

role of religion, because "manifestly slavery often received strong sponsorship from religious enthusiasts," including Quakers and Methodists. In fact, for Blackburn abolitionism had no "one-to-one correspondence" with the emancipation of slaves. Blackburn qualifies his argument, observing "not that anti-slavery was purely secular in inspiration, but that its achievements required a secular setting."

To construct his own "Marxist narrative" concerning "the essential working of capitalism, racialism, colonialism, and slavery," Blackburn draws upon David Brion Davis's *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1776-1823*, and Eugene Genovese's *From Rebellion to Revolution*. Although slavery may have arisen for economic reasons, it was overthrown not simply because it was economically unprofitable but because of a broad spectrum of largely political reasons. He finds, for example, that North American and British patriots "did incline" to anti-slavery because of the "discourse of freedom" that emerged so prominently in the eighteenth century. Yet, anti-slavery often amounted to little more than "mild benevolence or mere political rhetoric" because it "often crumbled at the first contact with an opposing material or 'patriotic' interest." Other opponents of slavery, particularly lower classes, fought slavery because they themselves had often endured some form of bondage or servitude. Opposition to the metropolis came not only from within but also from without. The rise of slavery created and empowered "a class of planters and colonial merchants that was unlikely to remain for ever content with metropolitan tutelage." In sum, slavery perished only when "there was a protracted accumulation of problems for the slave order and a concentration of diverse forces opposed to it."

Although a sequel with much more attention to the United States is promised, this particular volume is superficial in its treatment of the U.S. In fact, Blackburn's chronological focus on the U.S. in the early nineteenth century permits him to overlook the role of bourgeois reformers and the role of religion. One interesting point, briefly treated, is that the United States recognized that Haiti's independence of European powers in 1804 was a "signal demonstration" that North America could be economically independent as well.

Students would profit from this book's careful and balanced account. The difficulty is that this text requires sophisticated reading skills and knowledge. The enormous complexity of the argument, the amount and density of the information, the treatment of many countries and provinces, often shifting from colonial to imperial politics, will likely daunt, if not confuse, all but the best undergraduates.

Earlham College

Randall Shrock

**Alan Sked. *Britain's Decline: Problems and Perspectives*. New York: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1987. Pp. 90. Paper, \$7.95.**

Perhaps it is inevitable that the nation that gave us Edward Gibbon should have a preoccupation with "decline." In this slender pamphlet, Alan Sked summarizes what three dozen social scientists have said about contemporary Britain's economic and moral decline. Sponsored by the Historical Association, the pamphlet is designed to inform the average citizen and lift the level of public debate on such issues as the power of trade unions, the Welfare State, crime, drugs, sexual behavior, the Church of England, and low economic productivity. Sked tries to be even-handed in his evaluations, neither attacking nor endorsing the controversial policies of Mrs. Thatcher.

Both Tory and Labourite can find useful information in this inexpensive and readable pamphlet. Can the same be said for American students? The answer is probably not. The American undergraduate should not attempt Sked until he or she has read at least the last couple of chapters in a good survey textbook such as Roberts and Roberts. If the student has a strong interest in history he or she would likely derive more benefit from studies by Arthur Marwick and Anthony Sampson. Sked's pamphlet would be useful in a social science methods course or in a comparative government class. To the general American reader, it is nearly useless.

Britain's decline is relative, as is that of the United States, and it may prove temporary. In recent years, British industrial productivity has shown improvement, and British scientists have won 35 Nobel prizes since the end of World War II. The problems of stagflation, persistent poverty, and racial tensions are universal, not exclusively British.

Somerset Community College

Roger Tate