alabama Associate

As part of my ongoing work with JSRI, I serve on the national Jesuit social analysis advisory group studying the ministerial implications of solidarity with inner-city populations in the U.S. The goal of this Consultation on Inner-City Populations is to inform leadership choices as well as to promote interdisciplinary/cross-regional networking and sharing of resources, information, and learning. We want to help leadership and institutions strategize about what it means to be in solidarity with inner-city populations. The hope is that leadership will have a better understanding of poor people's needs and how the Society of Jesus can better serve these needs, incorporating this knowledge into strategic plans and apostolic decision-making at national, regional, and local levels. Our advisory group hopes to help U.S. Jesuit ministries increase capacity to serve the urban poor through collaboration—addressing common challenges and sharing knowledge and resources.



2008 Portrait

In 2008, our group sketched a portrait of inner-city needs and Jesuit responses to these needs in the U.S., identifying the following issues impacting inner-city populations and the Jesuit ministries serving them:

- The urban poor are increasingly unable to purchase basic goods for survival (food, gasoline to get to work, utilities to heat the home, etc.) due to dramatically rising costs.
- The urban poor lack access to power to address the underlying factors of poverty and to break the cycle of poverty and marginalization.
- There is a great spiritual hunger among the urban poor, but considerable lack of spiritual direction and spiritual support.

The effects of inflation on the poor:

- Research is needed not only on current situations, but future trends, e.g., food prices and related factors, such as how policies to counteract the effects of climate change will impact future price increases in the basic goods package.
- We need to improve dialogue with organized community groups about the direct impact of inflationary pressures on the poor and brainstorm possible solutions (enhanced ways to meet immediate basic needs and ways to affect longer-term change).
- We need to explore advocacy opportunities that facilitate collaboration across national Jesuit endeavors such as the Jesuit Conference staff and the Jesuit Commission on Social and International Ministries.

Empowerment:

- There are opportunities to strengthen community organizing within existing Jesuit ministries (especially inner-city parishes and charitable works).
- There is potential to strengthen ecumenical and inter-religious collaboration in community organizing.
- There is an opportunity to promote models for immersion, service learning, and community action programs that deepen and enrich partnerships between sending and receiving communities, which could lead to greater overall empowerment of the urban poor as well as their partner sending communities.

Inner-city poor during the economic recession¹

- The Society of Jesus may be of assistance in developing dialogue with public schools in the inner city.

Spiritual Hunger:

- Ignatian retreat programs can be further developed to actively engage inner-city populations.
- We can learn much from some inner-city parishes that have developed comprehensive service models.
- Inner-city parishes provide an ideal forum for developing dialogue about the needs of the urban poor.

2009 – 2010 Surveys

At the start of 2009 we brainstormed many of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of Jesuit inner-city ministries in the United States, and then developed some strategic directions for the future, focusing on:

- Listening to the poor
- Ignatian spirituality and social ministries
- Collaboration across Jesuit ministries
- Parish social ministry
- Educational ministries among the poor

In 2009, and again in 2010, our survey of selected Jesuit urban ministries indicated some impacts of the economic recession in the inner cities:

- **Unemployment.** The high rate of unemployment and underemployment among the poor continues, particularly among urban African American and Hispanic people. Many of the constituencies served by Jesuit urban ministries were living in poverty before the recession; however, these populations have been plunged into deeper poverty by the unemployment crisis. Minorities and lower-skilled workers have been disproportionately impacted by high levels of unemployment. Though there has been some marginal improvement in employment in certain cities, many

people served by Jesuit urban ministries find themselves in the same difficult economic situation in 2010 as in 2009. There is a perception among ministry leaders that for the last two years people have had to skimp and save even more or try to find multiple part-time jobs to make ends meet. In 2010, many of inner-city poor now find themselves among the ranks of the long-term unemployed or underemployed.

- **Housing instability and a rise in homelessness.** The trend in the rise of homelessness, particularly among families, does not seem to have abated in 2010. Affordable rental properties are still scarce and foreclosures have not diminished. Gentrification is affecting some of the communities where our ministries serve, adding to a continued decrease in affordable housing units.
- **Youth issues and violence.** Lack of jobs for youth, state cut-backs in youth programs and education, and family issues related to housing instability and long-term unemployment were cited as having serious negative consequences for children and youth in the communities where many of our ministries serve in 2009 and 2010.
- **Perceived limited impact of government stimulus funding in communities.** Many of the ministries have not seen a direct impact of government stimulus funding in their communities to offset effects of the recession. Some ministry leaders report an awareness of some city-wide projects funded through federal stimulus money and grants, but few ministry leaders were aware of projects that are directly affecting the neighborhoods where the ministries operate or the people served by the ministries.
- **A rise in the perception of discrimination against Hispanics.** Among those working with urban Hispanic populations, the ministry leaders claim that

people report that they feel a greater sense of discrimination than ever before—a demoralizing and frightening backlash directed at them that is prevalent in the media and society—and is evidenced by such measures as the 2010 Arizona immigration law.

