

of culture and learning, the academics, was as patron, not censor. The only drawback to this navigation between the reign's propagandists and detractors, stress on Louis's similarities to contemporary leaders in his war aims, and effort to temper the Sun King's larger-than-life image, is that the drama of the reign and the king's personality become flattened.

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Roderick Floud. *The People and the British Economy, 1830-1914.* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. Pp. 218. Paper, \$14.95; ISBN 0-19-289210-X.

Rex Pope. *The British Economy Since 1914: A Study in Decline?* London & New York: Longman, 1998. Pp. x, 140. Paper, \$11.95; ISBN 0-582-30194-7.

These two economic histories by Roderick Floud and Rex Pope share a number of qualities and are nicely compatible chronologically. Each book is intended for general readers and students. Each is clearly written by an obviously thoughtful and well-informed scholar. Each is crammed with factual information. Each takes a very positive view of British economic development and rejects some common criticisms of it. For instance, Floud ends and Pope begins by denying the frequently drawn image of Britain as an economic "weary Titan" stumbling out of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.

Pope had more defending to do, of course, and presents evidence effectively to support his arguments that the pictures of British decline are quite exaggerated because they are based on unrealistic comparisons. The dominance of Britain in the nineteenth century was really aberrant and could not have been maintained. The United States is so much larger and intrinsically richer than Britain, especially as the empire was lost, that comparisons to it are hardly meaningful. When measured against more comparable European economies, Britain's did very well during most of the twentieth century, with the 1970s as a notable exception. Pope leans toward free market conservative theory and often suggests that government and labor were barriers to even greater success. He argues well, though there is little reason to think that those leaning to other theories will be convinced. A small collection of relevant documents is appended to the text, but Pope's descriptions are amazingly complete for such a short work and there seems little virtue to having these two dozen snippets. They might be useful when the book is used as a text, affording students a sense of the original materials from which economic history is written.

Floud devotes much of his work to explaining the success of the Victorian economy and how that development influenced the lives of the British people. Any teacher will be pleased with the comprehensive survey in this book. Demography,

types of enterprise, social class, financial patterns, lifestyle, and many other factors are explored. Floud has an eye for the unusual interest-catching example. He discusses the impact of interchangeable parts on the work place, as an example of a significant economic change that is often overlooked. A discussion of new national industries leads to brewing and per capita consumption of beer (31 gallons per person in 1910). Floud lives up to the reference to "the people" in his title, and consistently relates economic details and facts to the lives of Britons. The result is that he turns economic history from a narrow focus to real social history.

When considered as possible textbooks, these two books lose their similarity. Students are likely to read Floud. He virtually never bogs down into dry economic facts and figures without enlivening the story with examples from everyday life. This also makes his book valuable for providing a sense of what life in the nineteenth century was like. Unfortunately, Pope only comes close to this sort of breadth in his next-to-last chapter when he discusses the possibility of cultural influences on the performance of the economy. As he says, "Earlier chapters have dealt with the economic evidence and how to interpret it." Indeed, "evidence" is the right word—meticulously but not very interestingly presented. Though *The British Economy Since 1914* has its virtues, it is hard to imagine a student willingly using this book as more than a reference work.

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Martin Kitchen. *The British Empire and Commonwealth: A Short History.* New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996. Pp. 197. Cloth, \$45.00; ISBN 0-312-16393-2. Paper, \$18.95; ISBN 0-312-16394-0.

W.D. Rubinstein. *Britain's Century: A Political and Social History 1815-1905.* Oxford University Press, 1998. Pp. xv, 352. Cloth, \$80.00; ISBN 0-340-57533-6. Paper, \$19.95; ISBN 0-340-57534-4.

The number of textbooks dealing with British history can intimidate even the seasoned teacher and scholar. So imagine my dilemma when I inherited the British history courses from a retired colleague after not having taught the subject for some twelve years. Because my research field is modern British history, although I also teach undergraduate courses in modern Europe, I quickly discovered that the texts I used when I last taught the field, and even those of my colleague, no longer were satisfactory in the light of recent research and changes in the field. So my formal review of these two texts (by chance offered to me for review by the book review editor) coincided with a wider search for text adoptions in England since 1689, a 3000-level course at my university. So I have some immediate experience in assessing how these two books measure up to their competition.