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Britain to 1830

In 1830, King George IV died and was succeeded by his brother the Duke of Clarence, who became William IV. William's rule was short – only seven years, and was flanked by powerful royal personalities both before and after. George IV (r. 1820–1830) had been a wonderfully disliked philanderer and decadent dandy. Queen Victoria's rule (1837–1903) spanned over six decades and represented the highest point of British industrial and imperial strength. Yet in his apparently timeless ceremonial coronation as king of Great Britain, William reminds us just how paradoxically new the kingdom of Great Britain really was. In 1830, it had existed only 30 years.

Great Britain signified an area of land encompassing one large island off the northwest coast of Europe, a smaller island further west (Ireland), and a host of still smaller islands scattered nearby (the Orkneys and Shetlands to the north, the Hebrides to the northwest, the Isle of Man to the west, and the Isle of Wight due south, among others). The total land mass was just over 120,000 square miles: slightly larger than the combined New England states, less than half the size of Texas, smaller even than France or modern Germany. Great Britain was neither geographically coherent nor, as a nation, very old, having been created by unifying Ireland with England, Wales and Scotland by legislative act in 1800. Scotland itself had been similarly united with England and Wales in 1707, and Wales in 1536. The United Kingdom in 1830 was thus already a state that had been absorbing its neighbors for three centuries.

Even in 1830, Great Britain was more than the sum of these small islands in the North Atlantic. In terms of population, the British Empire theoretically encompassed over one-fifth of all the world's inhabitants in 1815 – and this was even *after* the loss of 13 of the American colonies. What then did it mean to be "British" in 1830? Who governed Britain? Who worked, who spent, and how

did people live? This chapter attempts both a static picture of the governance, landscapes, and societies of Britain in 1830, as well as an exploration of the many changes in politics, economic production, and ideas in the decades leading up to William's coronation.

Geography

The defining feature of British geography as a set of islands navigable by internal rivers and canals is its proximity to and reliance upon water. Water protected Britain from European conquest in this period: the most recent successful invasion from Europe had occurred in the Middle Ages.[1] Separation by 30 miles of water from continental Europe encouraged the British, perhaps more than most people, to explain their temperament with reference to accidents of geography. They saw themselves as different from Europeans in spirit, in culture, and in politics. One cannot read too much into this assertion of difference, since Britons also traveled abroad, had extensive commercial relations with European states, sometimes sent their children to be educated abroad, and had numerous cultural connections and exchanges across the English Channel, and across many other bodies of water besides. That they *saw* themselves as different is more telling than the possibility of difference itself.

The British Isles possessed a long coastline and many port cities. With extensive internal waterways, enhanced by eighteenth-century canal building, this meant ease of access to water transport – and transport by water was, in the age before railways, always less expensive and faster than transit over land. No point in Britain is more than 70 miles from the ocean, and most are far less distant from major rivers and canals.

Britain has extensive variations in its landscape. The North of England, north of a rough and imaginary line from Durham to Exeter, is relatively mountainous, rainy (over 40 inches a year), and less agriculturally productive than the South, due to the rockier soil. It is also where much of the mineral wealth resides: the iron, coal, tin, clay, lead, and copper that have been crucial to modern industrial development.

South of this imaginary line, the land is more gently rolling, with less but still considerable rainfall, enough to make portions of it still essentially swampland in the eighteenth century. Better drainage techniques had by then already begun converting these boggy areas into cultivable farmland. Wales and Scotland are more mountainous, and Scotland consists of both rocky highlands and hilly, agriculturally fertile lowlands. In both Wales and Scotland by the early nineteenth century, geography had influenced settlement patterns: population concentrated in coastal areas, in valleys, or on plateaus. Separated from Britain by water in some areas wider than the English Channel, Ireland has fewer large mountain ranges and

Key

The following counties are abbreviated:

Bucks = Buckinghamshire
Beds = Bedfordshire
Herts = Hertfordshire
Hunts = Huntingdonshire
Notts = Nottinghamshire

Map 1.1 Counties of Great Britain and Ireland in 1830.
Source: Paul Kléber Monod, *Imperial Island: A History of Britain and Its Empire, 1660–1837* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

more rain than most of Britain. Its temperature range is even milder than that of southern England, with warmer winters and cooler summers.

Britain's climate is unusually moderate given how far north most of Britain actually lies – Britain's latitude is about the same as Calgary in western Canada. In fact, warm air from ocean currents coming out of the Caribbean generally gives Britain a milder climate than many northerly continental European countries. This could lead to metaphorical overexertion, as an enthusiastic poet of the 1780s endowed Britain's climate with powerful attributes:

> Thy Seasons moderate as thy Laws appear,
> Thy Constitution wholesome as the year:
> Well pois'd, and pregnant in thy annual Round
> With Wisdom, where no fierce Extreme is found.[2]

Whether Britain owed moderate, wholesome, well-poised, or wise government to its weather is a fine point on which scholars may disagree, but the moderate climate certainly meant long growing seasons, mild winters and relatively cool summers.

Governance and Political Culture

Although in theory Great Britain was ruled by a monarch who headed the executive branch of national government, the governing structures had several layers with power diffused among them. To contemporaries British government presented several paradoxes: a strong state with a weak and limited monarchy; a ruling oligarchy that nevertheless paid lip service to public opinion; a nation that prided itself on a wide range of political and civil freedoms, yet was still in 1830 anything but democratic. Historians have called Britain since 1689 a "constitutional monarchy," yet there is no written constitution to be found, rather a set of political practices with legislative and customary boundaries of action.

Great Britain's national government consisted of the monarch and two legislative bodies making up Parliament: the House of Lords and House of Commons. The monarchy's powers had been dramatically reduced in the seventeenth century, and its range of operations came to rely on consensus. In 1830 the monarch needed parliamentary approval for all expenditure, which placed significant limitations on the ability to conduct foreign and military affairs freely. Only Parliament had the power to tax. The monarch appointed the Prime Minister, whose mission was to manage the crown's affairs in Parliament; but in practice, a Prime Minister could only govern if he could attract a majority of votes for key government legislation. And less formally, Parliament had made clear in the previous century that in times

of extraordinary political instability, it could even presume to decide who would be the next king or queen.

Other areas of authority were implied: no monarch had vetoed legislation since Queen Anne in the early eighteenth century, though it was still theoretically possible to do so. The crown appointed new peers, which gave it influence over the House of Lords. The crown also controlled and appointed offices throughout the executive branch, including the civil service and armed forces, and granted all royal pardons (the only kind there were). Finally, the crown could dismiss a Prime Minister fallen out of favor, but still had to work through Parliament for fiscal resources. King and Parliament worked together, and though there were fears of *growing* executive power as late as the 1770s, the crown was by then quite circumscribed in what it could accomplish on its own.

