

Book Reviews

Post-1800

STEPHANIE BARCZEWSKI, et al. *Britain since 1688: A Nation in the World*. London: Routledge, 2015. Pp. 378. \$43.95 (paper).

SUSAN KINGSLEY KENT. *A New History of Britain since 1688: Four Nations and an Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. 508. \$44.95 (paper).
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Writing a history of modern Britain these days requires a strong nerve, a willingness to revise rapidly, and, most of all, a healthy suspicion that the British electorate will act as predicted. The United Kingdom has been much in the news in the United States, especially with the 2016 decision to leave the European Union, so the recent publication of two ably written and thoroughly comprehensive surveys of Britain since the Glorious Revolution, authored by a group of North American scholars of the United Kingdom, is especially welcome. Both texts take as their primary responsibility not the history of Britain alone, but rather the story of the British place in modern global history. The subtitle of one text is *Four Nations and an Empire*, while the other's is *A Nation in the World*.

The similarity of emphasis in these two works extends beyond the theme advertised in these titles. Both resist any temptation to make England synonymous with Britain and quite deftly note how events in what once what might have been considered “the periphery” are in fact vital to changes at the heart of the British state. Susan Kingsley Kent, for example, rightly underscores the importance of Daniel O’Connell’s Catholic Emancipation movement in demonstrating to electoral reformers the power of political organization in the run-up to the Great Reform Act of 1832 (185–87). The team of Stephanie Barczewski, John Eglin, Stephen Heathorn, Michael Silvestri, and Michelle Tusan (hereafter “Barczewski” for the sake of space) stresses the role of Scotland in the construction of empire while explaining how empire helped build a modern metropolis like Glasgow. Both texts integrate popular culture effectively and use touchstone events, like Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee and the arrival of the India Corps at Ypres, to illuminate larger themes. Both also stress from the start that the story of modern

Britain is also the story of the rise of the modern political, administrative, and fiscal state, a valuable concept with which American undergraduates ought to grapple. The books marshal up-to-date bibliographies and useful timelines of events. (One concern about the Kent volume is simply the miniscule size of the type in the index.)

These two survey texts, in their emphasis on the relationship between Britain and the rest of the world, especially in the form of empire, also demonstrate the continued challenge of writing about empire in what is a national survey. Should empire get separate treatment and dedicated chapters, or should imperial developments weave in and out of the narrative? Both these books make the wise decision to opt for a balance between these two approaches. Kent presents mid-Victorian imperialism as part of the larger project of “liberalism,” albeit in its own chapter, but in the following chapter she integrates the “New Imperialism” effectively within the larger story of the rise of mass politics at the end of the nineteenth century. In Barczewski, separate sections treat imperial expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but empire also appears in chapters on the world wars, for example.

These books cover enormous ground, with impressive attention to detail. There are some differences, however, and each has its own particular strength. For Kent, it is the repeated use, in featured sections of each chapter, of the city of Liverpool as a lens through which students and readers can see larger trends in British history play out in a specific locale, and especially one that is not London. London, of course, is not overlooked in this volume, but Liverpool’s vibrant history intersects with so many historical developments and trends (like the Atlantic slave trade, industrialization, and the rise of a multi-racial Britain) that it is an informed and inspired choice. Simply because of its later publication date, Kent’s text can cover a few more recent issues as well, including the Scottish independence vote of 2014 and the 2015 General Election, two events that now seem very long ago given all that has happened since.

Barczewski and her colleagues have a different thread running through their book. They pay much more explicit attention to historiography, identifying shifts in understanding of historical events and contextualizing historical information, all the while reminding readers of the constructed nature of historical argument or narrative. Students can find their way from this text to the work of Steven Pincus on 1688 or Catherine Hall on imperial culture, to name two examples. This book also points students to an accessible online companion volume that includes a variety of primary sources. While these sources are just excerpts of larger texts, their presence will allow instructors to use them as prompts for classroom discussions or short response papers. That they are online means a welcome financial savings for both students and institutions. This book also is more explicitly directed at American readers, with specific sections dedicated, for example, to Britain’s reactions to the American Civil War.

