



Black Picket Fences, Second Edition: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class

By Mary Pattillo

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First published in 1999, Mary Pattillo's *Black Picket Fences* explores an American demographic group too often ignored by both scholars and the media: the black middle class. Nearly fifteen years later, this book remains a groundbreaking study of a group still underrepresented in the academic and public spheres. The result of living for three years in "Groveland," a black middle-class neighborhood on Chicago's South Side, *Black Picket Fences* explored both the advantages the black middle class has and the boundaries they still face. Despite arguments that race no longer matters, Pattillo showed a different reality, one where black and white middle classes remain separate and unequal.

Stark, moving, and still timely, the book is updated for this edition with a new epilogue by the author that details how the neighborhood and its residents fared in the recession of 2008, as well as new interviews with many of the same neighborhood residents featured in the original. Also included is a new foreword by acclaimed University of Pennsylvania sociologist Annette Lareau.

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- Sales Rank: #217869 in Books
- Published on: 2013-07-02
- Released on: 2013-07-02
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x 1.00" w x 6.00" l, .95 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 352 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

“An insightful look at the socioeconomic experiences of the black middle class. . . . Through the prism of a South Side Chicago neighborhood, the author shows the distinctly different reality middle-class blacks face as opposed to middle-class whites.”

(*Ebony*)

“[A] richly textured, thoughtful account of the precarious economic and social positions of young people in these middle-class families. . . . Pattillo knows Groveland, and she knows the literature on poverty and class. She is a careful and insightful observer. . . . Pattillo’s book provides a perceptive analysis of the black middle class in America in the 1990s and will be an integral part of courses on stratification, race, and poverty. But it is also an entertaining book that will appeal to general audiences interested in contemporary social issues. I recommend it.”

(Cynthia M. Duncan *American Journal of Sociology*)

“Few studies offer extensions to an existing body of research in a manner that is both paradigm shifting and enriching to the social sciences as a whole. . . . Pattillo has succeeded in doing both. Her analysis of the black middle class revives the tradition of community studies in American sociology while skillfully shifting the dialogue concerning the inner-city from its focus on social pathologies of the poor to a more holistic discussion of stratification and social interaction.”

(Robert Mark Silverman *Critical Sociology*)

“The most insightful study I have read on the black middle class. Like no other author, Mary Pattillo reveals the obstacles and pressures of black middle-class families. Readers of this clearly written and engaging book will understand why these experiences are unique, and why they produce social outcomes that often differ from those of the white middle class.”

(William Julius Wilson, author of *When Work Disappears*)

“More than with sweeping conclusions or policy recommendations, *Black Picket Fences* concerns itself with turning a detailed eye to a picture that’s easily glossed over in discussions of [Chicago’s] segregation. So it’s an academic text but a lively one . . . Pattillo is an excellent listener, and anyone looking to expand their conception of the South Side beyond the dire stories of Englewood violence and the ivied island of Hyde Park should listen in as well.”

(Daphne Sidor *Gapers Block*)

About the Author

Mary Pattillo is the Harold Washington Professor of Sociology and African American studies at Northwestern University. She is the author of *Black on the Block: The Politics of Race and Class in the City*, also published by the University of Chicago Press, and coeditor of *Imprisoning America: The Social Effects*

of Mass Incarceration.

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