The House of Lords comprised a varying number of hereditary peers, 26 bishops, and two archbishops. Peers inherited their titles of (in order of descending rank) Duke, Marquis, Earl, Viscount, and Baron.[3] To be a peer allowed but did not require one's attendance to government business in the House of Lords, so there was no absolute number of seats in that body; it depended on how many chose to participate at a given time. Some 360 peers voted on one of the most significant pieces of legislation in the 1830s, but most of the time far fewer sat in deliberation. The Lords often represented politically and socially conservative positions throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which meant that at many key points they could delay or obstruct legislation proposed by more liberal governments.

The House of Commons served as the more representative body, though it was representative only in an abstract and tenuous sense. Its 658 members represented the people of Great Britain "virtually." This meant in its eighteenth-century context that members of the Commons (or MPs, for Members of Parliament, a misnomer as nobody called a peer by that abbreviation) embodied all the different perspectives of the British people without actually being accountable to or elected by most of them. Indeed, contemporary politicians often boasted of their independence of electoral influence. Lord North claimed in 1784 – in Parliament – that members did not represent constituencies at all:

> To surrender their judgments, to abandon their own opinions, and to act as their constituents thought proper to instruct them, right or wrong, is to act unconstitutionally . . . They were not sent there . . . to represent a particular province or district, and to take care of the particular interest of that province; they were sent there as trustees, to act for the benefit and advantage of the whole kingdom. (Quoted in Briggs 1965: 98)

This was one position among several, however, as members often brought forward locally relevant legislation and acted on behalf of regional, local, and even personal interests.

Of the 658 total members, 489 held English seats; Scotland elected 45, Wales elected 24, and Ireland elected 100. English members came from counties (each of 40 counties returning two members), boroughs (ranging in size and legitimacy from cities and towns to deserted marsh, as in the case of Old Sarum which had no inhabitants at all, its residents having left for Salisbury centuries before due to bad drainage), and the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, each of which returned two members.

Voting rights were a patchwork in Britain before 1832. Generally, county residents paying 40 shillings per year in rent were eligible to vote. In some boroughs, nearly all taxpayers could vote; some were called "pot-wallopers" because anyone owning a pot in which to boil water could vote; in others, adult men earned the "freedom" of the borough and the right to vote there whether resident or not. On the other end of the spectrum, some borough seats were owned outright by individuals of wealth who sold seats to those sharing their sympathies and willing to pay. Nor was this last practice particularly secret; until 1807 such seats were still publicly advertised in newspapers. Many urban areas that had seen considerable population growth in the previous century had no representation at all until 1832.

Who served in the Commons? While it was an elected body, great landholders still dominated politics in the early nineteenth century, controlling the House of Lords, exercising direct influence over some two-thirds of all seats in the House of Commons, and serving in Cabinet posts. In urban constituencies, though, with less local influence deriving from landownership, this may have been less the case. In constituencies in London or Yorkshire, the "middling sort" might make their voices heard.

Nonvoters were not completely excluded from political participation. Through municipal politics, petitioning movements, voluntary associations, or the ability to finance (or withhold from financing) government debt, the middling sort had growing informal political influence that reformers increasingly sought to transform into a formal political role from the 1770s forward. In 1832 they achieved some measure of success. Locally, in areas such as poor law policy, policing, and parish government, even those without property at all could participate. In contested Parliamentary elections, the people arrayed in their numbers were essential: to raise their hands to nominate candidates at the outdoor "hustings"; to light their windows with candles, to wear symbolic colors and participate in parades through town; and even to eat roast beef and drink toasts at election-related banquets. In such ways political symbolism mattered.

By the early nineteenth century Britain's political leaders had developed a loose party system of Whigs and Tories, though these affiliations were so unstructured as to be only fair guides to political ideology. The monarch was supposed to be above party politics, but this was rarely the case in fact. Both party affiliations grew out of the late seventeenth century, and referred originally to those politicians in the 1670s and 1680s who either opposed the succession of the Catholic James,

Duke of York (Whigs), or supported him (Tories). While both Whig and Tory politicians came primarily from the landowning gentry, over the eighteenth century these early party labels had come to accrue other generally applicable meanings. Tories favored a less aggressive foreign policy, lower taxes, a powerful monarchy based on divine right rather than constitutional legitimacy, and a more exclusive Anglican Church. Whigs favored a more aggressive foreign policy in the service of commercial and colonial power and the taxes to pay for it, a constitutional monarchy, were less attached to the Anglican Church and more willing to tolerate Protestant religious dissent.

The wars with both the American colonies and revolutionary France altered these loose party alliances, so that by the early nineteenth century, Whigs had taken on the mantle of political reform, civil liberties, and increasingly, free trade. Tories, who had been in power during most of the wars with France, had cast themselves as protectors against revolutionary radicalism abroad and at home, and had become the party of order and repression in the course of their long period in office. A quarter-century of war against revolutionary France had both catalyzed British radicalism and its response: a series of laws both during the wars and in the years immediately following that curtailed civil liberties and stifled any possibility of Parliamentary reform. Tories also stood against free trade and for a system of protective agricultural tariffs. Even so, neither Whigs nor Tories had a developed party structure in 1830 that could ensure consistent votes on legislation or highly concerted political action, and it was not uncommon for individuals to start their career in one party and end it in another. A number of Parliamentary gadflies considered themselves "independent Radicals" and belonged to neither party, and party membership was not yet essential to a political career.

What did government mean in the early nineteenth century? How did most people feel themselves governed? The British state had for the previous century concerned itself primarily with war, foreign policy, and the means to pay for it: tax collection, trade policy and maintaining vast and intricate systems of credit and debt maintenance. In times of war in the eighteenth century (effectively over 45 years between 1700 and 1815), military and naval expenditure, combined with service on the national debt, averaged 85 percent of total expenses. More telling is how little by modern standards the state spent on civil government even in peacetime: approximately 18 percent in the early eighteenth century. Even that had fallen to 11 percent by the 1820s. Overall spending on civil government rose, but military spending and debt service rose even faster as wars became longer or more costly to prosecute.

As this budgetary breakdown suggests, domestic social legislation aimed at national issues remained a low priority, though this had begun to change, slowly, by the 1830s. "There was little expectation even as late as the 1840s that the central government should use a very significant proportion of national resources to attempt to ameliorate social injustice or even to promote economic growth; an expensive state was still usually equated with 'extravagance' and the perpetuation of unfair privileges" (Harling and Mandler 1993: 69). Relative to other European

states at the same time, Britain's national government played only a modest role in the daily lives of its people. And yet relative to other European states, Britain managed to extract a considerable amount of tax revenue year after year: 20 percent of national output went into the state's coffers in various forms of taxation, twice the percentage squeezed out of its subjects by the French state.

