

Book Reviews

BLUE CHIP BLACK: RACE, CLASS, AND STATUS IN THE NEW BLACK MIDDLE CLASS, by Karyn Lacy. Berkeley: University of California Press, George Gund Foundation Imprint in African American Studies, 2007, 302 pp. ISBN: 0520251156 or 978-0520251151 (hardcover) and ISBN: 0520251164 or 978-0520251168 \$21.95 (pb).

Reviewed by

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The birth, growth, and dynamic change occurring in communities of color in the United States have been a subject of urban sociology since Robert E. Park sent his graduate students out onto Chicago's streets admonishing them to get their pants dirty. The foci of many of these studies were the underserved, from William Julius Wilson's underclass to those left behind by Logan and Molotch's growth machines. But as communities of color diversify and expand into new social and physical spaces, different lenses are needed to understand the diversity that exists in these complex communities of color. Following in Mary Pattillo's shoes, sociologist Karyn Lacy aims to expose this diversity by focusing on the black middle class in suburban Washington, D.C. Her *Blue Chip Black: Race, Class and Status in the New Black Middle Class* is a deep ethnographic work that borrows from a number of theoretical traditions, including Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, Feagin's racial stigma theory, Massey & Denton's work on racial segregation, and Waters' work on adaptations of immigrants.

As a Harvard graduate student, Lacy immersed herself in the life of three black middle-class communities outside Washington, D.C., which she discovered vary in significant ways. There are the fragile black lower middle class earning less than \$50,000; the stable core black middle class earning \$50–99,999; and the elite black middle class, earning more than \$100,000. Each group uses a tool kit that is composed of public identities, status-based identities, racial and class-based identities, and suburban identities, all of which it uses to establish its position in American society "relative to white strangers, their white middle-class neighbors, lower class blacks, and one another" (p. 14). Lacy frames her book chapters around each of these identities, but argues that this is a contested process, as middle-class blacks seek to ground their children's identity as black individuals, while immersing them in middle-class white culture. Her careful analysis of parents' efforts extends Lareau's work on "concerted cultivation," calling into question the legitimacy of "black culture" as defined by these black middle-class families.

One of Lacy's contributions in comparing the three D.C. neighborhoods is the way her research subjects explain the importance of place, particularly in suburban

communities, in constructing complex social identities. The racial and class composition of a family's suburban neighborhood provides a distinct set of opportunities or challenges for black parents as they shape their own and their children's black middle-class identity. The differences in identity construction, or what it means to be in the black middle class in each of these three residential locations, make for fascinating reading, and bring to mind DuBois's "double consciousness" as the black middle class actively chooses from a broad cultural repertoire to negotiate identity.

One of the great strengths of this book is that Lacy clearly spells out the continuing structural conditions that maintain housing segregation, that impact opportunities for the black middle class. Salespersons at new housing developments, realtors, schools, and store clerks all perpetuate a view of blacks in general as the "truly disadvantaged." More disturbing is the view by some of Lacy's black middle-class subjects that, when they do experience discrimination, "they associate the incidents with an inability on their part to effectively signal their class position to store employees" (p. 112). Lacy goes "undercover" as a prospective homebuyer to test her subjects' experiences and is subtly rebuffed. Her analysis of her experiences as a black woman in this research context is discussed in detail in the book's appendix, a section that will surely be a valuable resource for budding ethnographers and those teaching methods courses.

There is much to learn from this book for those interested in the social geography of inequality, particularly for those of us interested in communities of color in the United States. Foremost is Lacy's contention that "we can no longer rely on studies of the black lower middle class to understand the experiences of the black middle class as a whole" (p. 226). The same could be said for the Latino, Vietnamese, and other communities of color with a growing middle class, broad within-group differences, and variation by place of residence. Lacy privileges the agency of the black middle class in constructing black racial identity and offers what she calls a "strategic assimilation pattern," whereby blacks negotiate a racial dualism that allows them to claim a place within the middle class. The inclusionary boundary work in which the black middle class engages to align themselves with their white middle-class neighbors appears to leave out Pattillo's sense of racial responsibility that the black middle class in Chicago's North Kenwood-Oakland area exhibits. Again, this difference points to the complexity of black middle-class experience and the importance of place in structuring opportunities for blacks, Latinos, and Asians.

There are some disconcerting parts to this book. Lacy uses three dimensions of status to measure distinctions between lower middle-class blacks and elite middle-class blacks: work ethic, responsible spending, and sacrificing for children. How she came to use these three measures is unclear and deserves elaboration, as these elements have some resemblance to Oscar Lewis's culture of poverty criteria. Her section on black parents' view of public schooling provides only a taste of what promises to become a rich area for research, particularly as black middle-class parents' expectations of what it takes for their children to be competitive in the adult world clashes with the school's definition of education for their children. But these are minor criticisms of a book that greatly advances our understanding of the diversity that exists within communities of color in the United States.

