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Was Education the Problem? The Historiography of British Education and Economic Decline

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ABSTRACT

In his article the Author discusses the question of British Education in the nineteenth century and asks, whether it was the reason behind Britain's economic decline.

Introduction

This article discusses what may be the most controversial issue in British historiography of the late 19th and 20th centuries: the economic, primarily industrial, decline of the nation. W.D. Rubinstein claimed that this is not only an issue of British historiography, but the issue. Martin J. Wiener claimed that the "leading problem of modern British history is the explanation of this economic decline."[1] The preoccupation of the historian with British decline has been so overwhelming, that it is possible to maintain, that all other issues are subservient to it. As a result, the liveliest and most contentious debates have taken place within this arena. In addition, the decline of Great Britain as a formidable economic and industrial world power has been one of the most analysed and discussed issues by not only historians, but also politicians, policy makers, economists, and educators. It

[1] Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, 1850–1980, New York 1981, p. 3.

is the latter to which this article will direct its attention. Historical analysis of how British education and educational institutions contributed to the country's decline has been voluminous. Indeed, the history of British education since the late 19th century, has been almost intractable from the larger issue of British decline. Yet there has not been a comprehensive attempt to analyse the historiography of the major issues and arguments concerning the role of education in the economic decline of the British nation. This article is an attempt to fulfil this void in the literature.

The issue is of a tremendous importance. Again, not only historians, but also politicians, economics, and policy-makers have studied and examined the British experience with decline. It has also taken on a significance outside of Britain as mature economies such as the United States and developing ones such as those in Eastern Europe seek to learn from the example of Britain. Can decline be prevented? What role does education have in the economic development of a country? What priorities should be made among educational resources? What type of curriculum should be emphasized? What can be learned from the historical experience of Britain in terms of structuring present day educational institutions and the organisation of teaching? What have historians had to say on the topic?

A brief look at the historiography of British economic decline

The brief examination of the historiography of British economic decline will focus on the modern debate, but some mention should be made of the early work in the field. The more traditional approaches to British decline are found in the realm of economic and statistical history. Many sources simply attempt to assess statistics with little historical interpretation. Though they do not provide historical analysis many works which were written during the period, especially in the 20th century, act as good primary sources for research; though they are often overlooked. An example of this is, Florence P. Sargant's *Post-War Investment, Location and Size of Plant* (Cambridge, 1962). It is not surprising that the years of the Great Depression in the 1930s brought a surge in business and industrial surveys, and a general stock-taking of the British economic landscape. The book *Britain in Depression; a Record of British Industries Since 1929* (London, 1935) is one of many, and is fairly representative of them. Its aim was to record the principal events and to indicate sources of data, rather than

to provide interpretation.[2] Alfred Plumber's *New British Industries in the Twentieth Century; a Survey of Development and Structure* (London, 1937) is a good survey of British developments in the 'new' industries of this century; including those in the fields of transport, electricity, new materials such as aluminum and Rayon, and food canning. It was written by the former Vice-Principal of Ruskin College, Oxford in response to what he viewed as the disproportionate amount of attention paid to the problems, position, and prospects of Britain's 'basic' industries (coal, cotton, iron, steel, shipbuilding, etc.) in contemporary commentary. As such Plumber represented an all to uncommon voice in the 1930s debate over British economic performance, and an important one in the historical debate over economic decline. His purpose was to encourage the nation to move forward rather than languish in romantic contemplation for the dying industries of the last century. This advocacy of new industries over old were the first hints of the historical debate concerning economic decline that would follow.

These 20th century offerings were similar to their predecessors decades earlier, and it was this vast number of contemporary comments that offered a degree of analysis. From the mid-1870s to the present day there has been a steady stream of commentators on the perceived ills of the British economy and nation. Typically these works dealt with an unfavourable comparison of Britain to one of its major competitors, normally Germany or the United States. In 1896 E.E. Williams published *Made In Germany*. In part one, entitled *Departing Glory* Williams laid a foundation for fear of growing German industrial strength.[3] The United States was also seen, and often feared, as an industrial and commercial adversary. The book *The American Invaders* by F. A. McKenzie is evidence of this trend. Published in 1902 it declared that America had invaded Britain, and to a lesser extent Europe, not with armed men "but with manufactured products."[4] Arthur Shadwell's *Industrial Efficiency: A Comparative Study of Industrial Life in England, Germany, & America* (London, 1906) provided one of the more comprehensive comparisons of, in this case solely, England with its major

[2] Published by the British Association for the Advancement of Science; Economic Science and Statistics Section.

[3] E.E. Williams (ed. with intro by Austen Albu), *Made in Germany*, London 1896, pp. 1, 18. [Williams was a member of Fabians before resigning from its executive and pursuing a career in journalism. This work was commissioned by William Heinemann, publisher of the *New Review*.]

[4] F.A. McKenzie, *The American Invaders*, London 1902, p. 1.

rivals. Unlike commentators at the beginning of the period who tended to blame legislative or other advantages of foreign rivals, this new school of thought represented by Shadwell and McKenzie focused on British shortcomings. A second area is represented by works such as Ian Bowen's *Britain's Industrial Survival* (London, mcmxlvii). Appearing after World War II these works tried to assess the status of British industrial and economic health as the country faced not only peace time reorganization, but also the second half of the 20th century. It an others books of this genre are a good source of contemporary thinking at the time, and in many ways reflect the works discussed above that appeared fifty years earlier.

As important as these first two areas of analysis are, it was not until the 1960s that Britain's economic and industrial decline received a full historical evaluation, and ultimately hijacked much of historical research. What I have come to term the "traditionalist approach" used standard historical theory, much of which was based on statistics and other economic data and existed basically within the realm of economic history. In addition, the traditionalists took as a foundation a certain set of fundamentally agreed upon historic "truths" from which to work. Rubinstein described this commonly held view of British economic history in the following manner:[5]

> Britain was the first nation to experience an industrial revolution, which began around 1760 and, by 1850, had transformed Britain into the 'workshop of the world', the pre-eminent industrial and manufacturing power of the time. After Britain's short-lived mid-Victorian economic zenith (1850–1870) Britain experienced a relentless period of economic decline, now lasting 120 years, wherein it not merely lost its industrial hegemony but was surpassed by virtually every other western nation and, recently, by many on the rim of east Asia. Moreover, this unrelieved period of relative economic contraction became steadily more severe, with each generational era witnessing, roughly speaking, a less impressive performance in relative international terms than the one before.

This traditionalist analysis was firmly inaugurated in the 1950s and 1960s, and the initial focus of many of the works was the history of the growth of competition between Britain and its international rivals; as well as the impact of the empire, and in the 20th century the cost of fighting two world wars. Much of the work was built upon the earlier research of R.J.S. Hoffman and his book *Great Britain and the German Trade Rivalry*,

[5] W.D. Rubinstein, *Capitalism, Culture, and Decline in Britain*; 1750–1990, New York 1993, p. 1.