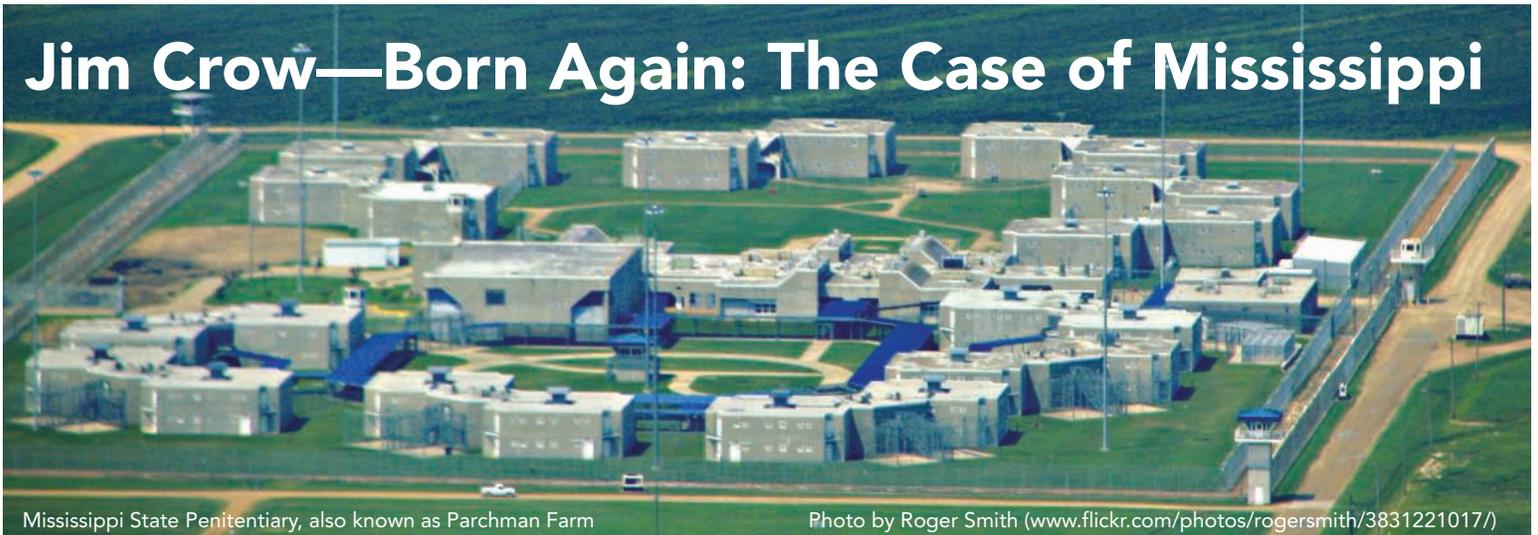
- **Deepening of personal and spiritual despair.** There is concern among ministry leaders about a worsening of personal and spiritual despair as the recession drags on. This can be very dangerous as it inhibits people's ability to help themselves out of the difficult situations. Spiritual and personal empowerment are essential elements of Jesuit ministry to the inner-city poor. Some ministry leaders report that they wish they could be freed from more administrative tasks to put emphasis on attending to people's needs in this area.

The Consultation on Inner-City Populations Continues

I hope that this brief article offers a “taste” of the much fuller menu of dishes available at our website referenced in footnote 1. There, one can find further results of this research, as well as many references to other studies, briefings, statistics and action suggestions related to urban poverty and the Jesuit involvement in inner-city ministries.

1 Although I take responsibility for this article, it reflects the collaboration of many people, in particular Amy Newlon, research coordinator in the Jesuit Conference Office of Social and International Ministries, as well as the membership of our national advisory committee. Much of the information in this article is excerpted from the webpage *Solidarity with Inner-City Populations*, where much more detail, documentation and further resources are provided: <http://bit.ly/bhUdFZ>

Jim Crow—Born Again: The Case of Mississippi



Mississippi State Penitentiary, also known as Parchman Farm

Photo by Roger Smith (www.flickr.com/photos/rogersmith/3831221017/)



Dr. Alex Mikulich, Research Fellow

As the U.S. is the global leader in incarceration, so Mississippi is a national leader. Mississippi has the second highest rate of incarceration in the nation, second only to Louisiana. Mississippi incarcerates its citizens at a rate of 735 per 100,000 population. The Sentencing Project reports that since 1988, the number of persons imprisoned in

Mississippi has increased by 208 percent, from 7,384 to 22,754. The national growth rate during the same period is 133 percent.¹

Mississippi is a case in point of Jim Crow's rebirth. Nearly two-thirds of Mississippi prisoners are incarcerated for nonviolent property and drug offenses, compared to half the prison population nationally. Although African Americans comprise 37 percent of the state's population, they represent 68 percent of those incarcerated. Conversely, although whites comprise 60 percent of the state's population, only 31 percent of the state prison population is white. The Sentencing Project finds that Mississippi incarcerates African Americans at 3.5 times the rate of whites.

