

Black Neighbors: Race and the Limits of Reform in the American Settlement House Movement, 1890–1945. By Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn. (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, c. 1993. Pp. xiv, 225. Paper, \$14.95, ISBN 0-8078-4423-3; cloth, \$39.95, ISBN 0-80782114-4.)

Black Neighbors has two purposes: “to explain the tragic failure of the mainstream settlement house movement to redirect its energies toward its black neighbors” and “to show how other institutions, which neither practitioners nor examiners of settlement work have traditionally considered part of the settlement movement, did conduct a version of settlement work in black communities” (p. 1). The author succeeds in the second of these endeavors more fully than in the first. Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn shows the extent to which different kinds of social service, educational, and recreational programs among African Americans, undertaken by churches (both black and white), social clubs, and other associations, can be considered settlement work. She also extends the regional scope and temporal reach of the study to describe “southern school-settlements” (p. 75)—not just Hampton and Tuskegee, but the Calhoun and Colored School and People’s Village School in Alabama and the Penn School on St. Helena Island, S. C. She examines them alongside social organizations in northern and midwestern cities from the Progressive Era until the civil rights movement. In so doing, she makes important contributions to the literature on social reform, establishing links among institutions usually considered analytically distinct and revealing the early stabs at interracial cooperation undertaken by black and white YWCA members.

The success of this endeavor, however, undermines Lasch-Quinn's other purpose: to highlight the tragedy of the settlement house movement and, thereby, "shed light on the enigmatic role of race in American reform." Once one acknowledges the author's broader definition of the movement, one can no longer assert with confidence that there was a "tragic failure" of the mainstream movement. If so much was being undertaken by organizations that ought to be incorporated within analyses of the settlement house movement, why should those people who have been considered part of the so-called actual movement have "redirect[ed their] energies" (p. 1)? Moreover, given the importance of white funding for organizations that did work among blacks and that Lasch-Quinn considers settlements, can we actually say that white settlement house leaders, for all their racial prejudice, did not direct their attention to the plight of inner-city blacks? And, indeed, Lasch-Quinn's first two chapters show distinctly that while white settlement house leaders were often prejudiced, some were not, and even those who were prejudiced contributed to social work among blacks. Their contributions ranged from promoting integration, to establishing segregated settlement houses, to merely donating money to other organizations undertaking such work. Perhaps what is really being described is not the failure of settlement houses on account of race, but their general eclipse in the face of new federal, local, and corporate philanthropic initiatives.

Finally, Lasch-Quinn nicely posits a dialectic between the leaders of the organizations and those they were serving. These organizations could both satisfy demands for social control and promote self-determination and advancement. Yet, if "black neighbors" were a key part of this dialectic, then it is questionable whether movement leaders could have done more through their settlement houses, even if their white neighbors had allowed them to do so. Did not desires for self-determination, particularly among black professionals who benefited from control of their own organizations, restrict the ways in which philanthropists could contribute to black communities? In short, the notion of a "tragedy" is problematic. It seems to suggest that what settlement houses did was crucial to the success of immigrants and blacks in America, when the changing social, economic, and political landscape (over which settlement house leaders had little control) was of far greater importance.