1875–1914 (Philadelphia, 1933). In many ways it set the bench-marks for this school: Britain did decline as a world economic power; this decline started in the later half of the 19th century and quickened in the last quarter; it was made worse by the formidable progress made by Britain's two closest rivals (Germany and America); this competition was at the time portrayed as 'menacing' and based at least in part on the unfair advantages and practices of the foreign countries; but in reality (as those enlightened at the time realized) the adverse economic progress of Britain was attributable mostly to its own failures and shortcomings. Hoffman also raised the question of whether Britain's relatively open market sparked the rivalry with German's more restrictive policies. D.C.M. Platt and Keith Robbins both later suggested, "that Victorians were so devoted to Free Trade that the direct interests of British trade were often sacrificed to an ideal."[6]

Paul Kennedy's *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism*; 1860–1914 (London, 1980) expanded the debate to include naval, military, as well as trade rivalries. Kennedy's other contribution, the much read and discussed *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York, 1987), may have best exemplified the traditionalist school in its latter incarnation. When it first appeared the book was met with equal measures of criticism and praise. In retrospect it might be said that its greatest curse was to be written in a manner that made it accessible to a wider audience outside of the cloistered halls of academics. In the final analysis, for the traditionalists, the continuing decline of the British nation had a multitude of causes, some of which were more justifiable than others and some of which were declared almost inevitable. For example, it was probably impossible for a small island nation to maintain its lead over larger and more resource rich nations such as the United States and Germany. Protracted involvement in two world wars and the Cold War in addition to its world-wide empire extracted a heavy financial burden. There was, however, also a growing wealth of historical scholarship that openly critiqued British institutions and policies, and suggested that 'decline' was not the country's unavoidable fate.

Within this approach there developed a branch of thought that actively criticised the entrepreneurship and decision-making of British businessmen and industrialists. Much was centred, again, around comparisons with Germans and Americans, but it also criticised the British in isolation.

[6] K. Robbins, *The Eclipse of a Great Power, Modern Britain* 1970–1992, New York 1994, p. 56; D.C.M. Platt, *Finance, Trade and Politics in British Foreign Policy*, 1815–1914, Oxford 1968.

This criticism was not particularly new. Contemporaries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries voiced similar complaints. This modern debate was introduced in 1954 when David Landes presented his seminal paper entitled *Entrepreneurship in Advanced Industrial Countries: The Anglo-German Rivalry* at a conference at Harvard.[7] This was followed by H.J. Habakkuk's work on *American and British Technology in the Nineteenth Century* in 1962, and Aldcroft's quite negative essay *The Entrepreneur and the British Economy* in 1964. Charles Wilson quickly responded to the negative impression of the entrepreneur and businessman in 1965 with *Economy and Society in Late Victorian Britain*.[8] These were followed by a series of general works, most notable among them being A.L. Levine's *Industrial Retardation in Britain*, 1880–1914 (London, 1967) and François Crouzet's *The Victorian Economy* (London, 1982). Which the exception of Wilson's analysis, most were primarily negative in their assessment of British entreprenuership and the business decisions of industrialists. E.J. Hobsbawn summed up the prevailing view: "As an entrepreneur he lacked that built-in urge to maintain a constant rate of technical progress almost for its own sake which is believed to be characteristic of American industrialists."[9]

A countering school of thought emerged that began to absolve British entrepreneurs and industrialists of the stigma of failure. Derek Aldcroft's *The Development of British Industry and Foreign Competition*, 1875–1914 (London 1968) was a collection of essays that examined the response of a number of different individual industries to foreign competition. This examination of specific industries was rather new, and the authors found very little to condemn.[10] Further studies of individual industries, such as shoes and boots by Roy Church and cycles by A.E. Harrison, came to similar

[7] The work was published in the conference papers, *Papers Presented at a Conference Sponsored Jointly by the Committee on Economic Growth of the Social Science Research Council and the Harvard University Centre in Entrepreneurial History*, Cambridge MA 1954. It was later expanded and published as *Technological Change and Development in Western Europe*, 1750–1914, in: M.M. Postan (ed.), *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, Vol. VI: *The Industrial Revolution and After*, Part 1, Cambridge 1965.

[8] H.J. Habakkuk, *American and British Technology in the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge 1962; D.H. Aldcroft, "The Entrepreneur and the British Economy: 1870–1914", *Economic History Review*, 2nd Ser., XVII 1964; Wilson C., "Economy and Society in Late Victorian Britain", *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., XVIII 1965.

[9] E.J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, London 1969, p. 183.

[10] Peter L. Payne, *Entrepreneurship and British Economic Decline in British Culture and Economic Decline*, edited by B. Collins & K. Robbins, London 1990, p. 26.

conclusions.[11] Thus two competing schools of thought emerged from the 1960s. One openly condemned the failure or absence of British entreprenuership, while the other "revisionist" school did battle against this view. Both boiled down to an examination of the question of why British business chose to make certain decisions. In particular, why did they fail to adopt new technologies? As Hobsbawm pointed out, "Britain then failed to adapt to new conditions, not because she could not, but because she did not wish to. The question is, why not?"[12] For those that defended the decision-making of British entrepreneurs and industrialists it was crucial not to look back with the benefit of hindsight, but rather evaluate the decisions that were made at the time and decide whether they were rational and proper based on sound business practice. Two Americans, Donald McCloskey and Lars Sandberg, used this approach combined with more traditional economic models to come to the conclusion that British businessmen had generally acted in a sound and rational manner.[13]

Therefore, even if one concluded that British industrialists and businessmen were slow to adopts new techniques, adapt to changing times, and innovate, one has to balance that against the criteria of decision-making present at the time. Industrialization in Britain happened earlier than anywhere else, and in the context of a special set of conditions which could not be maintained. The methods and techniques that where spawned from industrialization could not continue to be the most advanced and efficient, nor would they always be the best suited to sustain economic growth and technological change. However, to convert from these original methods was not always the most rational choice, therefore the choice not to change can not be condemned.

More critical historians have labelled this type of decision-making the choice to "muddle through" competition and changing times, rather than to dynamically innovate and adapt. One of the recent works in this vein is Michael Dintenfass's *The Decline of Industrial Britain* (London, 1992). In it the author turned full attention to the industrialists' resistance to invest in

[11] R. Church, "The Effect of the American Export Invasion on the British Boot and Shoe Industry, 1885–1914", *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. XXVIII, 1968; A.E. Harrison, "The Competitiveness of the British Cycle Industry, 1890–1914", *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., XXII, 1969.

[12] E.J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, *ed. cit.*, p. 182.

[13] D.N. McCloskey, L.G. Sandberg, "From Damnation to Redemption: Judgements on the Late Victorian Entrepreneur", *Explorations in Economic History*, Vol. IX, 1971.

and adopt new techniques, procedures, and equipment as one of the chief factors in long-term decline. Dinetenfass expanded this evaluation to include the undervaluation of worker training in technical aspects of their jobs, and technical education generally.

