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**Review of *The New Middle Classes: Life Styles, Status Claims and Political Orientations*. Arthur J. Vidich (Ed.) Both books reviewed by Charles M. Tolbert, Louisiana State University**

Charles M. Tolbert  
*Louisiana State University*

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David Croteau, *Politics and the Class Divide: Working People and the Middle Class Left*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995. \$49.95 hardcover, \$19.95 papercover.

Arthur J. Vidich (Ed.), *The New Middle Classes: Life Styles, Status Claims and Political Orientations*. New York: New York University Press, 1995. \$50.00 hardcover, \$17.50 papercover.

The vigorous debates of the 1980s about the U.S. middle class are largely over. What was once a radical and politically charged notion is now orthodox: the middle class is shrinking. So widely accepted is this fact that business publications routinely contain advice on how to develop and market niche products or how to penetrate the growing working class market. In this context of a moving (shrinking) target, along come two new volumes on middle classes. Croteau's monograph is a compilation of his extensive field experiences in working class settings as well as an assessment of contemporary theory in political sociology. Vidich's collection reprints articles and essays on the "new" middle classes that have appeared across this century. While neither directly addresses the middle class decline issue, each has much to offer.

Croteau frames the presentation of his data with three theoretical chapters. The first explores the "promise of democracy" and laments the chronic lack of working class political participation. The second theory chapter is an overview of recent U.S. social movements that, according to Croteau, have championed middle-class issues to the exclusion of the working class. In the third chapter, Croteau reviews theories of political participation and lays the foundation of a cultural explanation for working-class nonparticipation. These theory chapters are followed by seven chapters which report Croteau's field work in rich detail. The bases for his data are field notes from five months employment in a mail and shipping operation and more than forty in-depth interviews with working class persons. The thesis that emerges from Croteau's imagery challenges conventional notions held by many about the working class. It is not that working class persons are apathetic or conservative. Rather, the working class makes different use of "cultural tools" than does the middle class. The alienating result for the working class is that political participa-

tion efforts fail. In contrast, the middle class affirms its standing and relative efficacy through its participatory tradition.

What is new about Vidich's assembled writings on the middle class? To answer this question, one must appreciate his historical and sociological orientation. While Croteau focuses on post-modern middle and working classes, Vidich builds a depiction of a modern middle class with special emphasis on the middle classes that emerged in Weimar Germany and in the post-war U.S. Classic statements by Lederer and Marschak (1926), Mills (1951), and Giddens (1975) are reprinted along with more recent essays by Vidich himself (1982), Burris (1986), and Hughey (1982). The most contemporary essay is a reprint of Evans' (1992) article on the black middle class. The utility of the collection is that it brings together classic and more contemporary writing on the middle class. Other than Evans' paper, however, the reader does not learn much about the condition of the middle class after the early 1980s.

Does the middle class have a future? Neither of these volumes treats the existence of the middle class itself as problematic. Like many writers, the authors here tend to assume that the middle class is a constant even as they describe finite resources and declining abundance. The strong points of the two books are the depth and breadth of their depictions of emerging and entrenched classes. These same strengths could also be a basis for articulating a theory of middle class decline. Indeed, it may well be that this genre of work shifts from theorization of emergence to explanations of decline.

Charles M. Tolbert  
Louisiana State University

Martha Albertson Fineman, *The Neutered Mother, the Sexual Family (and Other Twentieth Century Tragedies)*. New York: Routledge, 1995. \$16.95 papercover.

*The Neutered Mother, the Sexual Family (and Other Twentieth Century Tragedies)* is a book that presents convincingly a legal argument for an innovative, revolutionary definition of the family. The ideas articulated are far removed from the usual progressive