

audience . . . [got] into the spirit of the thing by yelling and cheering" (51). This display, however, is characterized as a "most unusual demonstration." By giving such weight to insiders' unpublished commentary, Kibler is able to provide an unusually nuanced picture of the internal dynamics of vaudeville.

Kibler's study looks at masculinity and femininity in symbolic terms, as it focuses on three different aspects of vaudeville: the audience, the careers of several female performers, and the labor movement. Four of the author's eight chapters are devoted to profiles of "ladies of rank" and "rank ladies," performers chosen to represent different constructions of femininity and masculinity (in feminine guise) presented on the vaudeville stage. Her subjects include the comedy team of Kate and May Elinore; Julia Arthur, an actress from the legitimate stage who made a foray into vaudeville as Hamlet; May Irwin and other women who performed in blackface; and Ruth Budd, an unusually athletic acrobat. She devotes another chapter to the women's auxiliary of the White Rats, a fraternal order of vaudeville performers established in 1900 and reborn as a union after its merger with the International Actors' Union in 1910.

Kibler's study is ambitious in that it attempts to address simultaneously a variety of issues related to women and vaudeville. As a result, the terms of the discussion are occasionally confusing, as when symbolic femininity is evoked in different contexts and without clear definition. The performers profiled, however, are well-chosen examples in that they not only represent larger aspects of vaudeville but also suggest the amazing fluidity of symbolic gender in vaudeville as a whole. Though beyond the scope of Kibler's study, a consideration of the symbolic feminine as represented by men playing women in vaudeville would help to flesh out the story that *Rank Ladies* begins to unfold.

Better Baby Contests: The Scientific Quest for Perfect Childhood Health in the Early Twentieth Century, by Annette K. Vance Dorey. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1999. 232 pp. Illustrations, notes, appendixes, index. \$38.50 cloth.

Reviewer Lynne Curry is assistant professor of history at Eastern Illinois University. She is the author of *Modern Mothers in the Heartland: Gender, Health, and Progress in Illinois, 1900-1930* (1999).

Annette K. Vance Dorey has compiled a good deal of primary source material on the early twentieth-century phenomenon of the better baby contest, an amalgam of social reform and popular entertainment in-

tended to promote the well-being of infants and children by educating parents, especially mothers, in preventive health and hygiene practices. Dorey's profile of the movement can be situated within the broader framework of American public health reform in this period already established by works such as Elizabeth Fee, *Disease and Discovery: A History of the Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health, 1916-1939* (1987); John Duffy, *The Sanitarians: A History of American Public Health* (1990); and Nancy Tomes, *The Gospel of Germs: Men, Women, and the Microbe in American Life* (1998), among others. The centrality of women, both as subjects and objects of Progressive Era child health campaigns, has also received a good deal of attention in studies such as Richard A. Meckel, *Save the Babies: American Public Health Reform and the Prevention of Infant Mortality, 1850-1929* (1990); and Alisa Klaus, *Every Child a Lion: The Origins of Maternal and Infant Health Policy in the United States and France, 1890-1920* (1993).

By the turn of the century the widespread acceptance of the germ theory within the medical community shed new light on the role of individual behavior in preventing disease, leading child welfare advocates to stress the role of domestic hygiene in protecting children's health. With grassroots support from middle-class clubwomen, community activities such as child health demonstrations, films and magic lantern shows, and entire weeks devoted to "baby saving" appeared in both urban and rural venues. It was in America's heartland, however, that the particular innovation of the better baby contest thrived most vigorously.

Dorey chronicles midwesterners' enthusiasm for better baby contests at agricultural fairs, women's club meetings, and promotions sponsored by the popular press. Parents entered their offspring to learn more about child hygiene and to see how they measured up to the new standards being promulgated for children's height, weight, healthful appearance, and behavioral development; organizers often sweetened the deal by offering cash prizes to the winners. Thousands of curious onlookers enjoyed the spectacle of babies on display. Although its populist roots somewhat obscure the contest's origins, Dorey demonstrates that Iowa clubwomen numbered among its most zealous champions. Working with the American Medical Association's Committee for Public Health Education Among Women, the Iowa Congress of Mothers organized the state's first contest in 1911 and went on to form the American Baby Health Contest Association to promote the idea nationwide. Iowa clubwomen sponsored these events "relentlessly" on both the state and local levels until the 1950s (29).

Groups of organizers varied in their aims and purposes. Some intended the events as nothing more than baby beauty shows. Others held loftier aspirations; public health nurses, child welfare advocates in the U.S. Children's Bureau, and physicians interested in the new practice field of pediatrics all endeavored to infuse the contests with an aura of scientific respectability. Mothers were encouraged to seek a higher standard of health for their children by learning the essentials of domestic hygiene and having their children examined regularly by a health care provider. Sometimes these differing orientations led to clashes among the promoters themselves, as evidenced by the struggle over the awarding of prizes, which many found "vulgar and debasing" (181). Dorey devotes a chapter to profiling several female leaders in the movement, including Florence Brown Sherbon and Lenna L. Meanes, both Iowa medical doctors who contributed significantly to public health reform in the state.

This book's contribution is to make accessible a good deal of documentary evidence from this enigmatic episode in American health reform. Dorey has uncovered photographs, posters, contest scorecards, winners' names, and other data that enable us to flesh out the historical picture and make it come alive. Regrettably, the author has chosen neither to subject her findings to systematic analysis nor to address the substantial body of scholarship that already exists on this topic (2-3). The lack of a clear narrative structure (another unfortunate choice) and periodic awkward prose serve to lessen the impact of her material. Ultimately, we are left uncertain of the movement's broader significance for children's health in the United States. Dorey's startling conclusion that "the lessons of the baby-saving movement may help inform the current issues and discontent over managed care" (214) is completely unsupported by either her evidence or her narrative.

Tradition and Valor: A Family Journey, by Robert V. Morris. Manhattan, KS: Sunflower University Press, 1999. xii, 134 pp. Illustrations, appendix, index. \$18.95 paper.

Reviewer Robert F. Jefferson is assistant professor of history and African American World Studies at the University of Iowa. His primary research interest is African American GIs and their families during the Second World War.

"What does it take to make me a citizen of the land in which I was born? I have been loyal. My father was loyal before me. We have fought in every war and we have worked. Now, I am called to die for freedom. What of my children's future?" These sentiments uttered by noted author and human rights activist Shirley Graham in 1943 may

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.