For this group of historians the crucial question was also 'why' these decisions were made, but they refused to accept the explanation of economic rationality. In addition, it did not adequately address why British industrialists did not think in terms of long-term competitiveness, or possess the entrepreneurial spirit that would lead them to take chances. It became increasingly popular to look for sociological and cultural explanations to these issues. Many historians pointed to an overwhelming conservatism in British society. However, what has been termed the 'cultural critique' is currently the most commonly heard explanation. Rubinstein provided the most precise definition of this critique:[14]

> British culture in its various manifestations and institutions was (and is) anti-industrial and anti-business. The chief mechanism for the intergenerational transmission of anti- business values is the British educational system [...] The traditional and central aim of the public school and the older universities [...] was to producc the 'English gentleman', a well-rounded amateur [...] More broadly, too, British culture was anti-business and anti-industrial in other important ways. It was pervasively anti-urban [...] Britain's traditions were [...] hopelessly unmodernised and often bordered on feudal survivals [...] Its class structure was and is unusually rigid and wasteful of human resources [...] The end product of this is a society rooted in the past, pre-modern and anti-modern in most respects, and ill-equipped to deal with the modern world.

This critique was and is not simply heard from historians, but also from politicians, political 'think-tanks', journalists, and a vast array of other commentators. The overwhelming popularity of the 'cultural critique' is based primarily on the works of a trio of advocates: the journalist Anthony Sampson, historian Martin J. Wiener, and Corelli Barnett, a lecturer in defence studies. The widely read and tremendously influential work of the American Martin Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, 1850–1980 first appeared, as Wiener's most voracious critic W.D. Rubinstein points out, at a most advantageous time in 1981. Wiener started from the premise that it was incorrect and counter-productive to divorce culture from economics. He noted that development economists consistently

[14] W.D. Rubinstein, *Capitalism, Culture*, *ed. cit.*, pp. 2–3.

confronted the limitations of purely economic analysis. Wiener's conclusions on the effect of British culture were resoundingly negative. It placed a "check" on "the idealization of material growth and technical innovation."[15] Wiener maintained that culturally and socially Britain never had a straightforward industrial elite. Rather, the rentier aristocracy retained a cultural hegemony, and reshaped "the industrial bourgeoisie in its own image." The offspring of businessmen and industrialists were admitted to membership in the upper class only if they discarded their "production-oriented culture." Thus, at the height of its economic triumph the entrepreneurial class of Britain turned its attention to remaking itself in the image of the upper class it was replacing. Wiener concluded that the result was that "the radical ideal of active capital was submerged in the conservative ideal of passive property, and the urge to enterprise faded beneath the preference for stability."[16]

Wiener's work may be the best known, but it is not the only or indeed the first to pursue this line of historical examination. Anthony Sampson's *Anatomy of Britain* (London 1962; revised editions in 1965, 1971, and 1982), helped establish and legitimize the concept of the British establishment as class-ridden, inadequate, and uncomfortable with the modern 20th century world of high technology and rapid innovation. Appearing after Wiener's work was Corelli Barnett's *Audit of War: The Illusion and Reality of Britain as a Great Nation* (London 1986). This followed on from Barnett's early notable work *The Collapse of British Power* (London 1972) which had established him as a military historian. Barnett claimed that Britain's poor industrial efficiency and the fossilisation of British industry led to the country being dependent on American industrial might to fight and win the war. Yet, even in the face of victory, Britain failed. What Barnett calls the 'lost victory' was the missed opportunity to utilize the destruction of war to build a modern late-industrial economy. The blame was laid primarily, again, with an aged, conservative British establishment which was unsuited to and uncomfortable with the economic demands of the post-war era.

Predictably, the cultural critique received a volley of negative responses. Much was based on the presumption, as demonstrated above by Hobsbawm,

[15] Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit*, 1850–1980, Cambridge 1981, pp. 5–6.
[16] *Ibidem*, pp. 8, 13–14.

that economic explanations were preferred for economic phenomena. Purely cultural explanations had little authority because they did not rest upon measurable and calculable fundamentals, but rather relied on conjecture, opinion, and unverifiable conclusions. The critics of the 'cultural critique' gathered momentum and coalesced as a force during the late 1980s. In 1990 the first direct assault upon the critique (by now sometimes called the 'Barnett/Wiener Thesis') was made with the publication of a collection of essays entitled *British Culture and Economic Decline* (London 1990). These critics, including Payne, Rubinstein, and Robbins (mentioned above) as well as Harold James and Bruce Collins, denounced the cultural explanation for many of the reasons listed above. The most scathing and formidable attack was reserved for W.D. Rubinstein. In "Cultural Explanations for Britain's Economic Decline: How True?"[17] he honed his skills for the full onslaught of his forthcoming book *Capitalism, Culture, & Decline in Britain* (London 1993). In the former he correctly noted that the entire historical debate surrounding decline focused primarily on the time after 1870; what has been termed the 'second industrial revolution'. It was during this time that Britain's failure to adapt and innovate became apparent. Based on this premise, Rubinstein questioned Wiener's cultural critique to the extent that it does not explain why Britain's anti-industrial and anti-urban culture did not prevent industrialisation in the first place. Finally, Rubinstein denounced the entire school of thought[18] when he wrote:[19]

> The cultural thesis fails, in my view, to devote sufficient attention to the peculiarities of the British economy or to deep-seated trends which began before 1870: it is not fully consistent with the actual chronology of change or, in some crucial aspects, with the true nature of British entrepreneurship; and it fails to present a persuasive nexus to account for the transmission of cultural values into economic behaviour and performance.

[17] W.D. Rubinstein, "Cultural Explanations for Britain's Economic Decline: How True?", in: Bruce Collins & Keith Robbins eds., *British Culture and Economic Decline*, London 1990.
[18] In addition to the works already discussed, this includes the following notable works: D.C. Coleman, "Gentlemen and Players", *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., XXVI, 1973; D. Ward, "The Public Schools and Industry in Britain after 1870", *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. XI, 1967; W.P. Kennedy, *Industrial Structure, Capital Markets, and the Origins of British Economic Decline*, Cambridge 1987.
[19] W.D. Rubinstein, *Cultural Explanations*, *ed. cit.*, p. 61.

As formidable as this essay was, it was merely a warm-up for Rubinstein's masterly crafted barrage against Wiener and the other cultural critics in *Capitalism and Culture*. In it he recounts with greater detail the arguments above, as well as pointing out that Germany had as anti-capitalist an elite as was present in Britain. Indeed, in European comparisons Rubinstein claimed that, "British culture has been markedly less strident in its condemnation of capitalism than any other European culture and, indeed, presents one of the rare cultural traditions where capitalism and business life have been advocated and defended by leading intellectuals."[20] If the anti-capitalist bias of a German intellectual elite, manifested in individuals such as Brecht, Thomas Mann, Kant, and Hegel, did not retard the much admired German economy, how is it that it did so in Britain?

However, Rubinstein reserved his most pointed criticism for Wiener himself, and by 1994 the 'cultural critique' and the 'Barnett/Wiener thesis' had transformed itself into the 'Wiener/Rubinstein debate'. Rubinstein derided Wiener's background and re search in reaching such conclusions. It is noted that Wiener was primarily a "historian of ideas and intellectual movements", rather than economics, education, or even specifically culture. Wiener's sources were characterised as ranging from "an obscure poem by Wilfred Scawen Blunt to an equally forgotten essay by Stanley Baldwin on the manifold virtues of rural England."[21] It is further noted that Wiener's thesis had found acceptance more readily in the non-academic arena of politicians, newspaper editors, and journalists, while the academic economic historian had failed to be convinced. Rubinstein's work was most significant for abandoning and disagreeing with the very premises of the traditionalist approach that had underpinned not only the cultural critique, but almost all of historical and popular thinking regarding British decline for the previous 100 years. Fundamentally, the cultural critique, and much other thinking on British decline, was incorrect because it was based upon an assumption that "Britain's was centrally an industrial economy whose industrial and manufacturing lead vanished through qualitative decline after 1870."[22] Rather, Rubinstein proposed:[23]

[20] W.D. Rubinstein, *Capitlism, Culture*, *ed. cit.*, p. 52.
[21] *Ibidem*, p. 23.
[22] *Ibidem*, p. 24.
[23] *Ibidem*.

