Fatal Years is the first systematic study of child mortality in the United States in the late nineteenth century. Exploiting newly discovered data from the 1900 Census of Population, Samuel Preston and Michael Haines present their findings in a volume that is not only a pioneering work of demography but also an accessible and moving historical narrative.

Despite having a rich, well fed, and highly literate population, the United States had exceptionally high child-mortality levels during this period: nearly one out of every five children died before the age of five. Preston and Haines challenge accepted opinion to show that losses in privileged social groups were as appalling as those among lower classes. Improvements came only with better knowledge about infectious diseases and greater public efforts to limit their spread. The authors look at a wide range of topics, including differences in mortality in urban versus rural areas and the differences in child mortality among various immigrant groups.

Samuel H. Preston is the Frederick J. Warren Professor of Demography and Professor of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania. Michael R. Haines is the Banfi Vintners Distinguished Professor of Economics at Colgate University.
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(Resolution adopted October 25, 1926, as revised through September 30, 1974)
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Illustrations

1. Child labor was rising in the late nineteenth century. Shown here is a fully equipped eight-year-old miner from Clarksburg, West Virginia. (The Bettmann Archive)

2. Urban children were also involved in income-producing activities, as shown in this Jacob Riis photograph of a family group making artificial flowers, ca. 1890. (The Bettmann Archive)

3. By 1900, Americans were well fed by international standards of the time or even of today. Two girls from the slums of 1890 display a giant bread loaf and pretzel. (The Bettmann Archive)

4. Most blacks lived in the rural South and were victims of discriminatory practices that prevented their economic advance. Two black children from Georgia have just broken a trace on their goat team. (The Bettmann Archive)

5. The hazards of urban living appeared both in sharply higher child mortality and in poorer indexes of physical
development. Pictured here is an obviously stunted urban youth whose family is taking advantage of free ice distribution in New York City, 1919. (UPI/Bettmann Newsphotos) 115

6. Robust rural schoolchildren in Keota, Iowa, are playing "drop the handkerchief" in the early 1890s. (UPI/Bettmann Newsphotos) 116

7. The congested conditions of urban tenements, such as that pictured here in New York (ca. 1910), were undoubtedly related to the excessive child mortality of both natives and immigrants in cities. (The Bettmann Archive) 166

8. The children of physicians and surgeons had mortality that was only 6 percent below the national average, reflecting both physicians' relatively lower status and the shortage of effective preventions and cures. Shown here is a Wisconsin doctor and his family. (The Bettmann Archive) 189