GOD NEEDS NO PASSPORT: IMMIGRANTS AND THE CHANGING AMERICAN RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE, by Peggy Levitt. New York: The New Press. 2007. Pp. 270

Reviewed by

Pyong Gap Min

Peggy Levitt is the author of *The Transnational Villagers* (2001) and many articles focusing on U.S. immigrants' transnational lives connecting their immigrant destination and home cities. As the title indicates, her latest book focuses on the transnational dimensions of immigrants' religious practices. Although Levitt does not mention in any place what are the main objectives of her book, she seems to deliver two central messages or themes. The primary one is that immigrants' religious practices basically involve border-crossing dual lives in two countries or even global lives in multiple countries where particular religions are important. The secondary theme or message seems to be that immigrants with different—namely, non-Christian—religious faiths have a lot in common with Americans in their vision of the good society and their practice of faith within it. Levitt delivers this message to counter what she considers to be the one-dimensional extremist, often terrorist, image of immigrants with deep religious faith. The author provides a typology of the values and practices of the immigrant faithful to emphasize the diversity of religious practices within each religious group.

The book is based on nearly ten years of research among four immigrant faith groups in Boston: Pakistani Muslims, two Gujarati Hindu organizations, Irish Catholics, and Brazilian Pentecostal/Evangelical Protestants. Ethnographic research conducted in the four immigrant groups' religious institutions in Boston and their home cities or villages is the major data source for the book project. Personal interviews with 247 immigrants of the four national origin-groups comprise an important component of the ethnographic research. Collecting data in both immigrants' destination and home cities (villages) is the major methodological advantage of this book over previous transnational studies based on data from immigrants alone. By adding stories based on personal interviews and observations on the other side of the world, she offers clearer pictures of immigrants' transnational lives.

Only one of the seven chapters (Chapter 5) focuses on the transnational aspects of her informants' religious practices, with another chapter (Chapter 3) devoting several pages to discussing "religious global citizens." In Chapter 5, Levitt examines different forms of transnational linkages in religious practices among the four selected immigrant groups. She presents organizational linkages between religious institutions in Boston and home cities as the most significant form of transnational religious lives. For example, she reports that the Irish Episcopal Commission on Emigrants in Dublin sent two priests to Boston to take care of new Irish immigrants through the new Irish Pastoral Center. In contrast to Catholics who adopt the transnational religious corporation model, she introduces the International Swaminarayan Satsang Organization and Swadhyaya as national groups that work transnationally. These two Gujarati-based Hindu organizations have branches in the United States and other countries. She also discusses in this chapter transnational supplies of religious materials and the role of technology in transnational linkages between home and host religious communities.

The major strength of Levitt's book is its presentation of transnational stories, describing in a journalistic style her direct observations of many important settings and her informants' personal narratives. Because of this engaging style of writing, the book is likely to appeal to a wide range of readers who may not have an academic background in immigrants' religious practices and transnational lives. This book, along with her first book, *The Transnational Villagers*, makes an important contribution to transnational studies. It could be used as an ideal text for courses that cover immigration and immigrants' transnational ties to their homeland.

But this book contributes only moderately to studies of immigrants' transnational religious practices. When I saw the title, *God Needs No Passport*, I expected to find a great deal of analytic information about the transnational aspects of immigrants' religious practices. However, as I already pointed out, only one of the seven chapters focuses on this issue. Based on interviews with nearly 250 immigrants, she could have systematically analyzed different aspects of immigrants' transnational lives, but the book includes limited analytic information about them. The author has provided more information about the nature of transnational lives in general and the typology of the immigrant faithful than about transnational religious lives per se.

I also would like to point out that the author's selection of two Hindu groups for her ethnographic research has led her to present Indian Hindu immigrants' religious practices as more transnational than they really are. The International Swaminarayan Satsang Organization and Swadhyaya are two major sectarian Hindu organizations that have international networks. Other Hindu temples in the United States have far fewer linkages to religious organizations in India. These two Hindu organizations also have a more congregational style of worship services, similar to those of American Christians, than do other Hindus. But only a very small proportion of Indian Hindus are affiliated with these two organizations.

In addition, I have a moderate reservation about the author's suggestion that the people from the four faith traditions articulated views spanning a wide range of the liberal-conservative political spectrum, echoing the range of opinions expressed by native-born Americans (p.162). Levitt seems to have made the above suggestion to counter the image that many immigrants with deep religious faith have brought with them conservative political views. On the contrary, the vast majority of immigrants, including Muslim immigrants, try to keep their religious practices personal, whereas many native-born white evangelicals try to tie their religious dogmas to political issues.