> [...] that Britain was never fundamentally an industrial and manufacturing economy; rather, it was always, even at the height of the industrial revolution, essentially a commercial, financial, and service-based economy whose comparative advantages always lay with commerce and finance [...] What is so often seen as Britain's industrial decline or collapse can be seen, with greater accuracy, as a transfer of resources and entrepreneurial energies into other forms of business life.

This movement, furthermore, had nothing to do with British culture, society, entrenched elites, education, or value system, but was yet another rational economic response. In moving out of industry and into finance and commerce Britain's entrepreneurs were "resounding intelligently to realistically perceived opportunities." The cultural critique, and for that matter much of scholarship on British decline, was "not merely misconceived but a *non sequitur*, offering explanations for something which did not actually occur."[24]

As a final word on this aspect of British historiography during the period it is interesting to note that more traditional examinations of industrial decline had also perceived and examined this movement away from industry and into finance, commerce, and services. However, it was not viewed in a positive manner as an astute economic decision to concentrate on strengths and respond to perceived economic opportunities. Indeed, it was viewed with disdain as an easy and cheap alternative to modernising industry, investing in domestic (rather than overseas) capital, and innovating in the face of international competition. In short, it was an easier not better solution. Hobsbawm put it thus:[25]

> The British economy as a whole tended to retreat from industry into trade and finance, where our services reinforced out actual and future competitors, but made very satisfactory profits [...] Britain we may say. was becoming a parasitic rather than a competitive economy, living off the remains of world monopoly, the underdeveloped world, her past accumulations of wealth and the advance of her rivals.

The historiography of British education

Though not a historian Michael W. Apple (a professor of Curriculum and Educational Policy Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison) developed interesting issues in his book *Cultural and Economic Reproduction*

[24] *Ibidem*, pp. 24–25.
[25] E.J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, *ed. cit.*, pp. 191–192.

in Education; Essays on Class, Ideology, and the State (Boston 1982).[26] Apple stated that, "Most of the current discussion about the role of schooling in advanced industrial societies has been stimulated by a large quantity of scholarship that is critical of what educational systems do."[27] Furthermore, the British sociologist of education A.H. Halsey commented that "there has been a growing realisation that [...] education not only does not contribute to economic growth but can actually hold it back."[28] This is indeed the case in the historiography of British education during this time period. The historical analysis of education has been primarily negative; possibly unfairly so. Much of the negative evaluation has come within the context of the debate over decline.

Early and mid-19th century education has been viewed by many historical commentators as a key issue of democracy and society. Yet, by the latter half of the century, and certainly in the last quarter historians viewed it as an economic issue; an element of girding the country for the international competition of the 20th century. Michael Sanderson pointed out that during the 19th century a great shift in education took place. From the 1830s to 1870 the emphasis of public policy was on responding to social problems created by industrialisation. After that date the goal was to not only deal with domestic social problems, but also "sustain the economy in the face of competition abroad from the industries of Germany and the United States of America."[29]

The Education Act of 1870 has been viewed as a response to the extension of the franchise in 1867. Yet, it has also been evaluated as a response to the dynamics of the international arena. Christopher Harvie explains that the Act was pushed forward by "external events which seemed to have ominous implications for Britain's military and commercial supremacy."[30]

[26] The work must be considered from the perspective that it explicitly represented "attempts to come to terms with the influence of Marxists approaches to educational analysis" and the structural roots of domination and exploitation. M.W. Apple, *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education. Essays on Class, Ideology, and the State*, Boston 1982, p. 4.
[27] *Ibidem*, p. 1.
[28] B. Williamson, *Education, Social Structure and Development. A Comparative Analysis*, London 1979, p. 1.
[29] M. Sanderson, *Education, Economic Change and Society in England*, 1780–1870, Cambridge 1995, p. 63.
[30] C. Harvie, G. Martin & A. Scharf (eds.), *Industrialisation & Culture*, 1830–1914, London 1970, p. 142.

It is noted that in the Parliamentary introduction of his education bill E.M. Forster proclaimed:[31]

> Upon the speedy provision of elementary education depends our industrial prosperity. It is of no use trying to give technical teaching to our artisans without elementary education; uneducated labourers — and many of our labourers are utterly uneducated — are, for the most part, unskilled labourers, and, if we leave our work-folk any longer unskilled, notwithstanding their strong sinews and determined energy, they will become overmatched in the competition of the world.

Historians have taken to task the British education system for its perceived contribution to British decline for well over a hundred years. As with the issue of decline generally, this criticism can be traced to contemporary commentary in the 19th century. Those critical of Britain's economic position in the world were often also critical of its education system in comparison to its international competitors; again principally America and Germany. An article in *The Saturday Review*, in 1895 stated:[32]

> The truth seems to be that the progress of Germany depends much more upon the education of her people and upon their scientific knowledge than upon any legislation or other advantage. The workpeople all have the advantage of technical education [...] and they appear to be more sober and more amenable to discipline than our own workpeople; but it is mainly in the training of the employers and in the possession of scientific skill that Germany excels. Our manufacturers are not as well educated as the Germans generally.

McKenzie and Williams both complained about Britain's neglect of education. McKenzie was quick to point out that it was in the realm of education that Britain failed in comparison to the Americans. As with the Germans, the American workman was better educated. Citing the poor quality of technical education in Britain, McKenzie proclaimed that whereas America was covered with magnificent technical schools Britain did not know what technical education meant in the American sense.[33] In Britain the co-education of boys and girls existed as a moral issue, while in America education reacted to the desire to raise the intelligence of the entire people. Furthermore, in America a satisfactory system of secondary education

[31] Parl. Deb. 3rd Series. Vol. 199, Feb. 17, 1870, 465–466.
[32] "German Industrial Progress" (Unauthored editorial), *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art*, Dec. 19, 1895, Vol. LX, p. 806.
[33] F.A. McKenzie, *The American Invaders*, *ed. cit.*, pp. 222–223, 225.

existed to bridge the gap between elementary and university education, while in Britain a great gulf was fixed between the two. The industrial and commercial result of these failures in the British system was that the British workman was not as adaptable as the American workman, and he did not as readily take command of new appliances and machines as his American counterpart.

Other contemporary commentators cited the lack of any connection between education and industry. For example, it was often complained that while Britain did not lack genius to reach great discoveries, it did lack the trained practical man able to apply the discovery to the wants of mankind. Thus, the gap between abstract scientist and actual use proved inefficient. The gap between scientific theory and industrial use was again contrasted with Germany and America where:[34]

> The skilled chemist [...] and the skilled engineers [...] soon made themselves so useful to their employers that their value in the public estimate, and their money value to themselves, rapidly increased; and now the trained scientist is as indispensable in the German and American factory and workshops as the mechanic.

