ical power did not bring economic clout to black Brooklyn. Illustra-
tively, though the town, which incorporated in 1873, was surround-
ed by coal mines, no major industries were founded there. Most adult
males had to seek employment in riverine industries, farming, or as
common laborers in surrounding white settlements. Social life cen-
tered on churches, fraternal organizations, and family networks soft-
ened the town’s precarious fiscal condition. However, according to
Cha-Jua, demographic shifts occasioned by industrializing East St.
Louis and migratory patterns often destabilized these communal
structures.

The increasing proletarianization of Brooklyn African Americans
who found employment in neighboring industries was a help to peo-
ple who had previously been landless agricultural workers. Nonethe-
less, racism exposed them to the worst vagaries of industrial capitalism,
such as exploitation, or the systematic, racially discriminatory under-
payment of black workers. Constantly threatened with annexation,
Brooklyn endured political corruption, racial violence, and further
economic decline as it entered the twentieth century. Though it con-
tinued to survive as a black enclave, the proliferation of boarding-
houses, saloons, and dens of vice testified to its hollow economy and
uncertain future.

Drawing liberally on census records, period newspapers, and
other sources, America’s First Black Town is well researched, cogent-
ly argued, and brings an important story to life. The experiences of
black Brooklyn are placed within the broader history of Illinois, and
the author compares his subject with other black towns. One might
question the author’s attempt to fit Brooklyn into a colonial paradigm.
It seems strange to see phrases such as “protonationalism,” “white
minority colonial domination,” and “decolonization” used to describe
a nineteenth-century Illinois town with barely a thousand inhabi-
tants (e.g., pp. 3, 120, 143). Aside from this, the book is an insight-
ful study that sheds light on a heretofore obscured history.

Claude A. Clegg, associate professor of history at Indiana University, Bloomington,
is the author of An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad (1997).
Currently, he is writing a book on the emigration of black North Carolinians to Liberia
during the nineteenth century.

Modern Mothers in the Heartland: Gender, Health, and Progress in
Illinois, 1900–1930. By Lynne Curry. (Columbus: Ohio State Uni-
bibliography, index. Clothbound, $40.00; paperbound, $18.50.

Although the overall death rate dropped with the widespread
use of sewer and water filtration systems during the last half of the
nineteenth century, infant mortality did not. Concerned public health
officials consequently tapped mothers as the frontline soldiers in the
battle against dirt and disease. In her engaging and thorough book,
Lynne Curry tells the story of this national movement to create “modern mothers” and healthier babies by focusing on Illinois. Her study of an entire state examines this topic in a way few historians have, for the early twentieth-century infant welfare movement was really two campaigns—one urban, one rural—and two vastly different stories.

In Chicago an army of philanthropists, volunteers, physicians, nurses, and public health workers mobilized to lower infant mortality with a host of organizations and activities. Medical dispensaries, visiting nurses, settlement houses, pure milk depots, infant welfare stations, and portable hospitals known as “baby tents” brought health services and advice directly to immigrant mothers. Because the medical profession associated poor health and unsanitary conditions with the foreign born pouring into American cities, they initially ignored urban African Americans and native-born rural residents needing similar services.

By 1910, in the wake of the public health offensive in Chicago, infant mortality rates had begun a steady decline. The rest of the state was a different story. As late as 1920, only 11 percent of Illinois farm families enjoyed indoor plumbing and, since farmers commonly located wells only yards from outdoor privies and stables, contaminated drinking water was common. Notorious for its hot, humid summers, swamps, and frequent flooding, downstate Illinois continued to host numerous epidemics, such as yellow fever, dysentery, and typhoid, that had long since been eradicated in Chicago.

Not until World War I, when a higher percentage of draftees from Illinois farms than from Chicago were rejected as unfit, did public health officials turn their attention to preventive health among farm families. Agricultural extension services, farm magazines, traveling exhibits, and state and county fairs soon bombarded rural mothers with health tips. Among the most popular events were better baby contests that modeled hygienic behavior by displaying tiny contestants in sanitized nurseries and judges outfitted in surgical garb and emphasized the concerns of the new medical specialty of pediatrics.

Curry argues that while the movement to lower infant mortality had clearly succeeded by the late 1920s, that achievement came without any acknowledgment from government or medicine that mothers were “special agents of modernity” (p. 152). Rather than become the progressive advocates for change that the 1921 Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act had signaled that they might, women instead became preventive-health consumers, purchasing everything from vitamins to disinfectants.

Curry covers a remarkable range of relevant topics including the Grange, the quality of soil in assorted Illinois counties, the machinations of better baby contests, the migration of former slaves to southern Illinois, the politics and activities of the U.S. Children’s Bureau, and the successes and failures of the federal government’s Sheppard-Towner Act. It is little wonder that Curry’s book contains
a few errors. Most notably, Chicago was not “the first municipality in the world” to offer universally pasteurized milk to its citizens (p. 25), although the city might have boasted of that at the time. Rather, the 1908 Evans Pasteurization Ordinance proved an immediate failure, and Chicago did not have pasteurized milk until eight long years had passed and many more babies had died. But a few minor errors do not diminish Curry’s vivid portrait. Her readable and informative book will contribute to many a lively discussion in women’s studies, medical history, and public health classes.

JACQUELINE H. WOLF, assistant professor of the history of medicine at the Ohio University College of Osteopathic Medicine, Athens, is the author of “Don’t Kill Your Baby: Public Health and the Decline of Breastfeeding in the 19th and 20th Centuries,” forthcoming from Ohio State University Press.


In *There Goes the Neighborhood*, David R. Reynolds investigates the process and implications of school consolidation in Iowa. While he focuses on that state—and more particularly on the Buck Creek neighborhood in Delaware County—his study is clearly relevant to other states in which rural school consolidation was an issue, including Indiana. Reynolds attends to at least three distinct, if interrelated, subjects. First, he engages in a highly theoretical discussion in which he attempts to distinguish the class identity and class consciousness of farm families from their economic status, narrowly defined. While this discussion will be of interest to theorists, it has a tendency to reify ideal types and to understate the dynamics of change in rural areas.

Reynolds’s second major subject is the Country Life Movement, the reform endeavor early in the twentieth century that sought to revitalize rural society and improve the performance of the agricultural economy. Reynolds’s explanation of the Country Life Movement’s educational dimension is generally good, if somewhat negative and ungenerous, and his placement of school reform in Iowa within the larger context of national reform is first-rate. Both nationally and locally school consolidation was considered a necessary step in the improvement of rural education and its elevation to the level of quality supposedly attained by urban schools.

The heart of the book, and its strongest portion, deals with the progress of consolidation in the Buck Creek neighborhood Reynolds uses as a case study. School consolidation and other reform ideas, such as agricultural improvement, county extension agents, and expanded church activities, were advanced there by Gilbert Chalice,