No textbook will ever be perfect (nor will any reviewer be able to help him- or herself from putting an oar in), but these books do not leave much with which to quibble. Kent’s provides a more detailed set of maps than the other book, with even the latter’s companion volume lacking in this area. Both books, given their aim to present Britain in an international context, might have incorporated more statistical or data-driven tables, reflecting perhaps the ways in which British industrialization produced a massive decline in manufacturing in Asia. For American readers especially, a brief discussion of the British constitution would also help, as the notion of an unwritten constitution comprising statutes, tradition, and precedent contrasts markedly with an American understanding of constitutions. There is an Irish question, too. Both texts, in framing the British story as one of four interacting nations, treat Ireland outside of the context of empire, despite the similarities between the governance and settlement of Ireland and other colonies and the ways in which many activists among the colonized, particularly in India, saw Irish nationalism as part of the larger anticolonial struggle. There may be no neat solution as to how to place Ireland in such a survey text, but even an acknowledgment of this difficulty would further a reader’s sense of the complexity of Ireland’s position in the larger British narrative.

These new textbooks reflect many ways in which the writing of British history, both domestic and imperial, has become much more interactive and interdependent in the last quarter century, with the dissolution of some imagined or artificial barriers between the worlds of home and empire. Together, they represent a very welcome development, and one hopes that their respective publishers will allow these scholars the opportunity to incorporate fully the events of 2016 and 2017—events that reflect the very themes framed in these volumes—in further editions of these books.

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CARIN BERKOWITZ and BERNARD LIGHTMAN, eds. *Science Museums in Transition: Cultures of Display in Nineteenth-Century Britain and America*. Science and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Britain. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017. Pp. 395. \$34.99 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2018.27

The history of museums of science has been dominated by the emergence of major metropolitan museums such as London's Natural History Museum and the Museum of Natural History in New York. With this collection of essays, editors Carin Berkowitz and Bernard Lightman seek to challenge this emphasis, illuminating the broader "exhibitionary complex" in which science took place. They invite us to blur the line between museums and exhibitions: considering "museums as permanent exhibitions" situates them in a much broader landscape of display and popular entertainment (1). The range of essays in the volume reflects the eclecticism of this Victorian exhibitionary complex. They examine individuals and institutions from the United States and Britain, grouped together in pairs of essays related to five themes. These pairings provide opportunities for comparison and in some cases reveal the transatlantic networks that informed developments in the history of science museums in both countries.

A central argument of the volume is that scholars need to look beyond the traditional setting of the national museum to explore where popular science took place in the mid-nineteenth century. Lightman's illuminating chapter on London's Colosseum focuses on locations with varied exhibits where science was displayed among numerous other subjects, themes, and performances. This chapter is paired through the theme "Sites of Miscelleneity" with Katherine Pandora's examination of the spectacular exhibitions of P. T. Barnum alongside Samuel Griswold Goodrich's juvenile periodical, *Robert Merry's Museum*, in what she calls the "vernacular sphere of science" (40). Jeremy Brooker's examination of Henry Morton, John Tyndall, and John Henry Pepper, "popularizers of science" (113), vividly describes the fascinating experiments and optical techniques used by these men and the diverse settings in which they established their reputations. Sally Gregory Kohlstedt considers academic collections in campus museums, often neglected sites in spite of the fact that in 1908 two out of three museum collections in North America were in colleges or universities (259). Only one chapter, by Pamela M. Henson on the United States National Museum, focuses on a major national museum, and in this case the focus is how its director, G. Brown Goode, realized his vision of an educational institution for the young democratic nation.

Scientific networks and the museum community within the United States and Britain and its empire are explored in several chapters. Lightman's chapter emphasizes how institutions such as the London Colosseum developed in response to each other and to the intense competition to attract audiences in the Victorian metropolis. Caroline Cornish uses the example of the Economic Botany Museum at Kew Gardens in London in order to "decenter the