In 1903 Professor Henry E. Armstrong summed up this position by observing that the one raw material Britain did not lack was brains and that the full energies of the country should be directed at "the manufacture of brains into a highly finished and efficient product."[35] This encouraged renaissance in education had to occur at all levels: elementary, secondary, and university. Increased expenditure on education was justified on grounds of efficiency. It was argued that there was no better investment of public money, because for every pound spent two or three pounds would come back from the closing of poor-houses and prisons. Education, therefore, was for the good of the country as well as the individual.[36] It was perceived that the 20th century would be a "period of keen, intelligent, almost fierce, international competition, more probably in the arts of peace even than in the arts of war." In the coming competitive century it was believed

[34] J.B. Hannay, "How Britain May Regain Her Manufacturing Supremacy", *Educational News*, Apr. 20, 1901, p. 279.
[35] H.E. Armstrong, "The Reign of the Engineer", *Quarterly Review*, Oct. 1903, Vol. 198, p. 64.
[36] See generally: *EIS Annual Congress* (From an address by Mr. George K. Smith, Dundee School Board), EN Jan. 12, 1901, pp. 28–31, 44–46; Morgan A., *Education and Social Progress*, London 1916. Note: much of this thinking was wrapped up in the 'National Efficiency Movement', a topic unfortunately there is not enough room to consider fully.

education would have to play a more prominent role. The late 19th century advocates proposed that if Britain did not revamp its educational infrastructure it would lose first its industrial supremacy, then the majority of its foreign trade, and "finally sink exhausted to the rank of an impoverished third-rate power."[37]

Many historians would argue that this is just what happened; though only a few would put the entire blame on education. Rather, most contend that neglect of education, or more precisely modem education, was a fundamental factor in British decline. For example, Hoffman chronicled the lack of commercial education and knowledge of foreign languages from which agents of British firms abroad suffered. Quoting from the *Westminster Gazette* Hoffman noted that this deficiency was "the basis of the Germans in pushing their commerce." Furthermore, consular reports regularly reported that the British were too often ignorant of the language and customs of the countries in which they tried to do business. Hoffman concluded, "British business was apparently not training up a class of men from which to recruit sufficient first-class commercial travelers; indeed, many of the representatives employed by British firms were of necessity German."[38]

Technical education in Britain also received historical criticism. Sanderson argued that in the early part of the 19th century the lively middle-class scientific culture that existed in the 18th century was not "transmitted down the social scale"; with adverse effects for British industry later in the century. He concluded that down to 1870: "While scientific and technical information circulated well in middle-class institutions, the attempt to create a technical education for working men was a failure [...] these years of the nineteenth century spanned a dangerous flagging in the provision of technical education."[39] Dinetenfass claimed that because of this lack of general academic technical education workers were only trained in how to do a limited range of tasks. As such they constituted a very able workforce responsive to the instructions of a boss, but one abjectly unable to suggest ways of doing things better or more productively. In addition, trained in the art of how to perform certain functions they were less adaptable to new methods and machines, less welcoming of them, and often fearful of new

[37] G.R. Searle, *The Quest for National Efficiency; A Study in British Politics and Political Thought*, 1899–1914, Oxford 1971, pp. 40 & 74.
[38] R.J.S. Hoffman, *Great Britain and the German Trade Rivalry*, 1875–1914, Philadelphia 1933, pp. 87–88.
[39] M. Sanderson, *Education, Economic Change and Society*, p. 29.

technology to which they were unaccustomed; even to the point of actively discouraging it. Hobsbawm concluded: "The British [...] entered the twentieth century and the age of modern science and technology as spectacularly ill-educated people."[40]

However, the greatest historical scrutiny has been reserved not for technical or commercial education, but rather the education of the elites in England: the cherished public school and ancient universities. One of their more eloquent and adamant critics was Bertrand Russell. In the 1930s he wrote of the intellectual and psychological failures of the public school in England. They had failed in the first respect because of their "contempt for intelligence, and more particularly for scientific intelligence." For Russell these defects were inseparable from the "fact that the public schools are designed to bolster up a system which is intellectually indefensible." Psychologically they failed because of the boys isolation from female companionship and the "conventional code of morals. "This combination led to the boys' mothers becoming "objects of secret longing and worship", overall contempt for a woman with whom sexual intercourse was possible, and the boys engaging in masturbation or homosexuality, or both. Russell concluded that "The mentality of the imperialist is thus reinforced by the complexes of the sexually starved."[41] A less damning and sexually charged account of the elites and the universities is found in R.D. Anderson's *Universities and Elites in Britain since* 1800 (Cambridge 1989).

Therefore, while not the first or only work to condemn England's elite education Martin Wiener's has become the quintessential statement on the deficiencies of English (although he claims to speak for 'Britain') elite education as they relate to the debate over decline. The central complaint is the stubborn refusal of these institutions to embrace a modern curriculum, and their cultural dislike for the rigours of industry and commerce. Of the teaching of science Wiener wrote: "science was linked in the public mind with industry, and this damaged its respectability in upper-class eyes. Industry meant an uncomfortable closeness to working with one's hands." On the public school's attitude toward business he claimed: "If technical skills necessary for professionalism were discouraged at public school, the world of business was openly disparaged." And his conclusion on the work of the public schools was that it prepared students to be "excellent administrators

[40] E.J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, *ed. cit.*, p. 169.
[41] B. Russell, *Education and the Social Order*, London 1932, pp. 80–82.

of a far-flung empire," but it did not fit them for "economic leadership." Furthermore, "The public schools nurtured the future elite's political, not economic, abilities and a desire to maintain stability and order far outweighed the desire to maximize individual or national wealth."[42] Wiener's criticism of the late-Victorian ancient universities is much the same. In both an elite that would control government and to a lesser extent industry were indoctrinated with a dislike for the modern world, technology, and industry, as well as receiving an education that failed to equip them for economic competition.

Yet to have a plausible relationship to the greater question of decline these attitudes had to have a wider impact than on the narrow elite that such institutions served. Wiener's thesis was that the public schools and their curriculum became "archetypal institutions" which all desired to attend or model themselves upon. The latter task was made more easy when in 1902 a state system of secondary education was developed. Its development was done by men trained at the public schools and committed to their ideals. Thus, the new state secondary schools embraced "a curriculum, an outlook, and forms of organization in line with the ideals of the education of the gentry." Thus the molding of state education "affecting every inhabitant of Britain" reflected the education of the elite.[43] Similarly the ancient universities trained up an elite that went into government and other institutions imbued with an anti-capitalist prejudice. Wiener concluded:[44]

> Thus, revivified public schools and ancient universities furnished the reformed and cohesive English elite with a way of life and an outlook that gave little attention or status to industrial pursuits. This development set England apart from its emerging rivals, for in neither the United States nor Germany did the educational system encourage a comparable retreat from business and industry.

Though focused on the recent past and not exclusively Britain, Apple's thesis that schools are basically institutions of economic and cultural reproduction recognises Wiener's thesis by acknowledging that schools are cultural as well as economic and educational institutions. In addition, it gives a societal reference point for the historical criticism that British education was elitist at the top, and unenlightened at the bottom. Its critics, such as

[42] Martin J. Wiener, *English Culture*, *ed. cit.*, pp. 18–19, 21.
[43] *Ibidem*, p. 21.
[44] *Ibidem*, p. 24.

