

appeal to specialists in the field, but it may not engage the general reader. Also, his concept of region, which is based upon transport and social networks, does not deal with the issue of cultural uniqueness. Was the upper Mississippi Valley culturally simply a western extension of the antebellum Northeast, just as the greater Midwest is presented in Andrew Cayton and Peter Onuf's, *The Midwest and the Nation* (1990)? Or did the Midwest possess a regional identity different from the East? This is an important question that Mahoney might have explored more thoroughly.

BRUCE BIGELOW, associate professor of geography at Butler University, Indianapolis, has written articles on the cultural geography of Indiana in the antebellum and civil war era.

*Southern Seed, Northern Soil: African-American Farm Communities in the Midwest, 1765–1900.* By Stephen A. Vincent. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999. Pp. xvii, 224. Maps, tables, illustrations, appendix, notes, index. \$35.00.)

*Southern Seed, Northern Soil* focuses on the rural communities of Beech and Roberts, and the people of African descent who settled and lived in this area of central Indiana during the nineteenth century. Coming from adjacent counties in North Carolina and Virginia, the pioneers were free men and women of mixed ancestry who were looking to escape racial tensions and improve their economic condition as owners of land. After leaving the South in the late 1820s and early 1830s, they settled in areas where land was inexpensive and situated close enough to Quaker settlements to provide them with a sense of security. Although their migration to the Old Northwest “led to markedly improved opportunities,” they still faced “disadvantages associated with their status as free people of color” (p. 47).

Stephen A. Vincent shows that landownership as a “form of power and control” (p. xvi) was central to the experience of Beech and Roberts residents well before freedmen pressed for “forty acres and a mule” after the Civil War. For the people of Beech and Roberts, landownership not only became a source of material improvement, it also helped create a buffer zone that put African Americans at a distance from hostile whites. Community institutions like churches and schools were symbols of autonomy and success. Built away from racial violence and discrimination, these institutions contributed to an identity that set their members apart from most other African Americans.

The children and grandchildren of the Beech and Roberts pioneers confronted marginal prospects in the area, especially after the Civil War when changes in the nation's economy increased farm debts. Yet, life in the rural Midwest was better than that offered blacks living in increasing numbers in the region's urban centers before the Great Migration. Those who did emigrate from Beech and

Roberts settlements benefited from “an upbringing that enhanced their chances of success in the world” (p. 149) and that helped many climb into the urban middle class as teachers and ministers.

This is an important book for Midwest, Indiana, black, and social history. By presenting the experience of black pioneers in the Midwest, Vincent invites historians to think again about the frontier’s impact on democracy, the rural experience of the antebellum northern black population, and the southern planters’ insistence during Reconstruction that freedmen needed supervision as farmers. *Southern Seed, Northern Soil* is especially useful for historians of the Great Migration. The study of black migration patterns from the South has seldom been done so skillfully. The author’s effort to link together primary sources such as census manuscript schedules, land deeds, and probate records—to name a few—has proven that this tour de force is very much worth the trouble. Those who study the migration of African Americans from the bottom up in the twentieth century will want to borrow some of his methodology.

NELSON OUELLET, assistant professor of history, University of Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada, is at work on a manuscript that focuses on black migrants living in Gary, Indiana, from 1906 to 1925.

*America’s First Black Town: Brooklyn, Illinois, 1830–1915.* By Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000. Pp. xiv, 276. Table, notes, index. \$37.50.)

This study traces Brooklyn, Illinois, from its beginnings as a haven for fugitive slaves to its emergence as a labor market for neighboring industries. Like other predominantly black towns that arose in the South and Midwest, Brooklyn was a product of black desires for autonomy and self-determination, as well as white racism and social exclusion. Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua argues that this small village was bypassed by businesses that might have allowed it to develop into a thriving city in its own right. Due to this neglect, Brooklyn was doomed to become “an unindustrialized residential satellite” of East St. Louis and adjacent white communities (p. 5).

The black community of Brooklyn was founded in 1829 with the arrival of eleven families from Missouri. The town’s proximity to the slaveholding South ensured it a steady influx of fugitive slaves but also guaranteed that runaways would be particularly susceptible to capture. Throughout the antebellum period, the rights and opportunities available to Brooklyn African Americans were circumscribed by Black Codes, political disfranchisement, and penury. Though situated in a nominally free state, life in antebellum Brooklyn was lived along the color line, as reflected in segregated public education, housing arrangements, and occupations. After the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, African Americans came to dominate municipal offices, including mayor. Unfortunately, polit-