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Blue-Chip Black: Race, Class, and Status in the New Black Middle Class. Karyn R. Lacy. Reviewed by Paul G. Wright.

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children should be raised at home by their mothers as well as market liberals who criticize government spending on social programs and particularly programs such as Head Start which, they claim, do not achieve their goals.

Despite opposition from traditionalists and market liberals, the author reveals the growing bipartisan political support for public preschool and child care provision. This is largely because of a substantial body of cost-benefit research that demonstrates the investment effect of these programs. Hard-nosed economists including Nobel Prize winners have shown that the rates of return to preschool education are considerable. However, Kirp repeatedly points out that the positive outcomes of preschool and child care are dependent on quality. Large classrooms with poorly trained teachers have few positive effects and indeed, as one study revealed, may even promote antisocial behavior.

Although Kirp writes for a popular readership, he provides a wealth of carefully documented statistical and other research information and examines the issues with care and thoughtfulness. It is an extremely readable book which will hopefully capture the attention of the social policy community. It will also be of major interest to social workers who are on the front-line of the provision of services to poor families and children. Hopefully they will have a better understanding of the role of preschool education and day care in addressing the pervasive and apparently contractible problem of child poverty today.

James Midgley, University of California, Berkeley

Karyn R. Lacy, *Blue-Chip Black: Race, Class, and Status in the New Black Middle Class*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007. \$60 hardcover, \$22.95 papercover.

To understand social identities in black communities, scholars have conducted ethnographic studies regarding the black middle-class community using single site designs. However, the communities they have studied are not uniformly middle-class but often include members of the black working-class and in some instances, the black poor. By not differentiating the classes from each other within these communities, they

have not actually focused on the black middle class.

In fact, a general criticism of the sociological literature is that it studies and examines poor or working-class African-Americans and compares this group to middle-class whites; thus, not comparing "apples to apples." Consequently, we know little about middle-class African-Americans and their values, beliefs, behaviors and goals for their families and communities. Instead the research perpetuates the existing negative and stereotypical image of African-Americans, which essentially associates black people with poverty and lower-class status. Much of the literature highlights challenges that confront the black community, such as racism, AIDS, disproportionality of black males in the prison system and black children in the foster care system. In short, the literature about black people and the concerns that the black community seem to face are about the same old issues viewed through the same lens.

Karyn R. Lacy assumes a different posture by highlighting different relevant issues that impact the black community. Lacy brings to our attention that middle and upper middle class black communities have concerns and are as "worthy of study" as are the issues facing the poor black community and that there are variations within the black middle-class community. Using a research methodology common to anthropological fieldwork, Lacy conducted in-depth interviews with 30 black middle-class couples and carried out ethnographic observations in three suburban communities in the Washington metropolitan area: a majority white middle-class suburb, a predominantly black middle-class suburb, and a majority black upper-middle-class suburb.

As a result of her research, Lacy shows how middle-class blacks construct and maintain five distinct social identities: public identities, status-based identities, racial identities, class-based identities, and suburban identities. These identities are housed in a tool kit and Lacy documents middle-class blacks' practices of choosing from the tool kit and the circumstances under which they are used, such as in public settings where they may encounter white or black strangers who are not aware of their middle class status. Lacy asserts that the black middle class employs an essential strategy to differentiate themselves from lower class blacks and accentuate their similarities with the white middle class. Lacy's research reveals that the middle-

class black families in each of their communities make different choices about how and when to use any of the identities that are housed in the black middle-class tool kit. These choices varied according to the families' residential location, their economic stability and their proximity to other racial groups.

The primary concern with Lacy's research is the narrow focus on middle class blacks who reside who in communities in the Washington metropolitan area. It would be worthwhile to compare these east coast families to black middle class families who reside, for example, on the west coast in comparable communities to see how they use the black middle class tool kit in similar or different ways to construct their social identities. But of course Lacy's book provides a model for what we need: additional research on the African-American middle class throughout the country.

Finally, the book is much more than another narrative about the challenges that confront the black community. It should be required reading for anyone interested in expanding their understanding of relevant issues that are important to the black middle class community that are rarely discussed in the literature.

Paul G. Wright, California State University, East Bay

Franklin E. Zimring, *The Great American Crime Decline*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. \$35.00 hardcover, \$21.95 papercover.

Crime statistics are fascinating. Perhaps no other numbers are so regularly embraced or ignored, manipulated, dismissed, debated or embellished than those showing changes in crime rates and patterns. Politicians might spin high crime rates to garner support for "tough on crime" legislation while lower rates are heralded as a sign of their success while in office. Media coverage, public outcry and fear likewise often drive crime policies that are ignorant of crime statistics and trend lines. For example, tragic shootings like those at Columbine High School propelled the implementation of numerous school safety strategies despite evidence that school crime and vio-