Wiener, maintain that it cultivated gentlemen or churned out the poorly educated masses ill equipped to deal with the rigours of international competition in the 20th century.

Wiener's greatest critic, predictability, was his arch nemesis W.D. Rubinstein. The core of Rubinstein's thesis regarding education was as much an assertion as, again, an attack (on Sampson as well, but principally Wiener). Sources, methodology, and conclusions were all called into question, but fundamentally for Rubinstein too many questions have been left unanswered. His worry is that a direct connection had not been proven between the work of the public schools and ancient universities, and the attitudes of elites.[45] Beyond this, however, Rubinstein made some important conclusions. First, using authoritative statistics he asserted that two few middle-class boys attended public schools to have the "deleterious effects often attributed to them." In addition, German university instruction in science and technology was overrated, as it lacked "flexibility and innovation." Finally, he offered evidence that, rather than being dismissive of those in business, public school boys actually were quite impressed by "big money."[46] He quoted one former public school pupil thus:[47]

> I remember when I first went to the college (Dulwich) that there were traces of a snobbish prejudice against people who were 'in trade': it was quite silly and unreasonable […] I don't think we boys ever took this view at all — on the contrary, I think we found it rather intriguing to be rubbing shoulders with sons of well-known manufacturers such as Epps (cocoa), Johnston (Bovril), and above all Brock (fireworks).

Rubinstein's point that only a small percentage of middle-class boys went to public schools is well noted. Indeed, the other major current in the historiography of British education is based upon the fact that for most of this period the majority had very little education (especially higher education) at all. These were the children of the working and lower classes. This historiography I have termed 'Egalitarians and Inegalitarians'.

> The issue between egalitarians and inegalitarians in educational controversy has momentous implications. Ultimately what is at stake is nothing less than the kind of society we wish to live in and the part to be played by education in achieving it.

[45] W.D. Rubinstein, *Capitlism, Culture*, *ed. cit.*, p. 105.
[46] *Ibidem*, pp. 113, 136, 139.
[47] *Ibidem*, p. 136.

These are the opening comments from *Education & Equality*, a series of essays edited by David Rubinstein.[48] Together with Brian Simon, he has often presented one of the most scathing interpretations of British (almost exclusively English) educational history. Both write from a left of centre perspective, with Simon often adopting a Marxist viewpoint. However, no matter how much current academic and popular thought may desire to discredit work prepared from this vantage point, their work has been consistently thought provoking, often ground breaking, and always well documented.

For David Rubinstein the history of British education (and the interminable consequences for the country) has been based around the conflict of the egalitarians and the inegalitarians, with the latter usually winning the day. He proclaimed that those that opposed educational policy in the late 1970s believed in a hierarchical society, and that between all levels of education "there should be barriers, restricting access to particular types of secondary school, to higher education, to the professions."[49] His view of the history of education in England can best be summed up in his own words: "Much of the history of elementary education in England has been a chronicle of exploitation and deprivation of poor children by adults of other social classes. No other conclusion can be drawn from the historical evidence."[50] Elsewhere he proposed the sombre conclusion: "Throughout history the middle and upper classes, through their control of the economic, legislative and administrative apparatus, have given the working classes as little and as poor an education as possible."[51]

This conflict, exploitation, and deprivation has its roots in the industrial revolution which for Rubinstein created a society far more sharply divided by class than any of its predecessors. The result of the accompanying 19th century urbanisation was that the small governing class of England was confronted by enormous and rapidly expanding cities filled with poorly educated workers. Living in squalor this population was a potential revolutionary threat to the "thin crust of civilization on top." For this upper-crust the question was how to best cope with this new "dangerous working class." Two contrasting attitudes developed in the 19th century: should this

[48] W.D. Rubinstein, *Education & Equality*, London 1979, p. 7.
[49] *Ibidem*.
[50] W.D. Rubinstein, "Education and Social Class: an Historical Perspective", in: *Education & Equality*, p. 19. (Note: Brian Simon assisted in the writing of this piece.)
[51] W.D. Rubinstein and C. Stoneman, *Education For Democracy*, London 1972, p. 7.

worrisome element be forcibly repressed or should they "be absorbed within the existing order, given a place in society on the assumption that people with something to lose tend not to engage in rebellion?" It was these two conflicting attitudes that were the central motives of the governing elite, and where a major contributor to the "form and content of the education of working-class children."[52] Thus, education in the 19th and first part of the 20th century was viewed as a societal tool, and was principally used to keep the working-classes in check and society on its existing line. In short, education for working-class children "was not intended primarily to benefit them and enrich their lives, but rather to carry through an ulterior social strategy."[53]

The lines of educational reform were tightly drawn in Rubinstein's estimation. It was the Labour Party and the greater Labour movement (and to a lesser extent Liberals) for whom credit should be given for reform and progress. He wrote of the Labour movement: "it was the efforts of the movement which did most to bring about not only strictly educational reform, but also social reforms [...] such as school meals and medical inspection and treatment for school children." In contrast, the Conservative position was best represented by the famous 1807 Parliament speech of Davies Giddy, that educating the poor would "'teach them to despise their lot in life' and 'render them insolent to their superiors.'"[54] The latter attitude permeated society in the 19th century. Businessmen did not want intellect from their workers, rather simply the ability and desire to follow a command. Those within an educational community set up by and designed to serve the middle-class also reflected this position. A Manchester school inspector praised the system of military drill introduced into the school code in 1872 for fostering in the working classes, "'immediate obedience and submission to authority' rather than 'the vulgar and pernicious doctrine that one man is as good as another'."[55]

Elsewhere Rubinstein attacks the twin spectres of the Church and the upper-classes generally. Citing the late 19th century as an era of great improvements in the provision of elementary schooling and the public's willingness to accept it, most of the credit goes to State involvement and the

[52] W.D. Rubinstein, *Education & Equality*, *ed. cit.*, p. 19.
[53] *Ibidem*, p. 20.
[54] *Ibidem*, p. 21.
[55] *Ibidem*, p. 22.

School Boards created after 1870. Prior to 1870 education in England was effectively controlled by religious organisations which viewed education generally as 'religious instruction'; with the Bible and other religious works often the only means of instruction. While denying effective education to the working classes, these groups provided the working-class with an orthodoxy of subservience.[56]

It should not be presumed that this is a view of educational historiography that is espoused by only a few radicals on the fringes of historical thinking. It is not. Hobsbawm maintained that the new system of secondary education that was created by the Education Act of 1902 had as its main object "to exclude from higher education the children of the working class." The result was that, "Knowledge, especially scientific knowledge, therefore took second place in the new British educational system, to the maintenance of a rigid division between the classes."[57] Furthermore, W.E. Mardsen concluded:[58]

> While it is obviously the case that in gross terms the well-to-do enjoyed immeasurably better educational opportunities than less fortunate groups, more finely-tuned appraisals make it equally clear that unequal access, both quantitative and qualitative existed within each social grade.