Mississippi has sought reform. Like much of the nation, Mississippi passed "tough on crime" laws that dramatically increased the duration of sentences, like the 85 percent rule, which mandated that prisoners serve 85 percent of their sentences prior to parole eligibility. In 2008, the 85 percent rule was modified to include only violent crime.

If Jim Crow died in Mississippi, he is born again in the jury box. In 2007, the Mississippi Supreme Court lamented: "racially profiling jurors and racially motivated jury selection are still prevalent twenty years after *Batson*." In *Batson v. Kentucky*, in 1985, the U.S. Supreme Court held that the Fourteenth Amendment prohibits prosecutors from discriminating on the

basis of race when selecting juries, a ruling praised as an important safeguard against all-white juries imprisoning African Americans on the basis of stereotypes.

In its 2010 report, "Illegal Racial Discrimination in Jury Selection: A Continuing Legacy," the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) examined jury selection in eight southern states, including Mississippi.² While EJI is encouraged that the Mississippi Supreme Court acknowledges the problem, EJI documents multiple cases since 2007 where Mississippi prosecutors continued to discriminate racially. EJI concludes that Mississippi's trial and appellate courts are failing to exercise meaningful oversight. Yet, as Michelle Alexander explains, the problem goes higher, because in its 1995 *Purkett v. Elm* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court "sent a clear message that appellate courts are largely free to accept the reasons offered by a prosecutor for excluding prospective black jurors—no matter how irrational or absurd the reasons may seem." (*The New Jim Crow*, p.120)

Finally, although the Mississippi Supreme Court recognizes that quality of representation of poor defendants "goes to the very heart of how we as a civilized society assure equal justice," the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) found that the State does not spend one dollar on poor defendants, leaving the burden of providing lawyers to counties that most do not honor. The NAACP reports that indigent defendants may wait as long as a year to meet a lawyer, that most often defense lawyers lack funds to conduct the most basic investigations, conduct legal research, or hire experts, and some counties charge defendants court costs and attorney's fees, increasing the debts of the poor. The NAACP concludes that in Mississippi, "justice is available only to those with means to pay for it. And sadly, our country's shameful history of racial discrimination is still readily apparent in the low quality representation provided to the poor, predominately black defendants."³

ENDNOTES

1 Nicole D. Porter, for the Sentencing Project, "Incarceration Trends in Mississippi 1988-2008." Accessed online at http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/inc_MississippiTrends.pdf on September 1, 2010.

2 Accessed online at <http://eji.org/eji/files/06.25.10%20Race%20and%20Jury%20Report%202nd%20Ed%20Final.pdf> on September 1, 2010.

3 "Assembly Line Justice: Mississippi's Indigent Defense Crisis," NAACP Legal Defense Fund, (2003), accessed online at <http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/downloads/sclaid/indigentdefense/ms-assemblylinejustice.pdf> on September 1, 2010.

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in an Age of Colorblindness

BY MICHELLE ALEXANDER

Reviewed by Dr. Alex Mikulich, Research Fellow

A 2010 Silver medalist at the Independent Publisher Book Awards, *The New Jim Crow* frighteningly demonstrates that “we have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it.”

The United States has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, and no other country incarcerates as many of its racial minorities. The U.S. incarcerates a higher percentage of Blacks than South Africa did during the height of apartheid.

Alexander dispels two major myths that sustain the scandal of mass incarceration:

- 1) The War of Drugs was intended to get rid of the kingpins of drug distribution; and
- 2) The War on Drugs was primarily concerned with the most dangerous drugs.

Neither is true. President Reagan’s War on Drugs initiated a new era of “unprecedented punitiveness.” Between 1980 and 2000, the number of people incarcerated increased from roughly 300,000 to over two million. The vast majority of these have been for nonviolent minor offenses.

Contrary to popular perception, the majority of drug users in the U.S. are white, yet seventy-five percent of people imprisoned for drug offenses are Black or Latino.

Even more startling were the results of a 1995 Drug Survey question that asked “Would you close your eyes for a second and envision a drug user and describe that person to me?” Ninety-five percent of respondents pictured a Black drug user, even though African Americans constitute only 15 percent and whites the vast majority of drug users.

An ideology of “colorblindness” masks a deeper reality: U.S. society is content with a drug war that defines the enemy racially.

Imagine that white middle class neighborhoods throughout the nation are subjected to SWAT Team searches that result in indiscriminate seizures of property, arrests and jail for innocents, and even death of innocent people due to the indiscriminate use of force. Outrage at government and scandal would ensue.