The increasing cost of government, primarily through the high cost of waging war throughout the eighteenth century, brought changes in how the political orders saw the state once the long wars against France ended in 1815. Both Whigs and Tories now argued with varying enthusiasm that the structures of state government needed to become more efficient, more centralized, and less expensive. Historians once thought that this drive to modernize government in the early nineteenth century was driven by the new social pressures of industrialization and the new and more vital energies of middle-class men from industry. Recent work suggests that the movement to modernize government came instead from a very old-fashioned source: a desire to reduce the cost of government to taxpayers, especially to the wealthiest landowners who paid the largest share of taxes.

Similar movements to make local government more efficient, centralized and professional (against the decentralized, corrupt and amateur governance of the eighteenth century) took place, and often for similar reasons: the cost of social policy drove demands for efficiency and centralization, since those were the only conceptual ways to claim better services without raising taxes. In the early nineteenth century, and crucial to our story, this subtle shift, and the prioritizing of efficiency and frugality in expenditure, meant that the state remained poorly equipped, and not really inclined, to respond to the social, economic and demographic challenges of industrialization.

Despite the prominence of national events like wars in shaping our understanding of early nineteenth-century British history, most Britons came into contact primarily with local government rather than with the British state. Each county had a lord-lieutenant, appointed by the crown, and usually one of the most prominent landowners in the county. He led the militia in times of civil unrest, dispensed patronage in the form of minor offices, and served as a conduit for information between the county and the central government. The Justices of the Peace (JPs), also crown appointees and often local landowners as well, licensed ale-houses, decided bastardy cases, oversaw the capture of runaway apprentices or servants, fixed prices and wages in a number of trades and agricultural products, decided the interpretation and implementation of poor law policy, oversaw markets, appointed constables, assessed tax rates, and negotiated riots large and small until troops could be summoned. And those responsibilities were in addition to their more recognizably judicial roles as judges of the criminal law: hearing cases, deciding punishments in cases where they acted as judge and jury, and convening juries for serious crimes. Both lords-lieutenant and JPs came from wealthy families, and to serve in such positions was a recognition of one's local authority as well as a tacit claim that those with the greatest property had the greatest interest in preserving social stability.

Britain's Empire

Britain was more than just a disorganized collection of ancient nationalities and local governing bodies held together by a few strands of central government. It was also the center of an empire, and this had profound implications for its trade, its politics, its identity, and its culture. Even after the loss of the American colonies, Britain remained at war's end in 1815 the greatest imperial power in the world. Imperial concerns had played an increasing role in drawing Britain into military and naval conflicts throughout the eighteenth century, as imperial commercial connections came to be seen as more and more important and worth fighting for. Throughout the eighteenth century, Parliament, newspapers, magazines and public commentary focused on imperial topics: trade, war, governance, imperial architecture and foodways, and the racial, cultural and ethnic difference of "natives" everywhere.

But the term "empire" meant not a single kind of colony, a uniform system of governance, or even similar motives for acquiring and developing different plots of land. It did not mean in this period that all imperial subjects spoke the same language or received the same attention from London. The defining feature of the empire was its variability. There were the colonies of primarily white settlement: British North America, and later Canada; Cape Colony; and the colonies that would later combine to form Australia. There was the collection of states, governed partly by the British government and partly by the privately owned East India Company, that would become India. And there were acquisitions through previous centuries' war and piracy in the West Indies, the Caribbean islands dedicated to agricultural production through slave labor: Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and numerous smaller islands.

Colonies provided significant amounts of some goods, usually raw materials; but they also provided Britain with the financial and shipping resources to do business in other parts of the world. Of the ten largest British imports in the late eighteenth century, half were from Europe and only three were colonial in origin: sugar (primarily from the West Indies), raw cotton (also primarily from the West Indies in this period), and manufactured cotton and silks (from India – though this was changing rapidly). Fifty years later, Britain still imported most of its second largest import, sugar, from the West Indies, but its largest import, cotton, now came from the United States. Another significant import was timber, one-third of which came from British North America, primarily Canada. Some 30 percent of British exports went to colonial possessions in the first half of the nineteenth century, primarily to the West Indies but also significantly to Canada and India. Britain also did a large export business with the former American colonies, and with Latin America, which had never been part of the British colonial sphere.

A network of legislative acts – the Navigation Acts of the 1650s – defined that sphere economically as much as politically, binding Britain and its colonies with

protective tariffs to ensure that colonial goods flowed more cheaply to Britain than elsewhere, and that British goods flowed more cheaply to the colonies than goods from other nations. The tariff system broke down in the early nineteenth century under the twin challenges of both ineffectiveness and the new political economy of free trade. In any case, by then British manufactures had become relatively less expensive globally, and so could flourish without tariff protection.

Along with iron and finished textiles, a different kind of export made its way from the British Isles to the British colonies: people. In the quarter century before 1815, about 180,000 people left England, Wales and Scotland; between 1815 and 1850, this number soared to 600,000 (with many emigrating from Ireland as well, particularly in the famine years of the 1840s). One-fifth of these emigrants traveled to imperial lands, the other four-fifths making their way to the United States.

The most controversial migrants were not voluntary, however, but forced. British imperial energies in the eighteenth century lay in the Atlantic: particularly in the vast network of shipping, finance, agricultural production, import and export underwritten by African slave labor. An average of 60,000 slaves crossed the Atlantic each year, bound primarily for the Caribbean in the early part of the century and, by its close, shifting focus to North America. They grew sugar, rice, indigo, cotton and tobacco, and served as domestic servants and even in some skilled trades. The British did not invent slavery, and indeed were part of a succession of European nations dominating the slave trade following the Portuguese, Dutch and Spanish. Still it was under the expanding Atlantic colonial economy, increasingly controlled by Britain, that slavery and the slave trade expanded most dramatically, up to its eventual abandonment under the pressure of the British anti–slave-trade movement in the early nineteenth century.

Colonies had been settled, acquired or won in such various ways and under such different kinds of British government that colonial rule remained haphazard in the early nineteenth century. Many of the Caribbean islands had self-governing assemblies, as had the American colonies before the revolution. Canada had institutions of representative government after 1791, as did Australia, which had been settled as a penal colony in 1788. Colonial governments always had a governor appointed in London, however, and local assemblies' legislation could always be overturned by the British Parliament. In 1815 this arrangement was formalized with the creation of the "crown colony," an entity ruled directly by the British state without need of local validation. This distinguished settler colonies from others, such as India, in which local rulers still ruled, and in which there was no need to introduce British styles of representative government as there were few British settlers to represent.