Most significant is the historical theory of the systematisation and segmentation of educational systems. Most prominently discussed in *The Rise of the Modern Educational System* edited by Detlef Müller, Fritz Ringer, and Brian Simon this historical analysis postulates that changes made in the structure of the education systems (especially in secondary and higher education) of England, as well as France and Germany, during the period from 1870 to 1914 were not shaped by "objective 'needs' of industrial-technical economies." Rather, while recognising important interactions between the educational and occupational systems, the national systems were changed primarily for their "social effects" and the changes in each country resulted in "hierarchical systems of education that tended to reproduce and to fortify the class and status structures of society."[59]

[56] See for example: W.D. Rubinstein, C. Stoneman, *Education for Democracy*, London 1972.
[57] E.J. Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire*, *ed. cit.*, p. 169.
[58] W.E. Marsden, *Unequal Educational Provision in England and Wales: The Nineteenth-Century Roots*, London 1987, p. 1.
[59] K. Müller, F. Ringer, B. Simon (eds.), *The Rise of the Modern Educational System. Structural Change and Social Reproduction* 1870–1920, New York 1987, p. XII.

Fritz Ringer's thesis on the segmentation describes a "subdivision of educational systems into parallel schools or programmes that differ both in their curriculum and in the social origins of their students."[60] While recognising vertical segmentation (i.e. tracks within schools or higher levels of education cut off to all but an elite), Ringer also describes a horizontal segmentation in which there existed different school types or 'tracks' which existed parallel to one another. These tracks can be distinguished by a number of factors including type of curriculum and social composition of the students.[61] In addition, David Rubinstein wrote about the "parallel" (rather than "end-on") nature of secondary education in England; viewing it as a separate entity with only tenuous connection to the basic elementary system of the working class down to 1907.[62] Thus, these historians identify a specifically working class education, separate and distinct from the rest of the system. Harold Entwistle claimed that to speak of "working-class education" implied that there was a "type of education appropriate to the working class, different from that which is relevant to other classes."[63]

As a final note on this subject it is interesting to recall the words of Joseph Chamberlain. During the 19th century debate on education he encouraged individuals to keep the following truth in mind: "'national progress of every kind depends upon certain individuals rather than upon the mass.'"[64]

The historiography of scottish education

Unlike the general debate on industrial decline or a more specific debate on Scottish decline, Scottish education has a long and flourishing historiography; as such, only a very brief explanation will be included here. However, the Scottish dimension has, once again, been largely ignored in the larger British debate, and it has not been as comprehensive or vigorous as that for England. This is particularly true of the issues surrounding education and decline. To their credit, W.D. Rubinstein and Sanderson do give scant mention to the Scottish tradition, but noticeably Wiener does

[60] *Ibidem*, p. 53.
[61] *Ibidem*, p. 57.
[62] W.D. Rubinstein, B. Simon, *Evolution of the Comprehensive School*, 1926–1972, London 1973, p. 2.
[63] H. Entwistle, *Class, Culture and Education*, London 1978, p. 63.
[64] G.R. Searle, *National Efficiency*, *ed. cit.*, p. 78.

not. Nor was the important 'Ringer thesis' applied to the Scottish educational system.[65]

The Union of the Crowns in 1707 allowed Scotland to retain control over its education, and it has developed quite differently and independently of England. Much of the historiography has dealt with this separateness, especially the perception that Scottish education was more democratic and egalitarian than its English counterpart. England's perceived reliance on public schools compared unfavourably with Scotland's national supply of "all-in-one" burgh and parish schools. Through these schools the Scot based his belief that any child, no matter how humble his beginnings, could rise through the ranks to the university; the now well known myth of the 'lad of parts'. This has been a powerful historical myth for the Scottish nation; using myth to identify something not false, but as Robert Anderson noted, "an idealization and distillation of a complex reality, a belief which influences history."[66]

There have been many general histories of Scottish education as well as local histories (some of the best are listed in the appendix). Indeed, it is often complained that most work has dealt with the narrow topic of the development of institutional structures without a fuller analysis of the social, economic, political, and gender issues related to education. The Humes & Paterson offering *Scottish Culture and Scottish Education*, 1800–1980 (Edinburgh 1983) is a noticeable exception. However, a lively historical debate has arisen surrounding two key issues. First, just how democratic was the system, and how did it compare to England. Second, how useful and advanced was Scottish education.

Lynn Jamieson has prominently questioned the democratic myth. In her work *We All Left at 14*, she pointed out that the vast majority of pupils left school as soon as they could. This was 14 years of age from 1883, but the abundance of exemptions available until the 1901 Act made the actual leaving age much lower, and there often was little encouragement to stay on.[67] Helen Corr has also presented critical evidence. She noted that in

[65] For a discussion of the 'Ringer thesis' as it applies to Scottish education see T. Velek, *Industrial & Commercial Efficiency. The Role, Reform, and Development of Scottish Technical & Commercial Education*, 1895–1914 [Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh 1996].
[66] R.D. Anderson, *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland*, Edinburgh 1983, p. 1.
[67] L. Jamieson, "We All Left at 14: Boys' and Girls' Schooling Circa 1900–1930", in: J. Fewell & F. Paterson (eds.), *Girls in Their Prime: Scottish Education Revisited*, Edinburgh 1990, pp. 16–17.

1834 only 1 in 12 of the population attended day schools; which left Scotland lagging behind Prussia, France, and the U.S.A. In addition, she presented convincing argumentation that secondary schooling, the avenue to the university, was the preserve of the middle class. Even late the 19th and early in the 20th centuries class differences remained magnified in educational opportunity, despite the opening of the secondary school through scholarships and the making of much education free. Even then, however, the pre-occupation of working class youth remained to leave school as soon as possible.[68]

The debate becomes more intense when considering the late developments from about 1890s to 1918. During this time a more complex system of education was established with a separate set of institutions for working class youth. However, the leading figure in the field, R.D. Anderson, has defended to some degree the democratic nature of Scottish education. In the landmark work *Education and Opportunity in Victorian Scotland* he contends that there was a 'ladder' from the gutter to the prestigious Scottish universities. It may have been extremely difficult to climb, but it existed. Anderson also explores better than any other the contrasting relationship of English and Scottish education. In *Secondary Schools and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth Century* Anderson argues that Scottish secondary schools followed a pattern similar to some English cities, particularly Birmingham. In them the old agrarian order "was able to make a stand against industrialism", and the schools became alternatives to the boarding public school in which classical learning was supreme.[69]

This leads to the second topic: the nature of schooling in Scotland and whether it was sufficiently modern. This resembles the debate in England, but again the debate has not been adequately explored especially in relation to issues of economics and decline.[70] However, similar to the case of England, the criticism of curriculum and focus began in the 19th century and continues in contemporary sources of the 20th century.