WHEN AMERICA BECAME SUBURBAN, by Robert A. Beauregard. University of Minnesota Press, 2006. 272 pp. ISBN 0-8166-4885-9.

Reviewed by

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In 2002, Robert Beauregard published *Voices of Decline*, a brilliant examination of the gutting of U.S. cities during the postwar decades, and more specifically the rhetoric surrounding this fate. *When America Became Suburban* serves as a companion piece to that

volume, exploring the flip side of center city decay. The immediate decades following the Second World War, which Beauregard identifies as “the short American Century,” were characterized by a prodigious expansion of the suburbs, which became the signature spaces of a newly constituted postwar American “way of life.” As with *Voices*, Beauregard is covering ground very familiar to most urban scholars; what he adds in both books is a remarkable breadth of observation and flair for synthesis, most evident in his deft bridging of the standard divide between cultural and political economic analyses of urban process.

It is significant that Beauregard titled his book *When America Became Suburban* rather than *How*. Downplaying issues of process (and for the most part intentionally ignoring key actors), the book addresses the significance of suburbanization in the context of its historical moment, seeing it as a central component of broad social outcomes including the unprecedented economic expansion of the postwar decades, incipient globalization and deindustrialization, and the ideological struggles of the Cold War. Beauregard is specific in his periodization of the short American Century, which begins with Bretton Woods and ends with the onset of the economic recession of 1973–1975. The designation American Century derives from *Time Magazine* publisher Henry Luce’s diagnosis of the postwar global circumstance, with the United States establishing itself as the leading economic power of the capitalist world, as well as the military and ideological bulwark against the encroachments of the Soviet Union.

Beauregard notes that the social forces spurring population and investment decline in the cores of old industrial cities were not limited to the United States, since similar patterns appeared to varying degrees in major cities throughout Western Europe. Nonetheless, “the suburban way of life was ideologically and substantively ‘clean’ and uniquely American. No other country engaged in mass suburbanization. Some... had ‘new towns’... but none had Levittowns” (p. 146). The forces spurring this suburban expansion included postwar affluence that allowed for a far more robust consumer economy than could be found in the still-wounded countries of Europe, a balance of government policy favorable to sprawling development, and most especially patterns of racial exclusion peculiar to the United States, with center cities increasingly racialized and thus stigmatized.

Before the Second World War, industrial cities were the core spaces of U.S. prosperity. Moreover, urban expansion followed a pattern that was largely distributive, that is, “most cities and towns had benefited from steady increases in population and geographical expansion prior to [World War II]” (p. 19). During the short American Century, conversely, the suburbs (and their associated new consumer requirements, from automobiles to patio furniture) became the new engines of economic growth. Moreover, expansion patterns shifted from distributive to parasitic. Suburban growth came at the expense of the core city, and sprawling Sunbelt cities grew at the expense of the industrial powers of the Northeast and the Midwest. A collection of factors drove this parasitic dynamic, including housing policy (particularly via FHA mortgage subsidization), the arrest of immigration dating back to the Depression era (to be resumed in the 1970s), white flight, and industrial redistribution (particularly via defense contracting). Left behind was a core city increasingly bereft of capital and social resources, stigmatized as derelict and disorderly. Beauregard argues that increasingly abandoned as well were the pluralist and cosmopolitan dimensions of the American identity, erased by the class and racial homogeneity of suburban subdivisions.

More and more, the suburbs would become the whitewashed face of the postwar American dream, in which “suburbia would serve as a bulwark against communism and class conflict’ blocking subversion and dissolving any lingering class divisions” (p. 169). As Beauregard presents it, the suburbs were the site of the constitution of postwar hegemony, both at home and abroad. The particular style of consumer affluence—scorned by intellectuals wedded to the metropole but hungered for by a middle class scarred by depression and war—was a powerful force for social integration of the white population. Suburban ranch homes provided a buffer against powerful postwar anxieties, including the looming threat of nuclear attack (which would after all most likely target dense urban cores) and the specter of civil rights and race mixing. Moreover, the affluence of the suburbs was promoted as the latest proof of American Exceptionalism (“No man who owns his own home and lot can be a Communist,” insisted William J. Levitt), leveraged to demonstrate the manifest superiority of U.S. style capitalism, most famously in Nixon’s “kitchen debate” with Khrushchev, a watershed that Beauregard revisits incisively.

Like *Voices of Decline, When America Became Suburban* opens up fresh perspectives on what might have seemed a thoroughly exhausted topic. Of course, much of the material will be familiar to serious urban scholars, and there is some unnecessary redundancy within the text itself. Still, Beauregard’s clarity of thought and exceptional talent for synthesis will reward even readers thoroughly immersed in the topic, while providing what may well become a new standard for classroom instruction.