The Indian states had begun as purely commercial ventures with no thought of settlement in the seventeenth century. The East India Company, a joint-stock company chartered with monopoly trading privileges, owned its own ships, paid its own employees, and financed its own military protection, and in this peculiar manner carved out significant portions of India as British colonies by the late eighteenth century. The Company engaged in both peaceful and hostile trading

actions that looked little different from local wars. Its employees made trading agreements with Indian princes that looked little different from treaties signed between sovereign states.

The Company collected taxes on Indian property for local rulers as part of these agreements, and so grew from a commercial operation into a vast administrative structure involved also in tax collection. It imported textiles from India, pepper from Sumatra and china, silk and tea from China. From the 1760s the Company began expanding its territory in India considerably, and its leaders expanded their responsibilities to include courts of law, armed forces, and many of the trappings of a state itself. In Britain, the Company and its leaders, with the great wealth they accrued, were often viewed as corrupt and beyond British control, and in 1773 Britain began to install government oversight on Company activities. Over the following decades, chartered company rule gradually gave way to direct government control, a process not completed until the state took over Company operations in their entirety in 1858.

Social Orders

In 1814, the Scottish author, magistrate and criminologist Patrick Colquhoun attempted a snapshot of British society in his *Treatise on the Wealth, Power, and Resources of the British Empire*. His statistical methods and accuracy leave much to be desired, but his numbers will do for a rough sense of who earned what and how in the early nineteenth century. Below the royal family and aristocracy (the "Highest Orders" comprising nearly 600 families) were the "Second Class," composed of non-titled gentlemen of considerable wealth (47,000 families), the "Third Class" of affluent clergy, lawyers, doctors, merchants, large manufacturers, and bankers (12,200 families), the "Fourth Class" of minor clergy, less notable lawyers and doctors, more modest manufacturers and merchants, prosperous shopkeepers and artists, and modest but independent farmers (233,650 families), the "Fifth Class" of small farmers, middling shopkeepers, and inn-keepers (564,800 families), the "Sixth Class" of artisans, agricultural laborers, and "others who subsist by labour in various employments" (2,126,095 families), the "Seventh, or Lowest Class" of paupers, vagrants, and criminals without any fixed labor (387,100 families), and a category of menial servants, separated out because the nature of their occupation precluded having families (1,279,923 individuals).

Colquhoun's remarkable precision should not be taken as accurate, but it provides us with a general analysis based on some of the widely shared assumptions of his era. He assumed that society was a hierarchy – an assumption few then would have questioned – and that the top of this pyramid belonged to people who had inherited titles and the land to go with them, implying also the income that derived from land. But this was not a society in which wealth or status

was determined entirely by land or title, as the other "classes" make clear. The second class consisted of "gentlemen," a broad category in which income could come from several sources; the third and fourth classes were based partially on land but also on commerce or profession. British society then was a society in which few clear lines separated people and families in terms of status, but one in which status was if anything more important because of this very lack of clarity. It was not a polarized society of rich and poor, nor were wealth and status static; but it was a society of many layers shading into one another. Individuals possessed some social mobility, in that merchants could acquire titles, land and landed status, and their offspring could marry into nobility; yeoman (small farmers) could become tradesmen; tradesmen could become merchants. There existed large numbers of people between the mighty and the poor, and these, called the "middling sort" by contemporaries, themselves recognized many gradations of wealth, status, profession, and influence. Colquhoun also points out that many people were quite poor. The very poor worked as laborers or servants, in agriculture and manufacturing, or in whatever low-skilled or unskilled labor was locally available.

Given a society of many permeable layers, there was still the general belief that wealth carried with it obligations: to one's family first, of course, but also to one's civic environment (you were expected to pay taxes and serve in local offices), and to the less affluent around you. The other side of this was the deference and respect accorded to and expected by the wealthy. It is important not to overstate the degree or impact of this paternalism, or the exclusive monopoly of the affluent over civic or philanthropic activities. There were aristocrats who shunned responsibility, and conversely, there were many poor Britons who saw no need for deference – or who simply did not come into contact with the great families of the county. But the concept of a paternalistic ruling class retained force into the nineteenth century, well after actual paternalism had in fact greatly diminished.

Industrial and Other Revolutions

The starting point of this volume – 1830 – used to be regarded by historians as the endpoint of the industrial revolution. The first "industrial revolution" was seen as a collection of transformations in productivity, working conditions and power sources with dramatic results for urban change, population growth, wealth distribution, the landscape of political power and the physical landscape of industrialized Britain. At the end of the revolution, many people worked in factories rather than at home or in the fields, they lived in cities rather than the country, they derived power from steam rather than their own or their animals' labor, and vast wealth and poverty was created that shaped the contours of countless individual lives and also the very power of the British state. Without industrial change, Britain would

not have become the great global military, imperial and economic power of the nineteenth century.

Contemporaries saw these changes as revolutionary as well. One author heralded in 1827 the massive consequences of the recent spread of steam power:

> To enumerate the effects of this invention would be to count every comfort and luxury of life. It has increased the sum of human happiness, not only by calling new pleasures into existence, but by so cheapening former enjoyments as to render them attainable by those who before never would have hoped to share them. Nor are its effects confined to England alone; they extend over the whole civilized world; and the savage tribes of America, Asia and Africa, must ere long feel the benefits, remote or intermediate, of this all-powerful agent.[4]

Alexis de Tocqueville, visiting the rapidly growing northern manufacturing city of Manchester in the 1830s, wrote in more mixed tones that "from this foul drain, the greatest stream of human industry flows out to fertilize the whole world." Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels based much of their early model of class conflict on what they observed in Manchester as well.

These observations capture the themes well and also several partially submerged truths: that contemporaries did not agree about the ultimate meaning of industrial change, though many thought it momentous enough; that it altered the patterns of human consumption by changing systems of production; that it had effects not confined to Britain but acting on a global scale; and that it would have long-term impact on the world's "savages" – as many Britons thought of peoples outside Europe – as well. Within these major themes and questions, what we know about and how we discuss industrial change have themselves been under constant revision since historian Arnold Toynbee coined the term and concept of an "industrial revolution" in 1884 (Toynbee 1961). In order to make sense of the concept, it is important to separate out several different transformations and take each in turn. For what at first glance looks like one process is really at least four: increased agricultural yield, changing patterns of population growth, expanding domestic and international consumption, and increased productivity in manufacturing. These four have led historians to argue that what we once saw as unified process taking seven decades now looks like a series of interconnected changes starting early in the eighteenth century and, in many ways, still only in its early stages by 1830.

Agriculture

A necessary precondition for increased manufacturing productivity was, in the eighteenth century, increased agricultural productivity – to feed more people at a lower cost, with fewer hands working the land. Yield on land rose dramatically,

and for several reasons. Farmers traditionally left some land fallow each year to replenish soil nutrients, and began introducing clover and root crops such as turnips to those fields that both returned nutrients to the soil quickly and provided feed for livestock. As the agricultural yield per acre fell in some parts of continental Europe in the early eighteenth century, production actually rose in Britain.

