After more than 500 fact-laden pages, a rather oversimplified picture emerges, in which modern salesmanship and standardized consumer goods are essentially American inventions, and in which there is no such thing as American resistance to the modernization of consumption. De Grazia has no space for the election campaigns of State Governors in interwar America against what was then known as the 'chain store menace'. In de Grazia's story, resistance only takes place in the 'conquered' nations, but is crushed swiftly by the lure of dishwashers and refrigerators. This 'conquered' Europe is described by de Grazia as a space where 'there was no consumerism' (p. 110) before the arrival of the American 'Market Empire'. Europe is presented as the realm of class differences, the cult of craftsmanship and 'good taste'. Despite the work done by Kristin Hoganson on how European ideas of taste, domesticity, and craftsmanship reached American parlours and kitchens in the early twentieth century, there is no space for nuances in this part of de Grazia's narrative either.

At the very end of her book, de Grazia finally admits that her study is not about American and European consumer culture, but about power. In a sense, her focus on alleged power structures rather than on the maze of reciprocal, trans-Atlantic cultural influences has led her to write the bible of a critically inverted Chandlerism. Her optic only detects big American corporations whose rhetoric openly reveals their interest in achieving economies of scale through the standardization of products and mass advertising schemes that set out to conquer the globe. The Europe that was then 'conquered' by these products is a romanticized space that never existed. Roy Church and others have shown how decades before American commercial travellers and advertising agencies set foot on European soil, British market cultures were already under the sway of mass distributors, chain stores and national advertising campaigns for standardized, branded, mass-produced consumer goods. No consumerism in Europe? Tell that to the Sainsburys, the Colmans, the Schweppes, the Hedleys, the Levers, the Lyons, and other early British entrepreneurs in the world of fast-moving consumer goods. A more nuanced approach would have allowed de Grazia to see reciprocal cultural exchange, negotiations, appropriations, as well as the persistence of often localized and class-bound cultures of consumption and citizenship, on both sides of the Atlantic.

Birkbeck College/Queen Mary College STEFAN SCHWARZKOPF

Kathleen E. Browne, *Creole economics: Caribbean cunning under the French flag* (Austin: Texas University Press, 2004. Pp. xvii + 271. 43 ills. $55; pbk. $22.95)

Browne's long-term commitment to and enthusiasm for understanding the economic and cultural workings of Martiniquais society is fully expounded in *Creole economics*. Introducing herself to the country in 1988 with research interests spanning the 'dependent' francophone world, this book provides a lucid and beautifully produced ethnographic introduction to the role of informal economies and gendered livelihoods in the French *département d'outre-mer* of Martinique. The study explores two key themes: first, ongoing reasons for the full integration of Martinique in 1946 into the French state, the metropolitan colonizer of the Caribbean isle for the preceding four centuries; second, the informal processes of economic develop-

© Economic History Society 2006

ment, allied with the notion of *débrouillardism*, or economic cunning, which intertwine formal state requirements with 'subversive' forms of entrepreneurship. Basing her argument on Martinique's informal economy as a cultural economy, Browne stresses that, 'the irreducible complexities of local meaning and practice must be allowed to inform and recast development planning efforts' (p. xiii). From this context evolves her concept of 'creole economics', succinctly defined as 'how the people in at least one island of the Caribbean are driven to make undeclared money in ways that earn them social status as well as income' (p. 10).

On reading the book, two very positive factors are evident. First, the text is written with great engagement. It is a highly readable research monograph that should entice readers well beyond the academy. This reviewer's copy is soon to be read by an interested, non-specialist Dutch friend en route to the Caribbean. The wider accessibility and dissemination of academic writing can only be commended, providing erudition remains sharp. Browne's book achieves this. The illustrations by Rod Salter, and accompanying photographs, add to the book's aesthetics, but inquisitive readers might seek more explicit linkage of the images to the script. This however, is a minor point, since the overall visual attractiveness effectively serves to lighten the feel of the text.

