

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.

In making decisions for textbook adoptions, several practical, pedagogical, and intellectual factors come into play, not least of which is the mundane matter of cost to students, particularly if one assigns multiple textbooks. Since historians tend to be tidy and precise folk, there is the matter of overlapping historical periods, especially if one decides to use texts that are not from the same publisher or series. Does one want one volume from 1830 to the present or two volumes, one from 1815-1905, with another running from 1870-1992, for example? What is the balance between political, social, and cultural history? What are the advantages of a thematic versus a chronological approach to British history? Just what sort of historical knowledge should the students receive from the course? Since most textbooks can be boring, should they be abandoned completely in favor of novels, specific monographs, or collections of essays? If not, what sort of balance should exist between the latter and the former? Is there a difference between English and British history? Should the treatment of topics be genuinely British, though the different histories of England, Scotland, and Wales are fully recognized, or should the idea of the history of the nation-state, or something vaguely defined as British, be abandoned as something anachronistic? Should a separate volume be devoted to the history of the British Empire and Commonwealth or does that fall into the category of "So What?" And finally, in the glow of the European Union, to what extent was the insular British stage, and Britain as a whole, involved in the affairs of Europe, diplomatically, militarily, economically, and culturally? Can the history of Britain then be understood in terms of convergence or divergence with Europe, or of roughly parallel tracks reflecting and sustaining longstanding differences? Whither Tony Blair and the "New Britain"? What approaches to choose and texts to adopt ultimately comes down to how the individual instructor answers these questions.

Clearly, no single text dealing with British history can survive the gauntlet of the above questions unbloodied. W.D. Rubinstein's *Britain's Century: A Political and Social History 1815-1905*, part of the Arnold History of Britain series, deals with Britain as the world's hegemonic power: "workshop of the world," "clearinghouse of the world," and "homeland of the mind." And despite a few problems, "Britain's class system, and the near-impossibility of three quarters of the population escaping from poverty, the exploitation of the working classes, and the failure to grant women equal political rights. ... the century of British hegemony was a good one ... we will be fortunate indeed if we can recreate in modern form over the decades to come." Rubinstein has organized his book in an unusual fashion. The first two-thirds of the text consists of a rather traditional general political history of Britain from 1815 to 1905 divided by prime ministerial government. The author believes that this approach will benefit more first-year history students who do not have a clue as to who Cobden and Bright were or who were the Liberal Unionists or against whom did Britain fight in the Crimean War. Rejecting the "clap-trap of post-modernism," Rubinstein embraces what he calls "old-fashioned" history: "... I have tried to write a textbook about nineteenth-century British history which explains, in a clear and hopefully interesting manner, the

basic facts of the subject, in an assimilable way." Rejecting Michel Foucault's idea that there are simply no facts outside of interpretation, Rubinstein argues that until one knows the basic facts—the grammar of history—any further discussion and debate about history remains impossible. He also rejects political histories that demand of the student subtle nuances of British politics that are basically inserted to display the erudition of the authors, not benefit students. There is something refreshing about this approach—that students actually learn something about how the British Cabinet system works, for instance. Rubinstein—rather significantly born and educated in the United States where college teachers confront similar problems—seems to be implying that if something drastic is not done, history will become the only discipline in which the more courses students take, the stupider they become. The rest of the text deals with social history, where he frankly admits the literature has so expanded that no text can be comprehensive. His final—and very useful for students—chapters cover British population growth, 1750-1914, social class in Britain, 1815-1905, religion and the churches in British society, 1815-1905, and gender and identities. Those interested in a much more complex social history should consult Edward Royle, *Modern Britain: A Social History 1750-1997* (1997) which also deals with Scotland and Wales. While I do not agree with him entirely, Rubinstein has written an honest, somewhat reactionary, but useful, textbook for students taking nineteenth-century British history courses. And he would definitely identify with the new Historical Society in the United States.

Martin Kitchen has written a very brief, straightforward, basically political, narrative of the history of the British Empire and Commonwealth that demonstrates competence and synthesis, if not rhetorical flair. If I had to come up with a one-word description of this book it would be "informative." He does not make any mention of the new fields of post-colonial studies or subaltern studies. While I recognize there exists an ideological struggle between traditional empire historians and their more literary colleagues, still Kitchen could have at least mentioned the fields. And both non-European and European women within the empire are also neglected. And what about the West Indian and African immigration to Britain in the 1950s? I noticed that the original copyright for this book came from the Centre for Distance Education, Simon Fraser University, and the text does have the feel of being written as a companion guide to a separate course. Instructors of courses in modern British history would find this brief volume of use only if their main text did not really cover the empire and commonwealth at all, and they desired an informative, competent guide that would take one from the First to the Second Empire, from Curzon to Decolonization, from Cecil Rhodes to Commonwealth, without pausing to catch your breath. The changing terrain of British history courses will demand new texts to meet new needs and new interpretations, or even old, neglected interpretations and needs.