Tight profit margins in grain led to economizing wherever possible, and while this meant lower food prices for consumers overall, many of the means of such economizing also had negative effects on less affluent farmers. Landholders wealthy enough to hire farm laborers had for centuries employed them by the year; now they employed by the week or even the day, allowing them to lay off when business was slow. Most dramatically, between 1760 and 1815, Parliament enacted over 3,400 Enclosure Acts, as landowners purchased common lands throughout the country, and purchased parcels of land from their neighbors as well to create larger holdings. Smaller plots meant less room to experiment with new crops or production methods. As a tangible sign of this, in the century after 1750, 200,000 miles of hedges were planted in England, as much as in the previous 500 years. With larger properties, farmers could experiment and increase productivity. Farmers also applied new fertilizers like seaweed, lime and guano, and drained marshlands to bring new fields under cultivation. Fields produced more for man and beast, and both increased their numbers as a result.

Population

In 1798 Thomas Malthus, a clergyman, published *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, arguing that population growth inevitably happened more rapidly than growth in the means to sustain a given population. This, he proposed, led to misery, hunger and early death for most people – and suggested certain limits to population growth as well. What Malthus did not know at the time of writing was that the population of Britain had been expanding at a fast rate for much of the previous century. About 13 million people lived in the British Isles in 1780, rising to 15.7 million in 1801 and 24 million in 1831 – close to doubling in a half-century. The population had begun to rise in the 1730s, and spurred on by low food prices and early marriages, increased more rapidly throughout the century. As the food supply supported greater numbers of people, the economy supported their employment as well. Had it not done so, cheap food would have been meaningless.

There were social consequences to this population increase. As coal and iron deposits were found in the North, and industries developed to extract and process them, the growing population found employment in new industries by shifting through migration from south to north. With shorter agricultural labor contracts, poor and landless farm laborers were less tied geographically to one place, and moved about the country more than in the past, placing strains on the system of poor relief that relied on a more stationary workforce. The nation was also

becoming increasingly urban. In 1650, only one in ten English people lived in towns larger than 10,000; in 1800, nearly one in four did so. The growth of towns resulted not from improved medical care (they continued to be seen as places of ill health, deaths exceeding births until the 1770s), but from in-migration as the rural population grew faster than rural employment. By 1700 London eclipsed Paris as the largest city in Europe, and continued to grow rapidly. In the eighteenth century one-sixth of all English men and women lived in London at some point in their lives – a far higher incidence of metropolitan living than elsewhere in Europe.

Consumption and markets

More food supported more people, and people required more than food alone to live – much more to live well. Domestic demand for manufactured goods of all kinds thus rose throughout the century, and internal trade flourished with road improvements and construction of numerous canals that sped goods around the country faster than before. For example, the Leeds and Liverpool canal began construction in 1770 and finally opened in 1816. At 127 miles, it served as the primary mode of coal transport from east to west, cutting transport costs by 80 percent between Yorkshire and Lancashire. Around mid-century more durable and smoother roads were laid down, speeding up land transport for people, produce and manufactures alike. The trip from London to Manchester by coach took 80 hours in 1750 and only 30 hours in 1821 – and this was before railways. The quantity of traffic also increased: in 1756 one coach ran daily from London to Brighton, and by 1811 there were 28 coaches every day on the same route. All this pointed to greater domestic consumption. The average family purchased £10 of British-made goods a year in 1688, £25 in 1750, and £40 in 1811. Affluent families purchased far more. Foreign trade also increased, as British North American colonies became more populous and Britain gained access to vast new colonial markets in India, particularly after mid-century. British exports to the Americas grew 687 percent, for example, from 1700 to 1770.

Contemporaries remarked often on how this massive increase in consumption and prosperity was unique to Britain, and on the social implications it brought in its wake. Fortunately there was little agreement about these. Henry Fielding, writing at mid-century, blamed crime on increasing consumption of the wealthy, which inspired the poor to ape their betters and steal to do it right. Foreign visitors remarked more positively on the relative luxury of all the classes and the dispersal of wealth throughout the nation. And Samuel Johnson claimed that easy consumption put the British in thrall to fashion and novelty, so much so that they even wanted to be "hanged in a new way."[5]

Naturally the wealthy spent the most, but such was the nature of English society that every layer might aspire to the layer above, and conspicuous consumption was one way to appear to have gotten there. The closeness of different economic

strata and lack often of clear demarcation meant that many people could emulate their social betters. Manufacturers responded to the ever-changing demand for newness, creating fashions that varied more and more rapidly as the century wore on – indeed, creating the concept of fashion as something highly impermanent. By the 1770s, this novelty manifested in ways both mundane, as new toys and pottery, and absurd, as outlandish wigs requiring special openings cut into carriage roofs.

This consumption of luxury goods by any but the rich was something new in itself. Economic theorists had earlier held that total consumer demand in a country was inelastic – the rich would purchase and the poor would barely get by with little surplus, making attempts to change or even consider domestic consumption irrelevant. The very word "market" had meant in the seventeenth century a fixed place where something was sold; in the eighteenth century it began to mean a potentially limitless demand for one's goods, if one knew how to manipulate people into wanting them. Luxury had previously been seen as something sinful; now it was an engine for economic growth. One observer noted at mid-century that envy itself "was a goad to industry and ingenuity even among the meaner sort who are spurred up to imitate this industry by the example of the rich." The man who bankrupted himself trying to spend like his social betters was nonetheless performing some good for the nation because he worked so hard to produce in order to support his material wants.

Productivity and industrial change

Throughout the eighteenth century, then, more food sustained more people, and more people purchased more things – but when we speak of the industrial revolution, we are also trying to explain the extraordinary rise in productivity that made possible the production of the things themselves. Higher productivity manifested itself in several ways. Real national output (the cost of goods produced nationally) grew slowly until about 1780, at about 1 percent annually; this then rose to 1.8 percent annually until 1800, and then more than 2 percent per year until around 1830. This type of continued growth, year after year, is unusual and has been pointed to as a "turning point" in British economic history. National exports rose from £9 million in 1780 to £22 million 20 years later – an impressive figure when one considers that Britain was at war against France at the later date. An international comparison gives a sense of the immensity of this change in productivity, at least in the most impacted field. In the mid-eighteenth century, the British domestically produced textile of choice was wool and had been so for a long time; silk was a luxury item. Cotton goods were typically made in such small quantities in Britain, and at such uncompetitive prices, that when the British bought cotton goods such as linens or calicoes, they imported them from India. In 1780 it took an Indian handspinner 50,000 hours to process 100 pounds of raw

cotton into cloth. By 1795 in Britain, an automatic spinning machine, or "mule," did the same work in just 300 hours. It is no surprise, then, that by the middle of the nineteenth century, the direction of goods had reversed. As dramatic as the rise in cotton production had been, however, and as great an impact as cotton had had on exports and internal consumption, its effects can be placed in perspective when we remember that as late as 1830, only one person in 80 worked in a cotton factory.

