

disease, and thus also vulnerable to strong public health regulation of their behaviours, both inside and outside the hospital, to recover full citizenship. Leonard Smith shows how the official visitations of the Lunacy Commissioners became the vehicle by which the central direction of insanity provision was gradually established, and how they succeeded in raising standards in both public and private asylums. The other chapters on mental hospitals finally dissolve any lingering impressions of such intuitions as socially isolated: entertainers visited, balls were held, and staff sports teams toured, while patient visits, though often (increasingly) closely regulated, were sometimes viewed sympathetically as having a therapeutic purpose.

The warmth of the welcome visitors received depended on the types of visitors and patients being visited, as well as the type and financial security of the hospital, and many other socio-economic variables. This very diversity, though strengthening the argument about the historiographical importance of attention to visitors, does make it hard to unify these essays. Arguably the most important conclusion—that these studies show that Foucault's view of institutional power/knowledge regimes needs to be revised to incorporate more fluid relationships with civil society—is rather hidden under a bushel. In addition, inevitably some potentially fruitful new areas for investigation can only be touched upon: for example the roles of hospitals in knowledge transfer via administrative and medical staff educational visits.

Until direct participation of donors in hospital administration waned with increasing reliance on patient contributory schemes and local authority contracting of services, leading to a shift to professional administrators, visiting and visiting policy were integrally bound up with the socio-economic survival of hospitals. Official visitation regimes, though also becoming more formalized and

professionalized, maintained the link between evolving patterns of social governance in hospital and civil society. Who came in, what they did and what they saw were key to securing funding and regulating social environments, and thus visiting was tightly controlled and often stage-managed to create the illusion of an idealized physical environment and moral universe. While there is some variation in quality and some contextual repetition between essays, and while the collection does not (as the editors acknowledge) cover military hospitals, these are very valuable contributions that develop the Porterian reorientation of medical history away from the profession and towards a wider social history of health care. As Catherine Coleborne's final article argues, the institution needs to be historiographically decentred: the meanings of illness and its treatment are not fully captured in analyses of the institution and its staff, but also lie in the multiple points of contact and interaction among the hospital world and family, lay and official visitors.

**Andrew J Hull,**  
Swansea University

**Lara Freidenfelds,** *The modern period: menstruation in twentieth-century America*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, pp. 242, £31.00, \$60.00 (hardback 978-0-80189245-5).

Although American women (and men) may take contemporary menstrual knowledge, education, and products for granted, Lara Freidenfelds, in her book *The modern period*, reminds us that our current ideas concerning menstruation and its management are neither inevitable nor given. Rather, through a skilful weaving of archival and interview sources, Freidenfelds demonstrates how contemporary menstrual management was born from a

cooperative effort between “experts” and ordinary women operating within a particular nexus of modern beliefs and practices. Ultimately, Freidenfelds concludes that the modern way of managing menstruation allowed women to fashion and control their bodies in accordance with a particular set of class and racial standards, as well as in ways that enhanced comfort, lessened anxiety, and fostered feelings of liberation.

Organizing her book into five thematic chapters, as opposed to chronologically, Freidenfelds cleverly demonstrates how the transition from “old-fashioned” to “modern” menstrual management was far from “common sense”. Separately tracing the developments of menstrual education, health beliefs, and management, the author shows how intersecting advances and changing beliefs in science and technology, as well as the industrialization and urbanization of America, combined to create the need and desire for efficient, controlled bodies that could function to their full capacity each day of the month. Additionally, modern menstrual management could not have advanced without an emerging and expanding middle class, and the hygienic beliefs and appearances it espoused, as well as a burgeoning consumer culture that offered a wide range of products to help individuals attain a middle-class hygienic ideal. Key to this transition were progressive ideals, particularly faith in science as an explanatory power and a tool for the betterment of society. This faith fostered increased education efforts and lessened concerns about activities disturbing the menstrual flow. Moreover, it generated and supported the expectation that women could carry on with their normal activities all month long, aided, of course, by ever-improving menstrual technology, such as pads, tampons, deodorants, and medications. Freidenfelds shows that not one, but all of these factors were necessary in order to persuade women to switch from homemade cloth pads to disposable items, as

well as participate in more open education, discussion, and display of menstruation and menstrual products.

Freidenfelds is careful to note, however, that this transition did not occur all at once. Rather, it was an ongoing negotiation between women and marketers, educators, and health professionals that crossed classes, races, and generations. A chapter on the medical and social controversies surrounding tampons shows that not all menstrual modernization was welcomed enthusiastically. This negotiation, however, is best illustrated by the author’s use of interview material from seventy-five women and men of different ages, class, and racial backgrounds. The words of these individuals demonstrate not only the piecemeal way in which modern menstrual practices were adopted, but also the struggles, joys, and humour both women and men found in making menstruation modern, adding a unique and engaging touch to the text.

Disappointing in this otherwise well-written and entertaining account, however, is Freidenfelds’ characterization of the march of menstrual progress as doing away with a substantial amount of menstrual shame. Although she notes that the increased menstrual “openness” of modernity is constrained to particular locations and discourses, she seems to insist that this circumscription is not necessarily problematic for women, both as individuals and as a gender construct. While it certainly is important to remember the positive, liberatory impact that new menstrual knowledges and management had on many women’s lives, it is equally important to acknowledge the utilization of these same knowledges and practices to shame, denigrate, and control women’s bodies by extension of their bodily processes.

**Anna M Piechowski,**  
University of Wisconsin-Madison