



CONTACT: Kalimah Knight  
617-521-2369  
[Kalimah.knight@simmons.edu](mailto:Kalimah.knight@simmons.edu)

**Leading Activists – Michelle Alexander and Judy Norsigian – to Speak at  
2016 Simmons College Commencement May 20**

BOSTON (March 3, 2016) – Simmons College is proud to announce two nationally known, pioneering social justice advocates will serve as keynote speakers during its 111<sup>th</sup> Commencement ceremonies [Friday, May 20 at the Blue Hills Bank Pavilion in Boston.](#)

Acclaimed civil rights lawyer, author, and legal scholar **Michelle Alexander** is the speaker for the morning [undergraduate ceremony at 9:30 a.m.](#) Groundbreaking women’s health advocate and author **Judy Norsigian** is the speaker for the afternoon ceremony for [master’s and doctoral students at 2:30 p.m.](#)

“These visionary women have been on the forefront of extraordinarily important movements to educate society and bring about change to two of the most critical issues of our time,” said Simmons College President Helen Drinan. “Their remarkable work to raise consciousness about the profound injustice of mass incarceration of African-American men and foundational importance of women’s health embody the spirit of purpose, empowerment, and excellence we want to impart to our graduates.”

*The college will be live tweeting from the ceremony at [@SimmonsCollege](#) #SIMS16.*

Alexander, a leading voice for racial equality in America, wrote the 2010 critically acclaimed *New York Times* best selling book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, which explores the high percentage of African-American males incarcerated in the United States. Alexander’s book won the 2011 NAACP Image Award for best non-fiction, and remained on the *Times* Best Seller List for more than a year.

Since its first publication, *The New Jim Crow* has received critical acclaim and been featured in national radio and television media outlets, including MSNBC, NPR, *Bill Moyers Journal*, *Tavis Smiley*, C-SPAN, and *Washington Journal*, among others. Prior to entering academia, Alexander served as the director of the Racial Justice Project for the ACLU of Northern California, where she coordinated media advocacy, grassroots organizing, coalition building, and litigation. The Project’s priority areas were educational equity and criminal justice reform. Alexander credits those years at the ACLU with awakening her to the many challenges of our nation’s criminal justice system. She is currently an associate professor of law at Ohio State University.

Norsigian co-authored the book *Our Bodies, Ourselves* in 1971, a pivotal time in the burgeoning women’s movement. This text empowered women to learn more about their bodies and encouraged them to draw from the experiences of other women to realize political and societal changes. *Our Bodies, Ourselves* has sold millions of copies worldwide, been translated into 30 languages, and gone through nine editions. *Library Journal* listed the 2011 edition as one of the best consumer health books of the year. Also a renowned speaker on women’s health concerns, Norsigian has made appearances on a number of television and radio programs, including *NBC*

(more)

*Nightly News, Al Jazeera, The Today Show, Good Morning America, The Early Show, Oprah, Fox News, and The Current.*

Both Alexander and Norsigian will receive honorary degrees from Simmons. Also receiving honorary degrees are:

- **Saru Jayaraman**, an advocate for the rights of immigrant workers, author, and co-founder of the Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (ROC United) in New York – an organization with more than 18,000 work members, 150 employer partners, and several thousand consumer members in over 30 cities nationwide. Jayaraman also serves as the director of the Food Labor Research Center at University of California, Berkeley, and authored the best selling books, *Behind the Kitchen Door* (2013), and *Forked: A New Standard for American Dining* (2016).
- **Dr. Paula A. Johnson**, an internationally recognized physician, researcher, and expert in public health and health policy. Recently appointed president of Wellesley College, Dr. Johnson has devoted her career to improving the lives of women through health care advancement and education Johnson founded the Connors Center for Women’s Health and Gender Biology and serves as its Executive Director and Chief of the Division of Women’s Health at Brigham and Women’s Hospital. Johnson, a cardiologist, is the Grayce A. Young Family Professor of Medicine in the Field of Women’s Health at Harvard Medical School, named in honor of her mother. She is also Professor of Epidemiology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.
- **Robert Lewis, Jr.**, a noted civic, community, non-profit leader, and founder of The BASE in 2013 – an organization that provides comprehensive athletic and advancement opportunities for student athletes. Lewis was the first executive director of City Year in Boston, where he also served as the non-profit’s senior vice president of operations. Lewis founded StreetSafe Boston, an initiative of the Boston Foundation that is the only privately funded organization of its kind, and deploys former gang members into the city’s most violent neighborhoods to help prevent gang violence. He is the recipient of the 2015 Sports Museum’s Lifetime Achievement Award at the Boston Baseball Writers Annual Dinner.

Simmons College ([www.simmons.edu](http://www.simmons.edu)) is a nationally recognized private university located in the heart of Boston, and is the preeminent authority on women’s leadership. Founded in 1899, Simmons is the only undergraduate women’s college in Boston, and maintains a history of visionary thinking and a focus on social responsibility. The college offers world-class coeducational graduate programs in nursing and health sciences, liberal arts, library and information science, business management, and social work. Follow Simmons on Twitter at [@SimmonsCollege](https://twitter.com/SimmonsCollege) and [@SimmonsNews](https://twitter.com/SimmonsNews).

###