While we associate "industrial" production with factory production, in fact productivity began to rise well before the adoption of large-scale centralized manufacturing. By the early eighteenth century, textiles, and particularly elements of the cotton industry, saw several significant transformations. Raw cotton went through several stages of production on its way to becoming cloth. The cotton was picked; carded to remove seeds, hulls and other debris; spun into thread; woven into cloth; and then dyed, cut and sewn into its final form. Already in the eighteenth century, then, there existed that "division of labor" that the Scottish economist Adam Smith credited with rising productivity (though he did not yet see it happening so dramatically in cotton in the 1770s). Through the "putting out" system, individuals contracted to spin and weave wool or cotton in their own homes, delivering the thread or cloth to merchants who supplied them with the raw wool or cotton and paid them on receipt of the finished cloth. A substantial amount of cotton production happened this way by the mid-eighteenth century and imports of raw cotton rose accordingly from £2.8 million in 1750 to nearly £60 million in 1800.

At first, these transformations were clearly beneficial to working people. Cotton cloth produced through the putting-out system allowed cottagers to take on some cotton spinning and weaving in their homes with minimal investment in machinery, and it allowed them to manage the time spent on cotton production within the context of their primary responsibilities of farming. It provided income that supplemented their agricultural pursuits and could be done at any time of the year, unlike many farming activities. Because parts of the productive process could be accomplished by different members of the family, it was a way for families to maximize the cash-producing output of women and children. During the course of the eighteenth century, however, increased productivity at various stages of the production process spelled a gradual erosion of the home spinner-and-weaver's contribution. Carding machines, flying shuttles to weave faster, and the spinning jenny (starting with 16 spindles in 1767 and expanding to 100 by 1800) all rapidly sped up the process of making cotton cloth and reduced its price. Steam power was first applied to spinning in 1785, and a year later, a power loom driven by horse, water or steam transformed weaving. Spinning and weaving had become so much more productive that until the early nineteenth-century invention of the cotton gin, the demand for raw cotton exceeded the supply.

The application of technology and steam power to cotton changed the relationships within the productive process. While cottagers could generally afford to own or rent spinning wheels and weaving looms, such applications as steam-driven

power looms and large spinning jennies were beyond the reach of almost all laborers (and too large for many households in sheer size as well). These massive machines were expensive and, once purchased, could be made quite profitable if they ran most of the time. This logic made factory production economically desirable, as employers laid out substantial funds to purchase equipment and then needed to bring workers to the equipment rather than the other way around. Once in the factory, owners advanced their production by integrating the timing of each stage of the process, which meant in effect that owners began to see their workers as part of the productive process itself. Factory workers thus traded inconsistent earning power and control over their own time (when working out of the home) for presumably consistent wages but far less control over their time, working conditions, and place of employment.

Why, then, would workers take on factory jobs? Factory wages often outstripped agricultural wages, and often outpaced wages for similar work done outside the factory as well. Inflation tended to increase faster even than factory wages in the late eighteenth century, so gains in real buying power (or the "standard of living") did not materialize until the 1840s for most workers. Adaptation to factory work, with its set and strictly enforced hours, holidays, meal times, break times, dress and mandatory sobriety, took place unevenly, and there was considerable tension throughout the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries between workers and employers over the new authority that employers attempted to exert at work. The stakes were large, since by the early nineteenth century employers asserted the right to influence or dictate the terms of workers' leisure as well.

Application of steam power to textile production had another powerful effect: it changed the relationship of people to their environment and determined the future of population growth, movement and density. Before steam, most large-scale manufacturing had to take place near running water, for Britain's streams and rivers ran many of the first-generation spinning jennies and looms. Thus, early factories were as likely to be outside of cities as in them. The modern image of industrialization and urban change derives from the later age of steam, which only gradually emerged in the late eighteenth century and became dominant by the 1830s. By then manufacturing could take place anywhere, and factories began appearing in cities and large towns to take advantage of proximity to a labor force. While industrialization and urbanization took place separately in the eighteenth century, and cities began growing independently and prior to major industrial change, by the end of the century the two movements had knit together as factories were increasingly located near people, and people migrated in search of jobs to where factories existed to hire them. The decision to locate factories near large population centers and sources of coal enhanced the northward-moving trend of the population, as cotton production grew most in the North. Population density nearly doubled, and in some cases more than doubled, in industrializing Lancashire, parts of Yorkshire, and Warwickshire. Birmingham, Bradford and Manchester all started the century as towns and ended as major urban centers.

Cotton was just one important force for economic change in Britain. By 1790 Britain had 150 cotton mills in operation; 20 years earlier there had been only 20 such mills. Soon some 7–8 percent of the entire national income came from cotton production. But other interlocking sectors also transformed as well, some of them spectacularly so. Coal, used in the early eighteenth century primarily to heat homes (much of the wood of Britain's great forest land having been built with or burnt in previous centuries), found a new use in powering blast furnaces engaged in smelting iron ore. Coal extraction rose from 3 million tons in 1700 to 10 million tons a century later. In 1728, 25,000 tons of pig iron was made; in 1788 this had more than doubled to 60,000 tons; and between 1788 and 1796, in a period of only *eight years*, this figure doubled again to 125,000 tons. Iron replaced wood in any number of uses: in architecture as rivets, screws and girders; in ships and bridges; in weapons, as well as household items.

Geography played a role in the pattern of industrialization, not only in the presence of water power at first and also of water transport, but also in the location of materials necessary to production. Tin, copper and lead made Cornwall a mining center; coal and iron together meant South Wales became a site of tremendous mining and smelting; the same was true of Birmingham. Most coal and iron deposits were found in the North, with very little found in the South near the urban centers of London, Oxford or Canterbury. The South had traditionally been a more prosperous agricultural region, the more mountainous North possessing poorer soil only capable of lower agricultural yields. Textile production originally thrived in areas that could not get by with farming alone, and so when cotton production took off it did so in places not known for their wealth, and drew population to those areas as well.