There was a growing consensus that Scotland could no longer afford to release pupils from school ill-prepared to contribute to the new industries they faced. It was written of Scottish pupils in 1898: "They have nothing

[68] H. Corr, "An Exploration into Scottish Education", in: Fraser & Morris, *People and Society in Scotland*, *ed. cit.*, pp. 293, 298–299.
[69] R.D. Anderson, "Secondary Schools and Scottish Society in the Nineteenth Century", *Past and Present*, No. 109, Nov. 1985, p. 178.
[70] For a greater exploration see: T. Velek, *Scottish Technical and Commercial Education*.

but 'culture' to show for their years of study; and that is a commodity for which there is no market."[71] The manufacturer was forced to send his son, whom he hoped would be his successor, to wrestle for years with Latin and Greek in the hope that the mental exercise would somehow prepare him for dyeing, weaving, or other industrial work. Indeed, it was often said that in Scotland it was "a deadly educational sin to learn anything useful in school."[72] For many reformers the emphasis placed on these ancient languages and adherence to the tradition of "general studies" symbolized how out of step the Scottish curriculum was to the changing needs of the nation:[73]

> What this country does, it does well. If its teachers stupidly adhere to whatever has the stamp of antiquity, they do it thoroughly [...] the schools as persistently as ever train embryo manufacturers on Latin and Greek [...] It is a sin against all pedagogic canons in this country to teach young people anything bearing directly on their destined life-work.

However, enthusiasm for expanded practical instruction such as technical commercial studies coincided with a movement against any instruction of a narrowly utilitarian kind and against premature specialization. In 1901 John Davidson wrote that Scottish reformers had lost sight of the fact that the highest attainment of education was "learning for learning's sake". He further pointed out that for all the regard given to German and American education Britain did not grow great with a German system nor under the 'modern' system. He concluded by asking "Shall a man live on bread and butter? Shall a Nation?"[74] However, prominent Scottish thinkers such as Alexander Darroch staunchly supported education as a means to a definable end. Invoking the basic nature of humankind and God to support his view Darroch wrote:[75]

> It has been urged that the place of knowledge in the pragmatic scheme reduces the intellect of man to the function of a mere instrument for the adaptation of means to ends, and the underlying assumption is, that by so doing, we place the human intellect in the category of mere mechanical contrivances. But there is nothing derogatory in our human intellect

[71] "Too Much Education", *Educational News*, Feb. 12, 1898, p. 117.
[72] *Ibidem*.
[73] "How The Germans Do It", *Educational News*, July 2, 1898, pp. 447–448, 448.
[74] J. Davidson, "Educational Shoddy", *Educational News*, Dec. 7, 1901, p. 872.
[75] A. Darroch, *Education and the New Utilitarianism, and Other Educational Essays*, London 1914, p. 12.

> being merely instrumental, since it is the instrument which has contrived all other human instruments, and moreover, and with all due respect, the intellect of God, if He is active at all in this world's affairs, must also work by the adaption [sic.] of means to secure ends.

J.V. Smith's *The Watt Institution, Dundee,* 1824–49 (Dundee 1978) is the only modern study of a Scottish mechanics institute. However, Anderson has begun a long needed study of technical and commercial education in his newest book, *Education and the Scottish People* (Oxford 1995). In it he argued that while there were many local initiatives to establish technical schools it was not a national movement. In addition, the important engineering sector in the West of the country failed to embrace technical studies. Commercial education presented much the same story, with little enthusiasm from employers to the ultimate detriment of the curriculum. The indispensable *A Century of the Scottish People,* 1830–1959 by T.C. Smout also provided important historical insight on the nature of education in relation to the work place. He criticised Scottish employers for supporting a market in 'boy labour' that had no educational foundation nor long-term employment prospects, with the result that advanced schooling was not valued by a bulk of the population. As a concluding thought on the historiography of Scottish education we turn again to Smout. He wrote:[76]

> In the twentieth century, Scottish education has been marked by the same attitude that branded it in the nineteenth, which regarded it as a matter of low social priority once the perceived needs of the middle classes has been attended to, and once a channel had been opened for a limited number of working-class children to use secondary school and university as a means of upward social mobility [...] nor the public at large, expressed much interest in achieving high standards for the bulk of the population, or even in discovering what the world outside Scotland considered high and appropriate standards for an efficient, modern nation.

Conclusion

The historiography of British education and economic decline can not be considered to have reached a final conclusion on the role of education. Indeed, the wider issue of the decline of Britain is in many ways still debated by those that adhere to Rubinstein's view that the traditionalist approach

[76] T.C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People,* 1830–1950, London 1987, p. 223.

to decline is misplaced. Yet, some conclusions can be made. It seems quite clear that the historiography of education has concluded that by the late 19th century the emphasis of educational rhetoric had shifted from employing education to address the social ills of industrialization to using education to better prepare the nation for economic challenges. While some historians argue that educational reality was still based upon certain social goals rather than economic reality, the rhetoric of educational goals had moved elsewhere. In addition, the overwhelming majority of historians believe that something in British education went wrong, though they argue over exactly what that was. At the very least, most historians agree that education did not actively help the economic and industrial progress of the nation; though to ignore the interaction of education with other social, cultural, and economic historical issues would be foolish.

Within this debate over education and economic goals, the focus of historical analysis has alternatively shifted from the structure and access of British educational institutions to the curriculums offered. Other historians have melted the two issues by arguing that even as access to education opened for once excluded classes of students, the curriculum that they were offered failed to prepare them for the competitive and technical world of the 20th century. In this school of thought, and elsewhere, the focus has clearly been on a trio of issues. First, there is the training of workers and the decline of the system of apprenticeships. Second, there is the issue of science education at all levels, but especially at the elementary and secondary levels. Finally, there is the more vocational side of education in the form of commercial and technical education. A variety of failures in these areas have been identified and debated.

Less intensely discussed has been the education of the elites. Historians who have analysed the topic have naturally focused on the private boarding school and the elite universities of Oxford and Cambridge. However, the historical debate has shared many of the main precepts and issues as the analysis of working-class education: the lack of scientific education, poor preparation for the intense international competition of the 20th century, and a lack of instruction in topics of practical importance in favor of established topics such as Latin and Greek. In these respects the two debates are truly very similar, though historians have generally treated them in isolation. The one clear difference is the argument that these elite institutions sought to reproduce an outdated elite more accustomed to proper social graces than operating a business.

As the recent work by Rubinstein demonstrates, the historical debate over British decline and education's role in it may have produced a multitude of research and publication, but it has not yet reached the saturation point. In the final analysis, the one definitive conclusion that can be reached has been that the historical debate over education and British decline does provide a foundation for the current debate over education reform throughout the world.

Czy problem tkwił w edukacji? Historiografia brytyjskiej edukacji i upadku gospodarczego

W swoim artykule Thomas Velek podejmuje jeden z — jak to ujmuje — „najbardziej kontrowersyjnych problemów brytyjskiej historiografii końca XIX i XX wieku". Jest to problem ekonomicznego, a dokładniej mówiąc, przemysłowego kryzysu Wielkiej Brytanii. Problematyka ta, twierdzi Autor, przez wiele lat dominowała i nadal dominuje w historiografii anglosaskiej poświęconej drugiej połowie XIX wieku. W swojej pracy T. Velek przedstawia główne kierunki badań nad kryzysem ekonomicznym w Wielkiej Brytanii, jak również nad rozwojem szkolnictwa w tym okresie. Stawiając pytanie: czy kryzys ekonomiczny był wynikiem kryzysu szkolnictwa, sugeruje odpowiedź pozytywną, lecz jedynie sugeruje, twierdząc, iż jest jeszcze zbyt wcześnie na podawanie ostatecznej konkluzji.