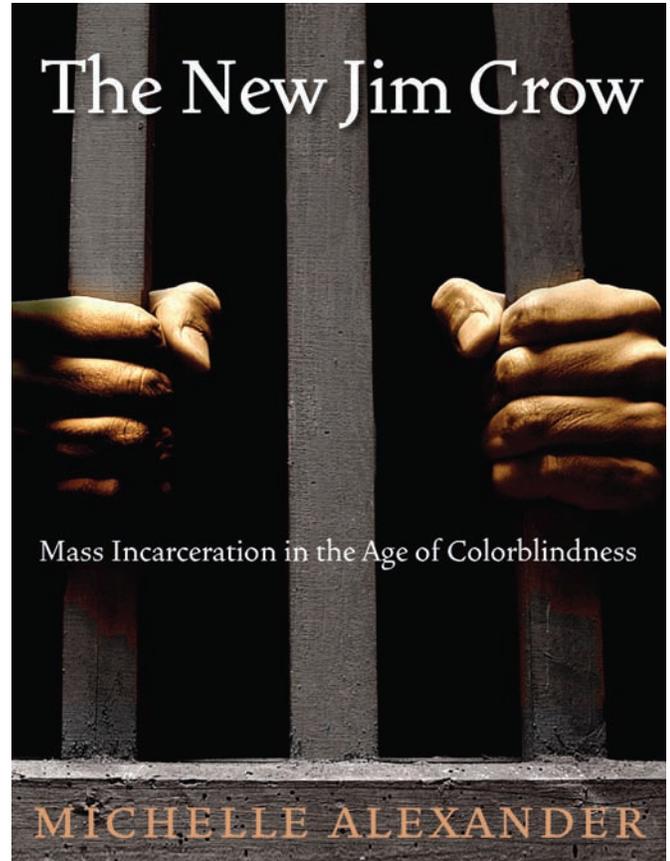
Although criminologists have documented at least 780 flawed paramilitary raids, including some that have resulted in deaths of innocents, there is no public outrage.

Discrimination occurs at every step in the process, from whom to stop, where to stop, whom to arrest, whom to sentence, and whom to imprison and disenfranchise.

Although the U.S. Supreme Court is one branch charged with the responsibility of protecting minorities from the excesses of majoritarian democracy, the Court adopted rules that *maximize*—not *minimize*—the amount of racial discrimination that would occur in the War on Drugs.

Adding insult to injury, the Court also has insured that people of color will not face a jury of their peers and will have no recourse to challenge discrimination at any point in the system.

Developing a vision that unites the interests of impoverished whites with people of color, Alexander calls for a new social justice movement that advocates for “All of Us or None of Us,” as traditional forms of civil rights litigation and policy reform have failed. That is a vision of faith and citizenship worth giving one’s life for; indeed, nothing less will suffice.





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Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and Social Analysis...

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is an instrument for standing with the poor, which sharpens the vision that enables us to see differently and clears our thinking to judge differently what we see. Too many well-intentioned people have begun volunteer work or ministry among the poor without understanding “what is really happening here.” When they fail to understand, they often find themselves part of the problem of alienation or paternalism, instead of being part of the solution. Social analysis is an important, necessary step in shaping a response that asks, what is discerning and effective love for me?

NEWS FLASH:

As an update to the article “Tomatoes, Farmworkers, and Social Justice” in our last *Quarterly*, in August, Sodexo signed a Fair Food agreement with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) to pay 1.5 cents more per pound for tomatoes to improve farmworkers’ wages, enforce a strict code of conduct with input from farmworkers, and to steer its tomato purchases towards growers who meet the code of conduct and away from those tainted by abusive labor practices. Sodexo is the provider of food services at Loyola University New Orleans.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 This is adapted from Kammer, *Salted with Fire: Spirituality for the Faithjustice Journey* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1995, 2008), pp. 40-42.
- 2 Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, S.J., *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), p. 14.
- 3 Francisco Ivern, S.J., “The Future of Faith and Justice: A Critical Review of Decree Four,” in *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, Vol. 14, No. 5, November, 1982, p. 19.
- 4 *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the “Theology of Liberation,”* Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, August 6, 1984 (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, Publication No. 935), p. 17.
- 5 Thomas E. Clarke, S.J., “Methodology,” in *The Context of Our Ministries: Working Papers* (Washington, D.C.: Jesuit Conference, 1981), pp. 6-9, at p. 7.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Joseph Daoust, S.J., “The Social Dimension of Ministry for the Reign of God,” Address to the Thirtieth Annual National Assembly of the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, St. Louis, Missouri, August 13, 1986, p. 18.
- 8 Peter Marchetti, S.J., in an address to New Orleans Province Jesuits, December, 1979.