Social Stability and Instability

The powerful and potentially destabilizing forces of commercial growth, industry, rapid urban change, and the transformation of rural land ownership throughout the eighteenth century together pose important questions about social stability. The British state weathered these profound social and economic challenges without major convulsions, while undertaking numerous military conflicts. Other European states under similar pressures experienced revolution and social conflict on a vast scale. Why not Britain? Was British society in 1830 held together by bonds of loyalty, manufactured or real? Or was it a society on the brink of revolution under the stresses of industrial change and political challenge? It is too easy to say that, because no revolution occurred, British subjects harbored only loyalty, just as it is also too simple to say that every social or political tension was a nascent rebellion for the state to nip in the bud. In the years immediately following the Napoleonic Wars, popular radicalism and political unrest rattled the British political establishment,

particularly in the context of massive and sudden troop demobilization, high food prices and domestic unemployment. Though revolution did not occur, it was certainly imaginable by a broad spectrum of British society.

We must content ourselves with speculations riddled with exceptions. We have already noted that British society, particularly rural society, was imbued with elements of paternalism and deference, which could have acted as means of stabilization. Two other kinds of cohesion merit consideration: law and customary practice, and religion and national identity.

Law and custom

Part of the ideological and economic inheritance of the early nineteenth century was a recasting of the meaning of customary practice. In the eighteenth century, custom and statute had provided support for a deferential social model that at the same time protected such rights of the common people as common land usage, food prices, wages, and working conditions. As this social model eroded, the state became less interventionist and more laissez-faire. At the same time, new technologies had transformed production in certain industries, population expansion created a vast pool of cheap labor, and new ways emerged to organize production that shifted control over working conditions from workers to employers. The state had been more proactive in the past out of a sense of preserving social order, and with the decline in such traditional concepts of order, new ways would have to be found to knit together the British people into a stable society in the face of tremendous social change. Two recent historians have written:

> Two nations faced one another in the post-war years and the divide between them was immense. What the post-war crisis revealed most clearly was that the ruling class was losing the capacity to govern . . . By 1820 . . . social reciprocities had greatly weakened. In a new social order in which custom and paternalism were marginal, in which new working-class identities were emerging alongside the growing economic power of the industrialist and the rule of the market, laws denouncing workers' associations and the haunting shadow of the military featured more conspicuously in the theatre of rule. (Hay and Rogers 1997: 208)

This transformation in the state's role did not happen immediately, but state protective regulations were dismantled over several generations. The government stopped encouraging prosecution for food profiteering in the 1760s, and by 1802 food markets were wholly unregulated. Wage-fixing by magistrates, sanctioned by the 1602 Statute of Artificers to prevent impoverishment, fell out of use in the mid-eighteenth century and was repealed in 1815. Apprenticeship requirements, which limited access to certain trades and thus protected wages in those fields, were repealed in 1814, having come under criticism by political economists and

employers for decades. And as we have seen, the half-century after 1760 saw a tremendous number of Enclosure Acts, making common field usage rarer. Nor were these changes reciprocal, since many categories of workers were still criminally punishable for leaving work under the Master and Servant Act.

The result was an imbalance between the demands that the law exacted and the protections the law offered. Enclosure allowed higher yields and greater economic efficiency, but also less of a safety net for the poor. Loosened restrictions on trade meant access for poor into trades, but also dilution of wages and standards. The repeal of statutes that protected labor allowed employers to introduce newer and more productive machinery, which many workers saw as threats to their jobs.

The criminal law also helped to reinforce authority, drawing many layers of society into that authority so that it rarely appeared to be an exclusive tool of the elite. Eighteenth-century criminal justice relied on the gallows, and on the terror it inspired among the poor. The state had few of the resources to deter crime that would be available to later governments: it had limited policing and limited secondary punishments. Prosecution depended on the victims of crime themselves. In this context, the criminal law could only deter through fear of punishment. Over the course of the eighteenth century, the number of crimes for which one could be hanged quadrupled, nearly all of them crimes against property. The criminal law, then, served as part of the means by which the wealthy commanded the respect and deference of the poor. But the law was not only a tool of the rich, and indeed, most of the victims of crime, then as now, were the poor themselves. Nor was the criminal law "controlled" in any absolute sense by the rich; people of varying means played a role in determining what it meant. Men of property in Parliament made the law itself and served as judges, but people of quite modest means served as jurors, watchmen, constables, and other local officers who set the reality of enforcement. And the ultimate decision in whether or not to prosecute a crime lay with the victim, who could be of any level of wealth. The law served thus as a means of social cohesion both for the terror of the gallows as a deterrent and for the widespread participation that allowed a broad spectrum of British society to play a role in interpreting its meaning.

Identities and Beliefs

In the midst of dramatic economic change, after a quarter-century of bloody and costly war, was there a common experience of what it meant to be "British"? We have no surveys of British identity to guide us, nor mass media on which to base generalizations. The very borders of what constituted "Britain" in 1830 had only recently incorporated Ireland and, not that much earlier, Scotland. Nor did a common language provide a universal foundation. At the end of the eighteenth

century, one in five Scots spoke only Gaelic, half of Ireland spoke only Irish Gaelic, and while the Welsh gentry were bilingual, a staggering 90 percent of the Welsh people spoke primarily Welsh. In the absence of ancient borders or common linguistic practice, historians have turned to common historical experience, ideology and religion to understand the nature of British identity.

The British saw themselves, their government, their social structures, their religion and even their climate as blessed, and in this rather blinkered self-satisfaction they may have been little different from residents of any other early nineteenth-century state. War can be a powerful catalyst for people to examine, reaffirm or critique their sense of national identity, and in the previous half-century they had experienced both demoralizing defeat in a colonial war and resounding victory in the longer conflict with revolutionary France. These wars should be placed in the larger context of both a century of commercial rivalry and outright war with different continental alliances that almost always included Catholic France. While religious belief played little direct role in the meaning of these conflicts, particularly as the century progressed, continuous warfare with the most powerful Catholic state solidified British identity as both Protestant and anti-Catholic, and referred Britons back to previous centuries' more overt religious conflict, beginning with the Reformation.

The term "Protestant" does not fully explain the theology of most Britons. Britain had, and still has, a close bond between church and state. The Anglican Church, also called the Church of England, was a blend of Protestant theology, with its emphasis on faith rather than works and a personal relationship to the divine rather than one mediated by priests, and a hierarchical structure similar to that of Catholicism, with authority over church policy and theology descending through two archbishops, 26 bishops, and numerous parish priests. The key structural difference was that the monarch served as the legal head of the Anglican Church, rather than the Pope.