BRANDING NEW YORK: HOW A CITY IN CRISIS WAS SOLD TO THE WORLD, by Miriam Greenberg. New York and London: Routledge, 2008. 265 pp. ISBN 0-415-95442-8 (paper).

Reviewed by

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In this book, Miriam Greenberg sets out to rescue the marketing of cities from its status as mere gloss on the underlying and ostensibly more influential relations of political economy. She succeeds, but only barely. The precariousness of her success rests with the problematic of representation, though, and not with any shortcoming of her scholarship.

Greenberg’s description of the marketing of New York City from the late 1960s to the 1990s focuses on the intersection of public relations, government policy, and socioeconomic conditions. At issue is the projection of a positive city image to corporate leaders, investors, and tourists in order to attract capital and boost the value of local investments. The story she tells is of an evolution from episodic and disparate efforts by local boosters to a coordinated and professional strategy integral to the City’s economic development initiative. Motivating this shift was a series of crises—blackouts, municipal bankruptcy, labor strikes—that cast New York City as dangerous, self-destructive, and undisciplined. The resultant anxiety of real estate, media, and financial sector elites precipitated the media-based response.

New York was one of the first cities to launch a concerted effort to position itself favorably in the public imagination and thus to engage its “real and symbolic commodification” (p. 10). Its efforts were facilitated by a concentration of television, radio, and

magazine media, a significant advertising presence, and a strong travel and tourism sector within which such initiatives could be crafted. They were driven by a political economy heavily reliant on financial services and real estate, industries whose fortunes much depend on perception. But while the media could be used to enhance the city's image, it could also spread news of the city's crises. The need to manage this dual function led to the involvement of economic and political elites.

Consequently, the city was the site of a number of innovations. One of the first magazines (*New York*) to celebrate city living and negotiate the divide between "gritty" neighborhoods and a consumption-based, middle-class lifestyle began publication in 1967. The Association for a Better New York, a private sector organization, mounted the memorable Big Apple campaign in 1971. A few years later, the state government launched its "I Love New York" marketing effort, one of the most successful and well known of its kind. The city was also at the forefront of public-private partnerships devoted to publicizing the city. And, well before other places, the municipal government promoted the city as movie location.

While the City and local economic elites projected a positive image to the rest of the world, they also had to counteract negative images. The arson that struck the Bronx in the 1970s, the fiscal crisis of that same decade, the police union's "Welcome to Fear City" campaign of 1975, films that portrayed the city as an "asphalt jungle," the proliferation of subway graffiti, and the blackout and subsequent looting in the summer of 1977 were image crises that threatened the city's investment climate and the City's municipal bond rating.

The solution was two-pronged: pump public monies into economic development and counter the negative image of the city with an aggressive marketing strategy. In a world of shrinking resources, the former meant cutting services to immigrants and the poor and subsidizing real estate development and financial service firms. The latter meant that the City devoted more and more funds to tourism and image management and employed more coordinated and focused marketing campaigns. In effect, the enduring social problems of the city were marginalized in favor of what seemed a quick, inexpensive fix for the city's problems. "Branding" was central to the City's neoliberal turn.

How much does "branding" matter to the development of a city and the crafting of public policy? This question is difficult to answer. It poses the same problem that marketing experts confront in justifying their efforts. To quote from Greenberg's discussion of one marketing campaign and its impact on tourism: "there is no way to prove that there is a direct, causal correlation between these two events" (p. 217). Given the overdetermination of events and conditions and the tenuous relation of representations to reality, any strong claim for the role of place marketing is suspect. We are provided with a good understanding of the interaction of marketing, image crises, and government policy, but have no way to assess their relative influence.

That said, this is a well written, richly documented, and revealing text. Greenberg does more than simply point to "branding" and lament its use. She respects both the seriousness of representational strategies and their ideological (and thus mystifying) motivations. Moreover, she grounds image-making efforts in the socioeconomic inequalities that frequently lead to crisis. In this book, Greenberg thinks carefully about issues of representation and is convincing about its importance.

This is an informative and insightfully constructed case study. What is missing, though, is a theoretical framing that would enable us to take its insights to other places and

times and to grasp in more general and abstract terms the representational forces that discipline the city and deflect attention from socioeconomic disparities. Her frequent references to neoliberalism and injustice and her notion of New York City as “a model for the *theory* (my emphasis) of urban branding” (p. 20) suggest that she would agree that presenting a rich, descriptive case is insufficient. Consequently, while I believe *Branding New York* is a contribution to the U.S. urban studies literature, it is only an initial stage in the investigation of this fascinating aspect of contemporary urban governance.