



2009

The Great American Crime Decline. Franklin E. Zimring. Reviewed by Matthew T. Theriot.

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Recommended Citation

Theriot, Matthew T. (2009) "*The Great American Crime Decline.* Franklin E. Zimring. Reviewed by Matthew T. Theriot," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 36 : Iss. 1 , Article 21.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol36/iss1/21>

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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-

lence generally was declining.

Speaking of declines, the 1990s were marked by an unprecedented and unexpected fall in crime in the United States. However, this trend was not usually discussed outside of academic circles. This decline occurred all around—in cities and rural areas, across geographic regions, in schools and in suburbs. As Franklin Zimring describes in his new book, *The Great American Crime Decline*, while the homicide rate in the United States climbed and remained high from 1964 to 1992, it dropped dramatically beginning around 1993 and reached close to pre-1964 levels by the year 2002. Moreover, the rates for key “index” offenses included in the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report all dropped by 23% to 40% in the 1990s. Pessimistic reports from the decade warned of an explosion in crime rates and the emergence of especially dangerous and violent juvenile criminals. Fortunately—and surprisingly—such expectations proved to be inaccurate.

Zimring’s insightful new book examines this phenomenon and attempts to understand just why crime declined so dramatically beginning in the 1990s. The first part of the book reviews relevant crime statistics and their change across the past several decades. There also is discussion about government actions and various crime control policies. Zimring then moves to a critical appraisal of the different reasons offered for why crime declined, including changes in the nation’s demographics and economy as well as abortion and changes in policing. The meticulous and systematic approach used by Zimring to dissect these reasons, their related literature and statistics makes this a particularly strong section of the book. The third part of the book takes a closer look at changes in New York’s crime rate as well as a comparison of Canadian and American crime rates. The parallel between the two countries’ decline in crime rates is intriguing given their different crime control policies and economic developments. Finally, Zimring ends the book by considering the future of crime in the United States, the long-term consequences of the 1990s’ crime decline, and what this decline teaches us about crime and how it is studied.

As in his previous books, Zimring writes with a style and language that makes this book accessible to readers both inside

and outside of academia. His comprehensive review and explanation of crime statistics will be understandable to more casual readers while his critical review of the various reasons offered to explain the crime decline is done in the careful, thorough, well-researched, and thought-provoking way that is expected in Zimring's work. The book focuses on declines across crime categories rather than in any one type of offense or offender so there is no specific focus on adolescents or juvenile crime. Yet, given Zimring's many important books and articles focused on this population, he undoubtedly has interesting thoughts and insights about the crime decline as it pertains directly to juveniles and juvenile crime rates. This would have been an interesting addition to the book, though the book does not lack for content in its absence. Instead, this book is a rich compilation of numbers, analysis, and insight that is organized to give the reader a deeper understanding of American crime rates and the complex interplay of factors that might explain its decline in the 1990s.

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