Many early nineteenth-century Britons fitted uneasily if at all into this church structure. Aside from the rituals of birth, marriage and death, few would have attended church with any regularity were it not for the social expectation of doing so – and many did not attend an Anglican church at all. The religious upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had left British Protestantism with several variants outside the Church of England. There were Dissenters, also called Nonconformists, meaning any Protestant not taking Anglican communion: Presbyterians, Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists, and Quakers. Some Catholics remained, though those numbers dwindled every decade: the 115,000 Catholics in 1720 had become only 69,000 by 1780. There were Jews, though not in significant numbers: probably fewer than 10,000 at any point in the eighteenth century. The Act of Toleration (1690) had guaranteed a generalized religious freedom, with certain political rights preserved for Anglicans. But proving oneself Anglican was a low bar for an easy conscience, and though legally excluded from office, several non-Anglican Dissenters and Jews became MPs, mayors and city leaders during

the eighteenth century by practicing "occasional conformity": which meant they went through the ritual of paying Anglican tithes and taking Anglican communion once a year to pass legally as Anglicans.

The Anglican Church had been losing participants throughout the eighteenth century, though Methodism (which began within the Church but ultimately left it) inspired many adherents among the working poor, and Evangelicalism (which sought to transform the Church from within) tried to put the fire back into a faith that looked, by the 1780s, a little too tainted by Enlightenment rationalism and moderation. Evangelical leaders William Wilberforce and Hannah More wanted to revive spirituality among the rich to save souls, and also to reaffirm their moral credibility among the poor. In this way God's work could coincide nicely with the paternalism so necessary to social cohesion. Evangelicals represented a new kind of Puritanism, one aimed at the comfortable and complacent, and one that promised to make people of character, moral fiber, and religious conviction who could take that conviction actively into the world. At the center of movements to abolish the slave trade, educate the poor, and pursue a more righteous foreign policy, Evangelicals led the way. The virtuous fervor of the turn of the nineteenth century fed prominently into the Victorian mood.

While British Protestantism was fragmented, anti-Catholicism was more cohesive. Anti-Catholic sentiment in Britain was based in the common belief that Britain had to defend itself against invasion or subversion by Catholic states, which might encourage British Catholics to turn against their neighbors and help engineer revolt from within. Such a revolt, if successful, would make Britain into a dependency of another state and spell the end of British liberties, British government, a successful foreign trade policy, and British practice of Protestantism at home. Such fears of foreign intervention had a legitimate enough basis in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when France and Spain had both attempted to foment rebellion, and in the eighteenth century when France had ties to the Scottish Jacobite rebellions in 1715 and 1745. English and later British Parliaments had passed a series of acts limiting Catholic practice in Britain: the Corporation and Test Acts (1663, 1673, and 1678) required Anglican observance to hold public office at any level. Catholics could not hold seats in Parliament, could not vote, and could not succeed to the throne, a limitation on very few individuals to be sure, but a symbolically powerful one nonetheless. Laws restricting property ownership, trade and civic rights for Catholics in Ireland were even more stringent – and it is worth pointing out that "British" identity contained an inherent core uncertainty once Ireland became part of the British state in 1800. To be fully British and Catholic was a contradiction in terms, resolved partially by the removal of restrictions on Catholics in 1829. Popular anti-Catholicism continued through the early nineteenth century, but popular religious toleration had also been growing for some time (and indeed, made possible Catholic Emancipation). Increasing numbers of Catholics fought in the British armed forces in the many wars of the eighteenth century, as well as the many colonial conflicts around the globe.

Britons saw themselves then as a Protestant people with unique liberties and particular claims to be civilized. They did not suffer under an autocratic monarch but had, in the context of early nineteenth-century Europe, a relatively limited royal authority. They possessed freedom from arbitrary arrest, a toleration of public demonstration, some participation in local government for the nonelite, jury trials and due legal process. Theirs was not a society of castes, and social mobility was at least plausible, albeit more possible for some than others. Famine, still present on the continent, no longer plagued the British Isles. They were not a militarized state, but a commercial state whose trade was protected by naval power, seen as the natural military force of a free people. And, lest we forget, Britons were a *free* people; the song 'Rule, Britannia' may not have said what Britons *were*, but the lyrics to the song made clear that they were not nor ever would be slaves.

All of this was partly true and partly wishful thinking. Britishness so defined underwent significant stresses from its military endeavors in the 70 years before 1830. Expansion of the empire throughout the late eighteenth century, particularly at the conclusion of the Seven Years' War (1763) brought in Catholics from Quebec, Hindus and Muslims from India, and indigenous peoples who were clearly not Christian, white or civilized in British terms. Empire meant ambiguity and paradox, and early nineteenth-century Britons were "an insular people, accepting concepts of authority, exclusiveness, and inequality so essential to Empire [who] had also espoused a political and economic liberalism which simultaneously undermined those foundations" (Porter 1999: 27). War against revolutionary France had led to limitations on civil liberties across the board, and postwar unrest led to further suspension of rights to assemble, to print, and to form associations. Jury trial had been in decline since the mid-eighteenth century as more minor crimes became subject to summary justice – judgment by one or two JPs without need of a jury of one's peers. And while Britons might not be slaves, and were squeamish about Britons owning too many slaves in Britain itself, they certainly bought, sold, insured, shipped, financed, and bought the produce of slaves largely without thought or regret. Eighteenth-century commerce and finance was predicated at many levels on colonial slave labor. But this too was complicated, as Britain was also the source of much anti-slavery campaigning; Parliament abolished the slave trade itself in 1807 and emancipated slaves in British colonies in 1833 (though the process of emancipation took several years).

Clearly, Britain in 1830 was a society in economic transition: a society whose legal and legislative structures lagged behind economic change. At the same time, strong institutional forces held the society together: the political primacy of the landed aristocracy, a widespread belief in the superiority of British liberties and institutions; opposition to Catholicism; the galvanizing nature of the empire and the wars against France. Over the next several decades, some of these hardy ideas were themselves challenged, as attempts were made to identify and resolve social issues, grant civil liberties to Protestant Dissenters and Catholics, and expand the

franchise. The question of the meaning of British identity would undergo continual redefinition throughout the entire modern period.

Notes

1 William of Orange, who could be said to have invaded England in 1688, was actually invited by leading nobles and faced no resistance, so this seems not to count.
2 "The Isle of Wight" (1782), anonymous poem quoted in Briggs 1965: 8.
3 These titles can be confusing for several reasons. First, individuals can gain titles over their lifetime, so the title by which they are called can vary according to when they play a particular role. Second, individuals can hold multiple titles, in which case they are referred to by their highest title. Third, younger sons who do not inherit their father's title may be referred to as "Lord such and such," even though they are not peers and do not sit in the House of Lords. As with sports statistics, keeping track of such rules and their specific applications can occupy considerable energy.
4 D. Lardner, *The Steam Engine Familiarly Explained and Illustrated with an Historical Sketch of its Invention and progressive Improvement* (1827), quoted in Briggs 1965: 24.
5 He referred to the spread of the gallows drop, supposedly more humane than a slow asphyxiation caused by simply removing the support underneath the hanged individual.

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