Second, the empirical and conceptual scope of the research, a portion of which has been published previously as journal articles, does much to integrate literatures on informal urban economies, postcolonial theory, and identity politics. While specialist readers of each might notice a few 'missing' authors (M. G. Smith's early provocative work on plural societies in the Caribbean perhaps being one example), Browne has achieved a remarkable synthesis and overview. The structure of the text, leading from 'Groundings', 'Frameworks' to 'Practices', develops the author's argument in substantive stages, catering for those without detailed knowledge of Martiniquais histories, while not reducing the intellectual rigour or reach of the developing argument.

Browne's concept of 'creole economics' is a useful framing device for the monograph, as is her focus on forms of *débrouillardism*. Both have clear references to comparative studies, as indicated in the text—the expansive literature on informal economies, especially within the Americas, and the trickster characters or stereotypes of anansi or *el tigre* across the Caribbean are well referenced. Thus, there exists a fine line between claiming the uniqueness of local histories and context *vis-à-vis* the wider presentation of 'creole economics' as a generic term. The detail of Browne's ethnographic approach and open discussion of research issues, however, do much to engage the reader in the research process and to assure us of her analytical conclusions.

Identity politics, specifically the 'love/hate' engagement of Martiniquais society (occasionally treated *en bloc* when juxtaposed to 'metropolitan French values', which tends to belie the intricacies of the ethnographies), form an underlying core theme to the book. Concepts and implications of 'Frenchness' and the legacies of colonialism are refreshingly analysed in the case of Martinique. Once again, the detail and energy of Browne's ethnographic approach serves well to substantiate broad claims to understanding social consciousness and the complex tensions of respectability and status.

The legacies of slavery, developed in the context of class and gender implications, are coherently framed in the final chapters of the book. The conclusions drawn from the empirical research are helpful and provide a good account of the fluid dynamics of contemporary society in Martinique. This therefore provides an excel-

© Economic History Society 2006

lent starting point from which a range of issues could be further developed. By necessity, reference to the direct implications of slavery for society in the twenty-first century Caribbean will always be contentious—some authors suggest a causal (and thus at times deterministic) link with the past. Browne ably makes these connections but leaves space for agency and discrete transitions in shaping past and present behaviour. In sum, she has produced a highly personal yet analytically rigorous account of a French Caribbean isle, and to her great credit, she presents complex intellectual terrain as a most enjoyable read.

University of Edinburgh DAVID HOWARD

Robert C. Allen, Tommy Bengtsson, and Martin Dribe, eds., *Living standards in the past: new perspectives on well-being in Asia and Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. Pp. xxii + 472. 52 figs. 3 maps. 68 tabs. £75)

Challenging Adam Smith is a sure way to attract attention in economics and economic history. He famously saw China as a country where 'the poverty . . . far surpasses that of the most beggarly of nations in Europe'. Starting with Ken Pomeranz's claim that real wages in China's Yangzi delta during the eighteenth century were comparable to those in the most advanced parts of Europe, a growing revisionist literature has taken issue with the idea that 'The Great Divergence' between Europe and Asia had already occurred by 1800. Parthasarathi's work on Southern India recently added spice to the challenge.

This edited volume offers a wealth of new research that sheds new light on this issue, offering a wide range of papers on the standard of living in early modern Europe and Asia. Allen uses his data on urban wages between the middle ages and the Second World War. Prices and nominal wages in both India and China were lower than in the west. Deflated by the cost of basic foodstuffs, wages in the most advanced parts of Europe were probably higher, but in many parts (such as Italy), the differences were small or even negative. This is an interesting result, but as Broadberry and Gupta have recently argued, it should not be over-interpreted. Silver wages were higher in Europe throughout the period because productivity was higher. High output per head spells high prices for non-traded goods—an effect that Samuelson and Balassa explained in 1964. Thus, the 'Great Divergence' may already have been a reality in 1500, but it largely arose from higher productivity, not higher real wages, if we only focus on (non-traded) staples. At the same time, traded goods and services were much cheaper for Europeans, with higher output per head underpinning the imports of spices and Indian calicoes.

The evidence assembled in this volume points to a declining standard of living in many areas, often over long periods. Allen finds that Indian real wages fell by a quarter between 1595 and 1961, and also repeats his finding of widespread declines in continental Europe after 1500 – especially in Spain, Austria, and France. Jan Luiten van Zanden shows a marked fall for The Netherlands between 1450 and 1800. He concludes that, since GDP increased over the same period, inequality must have grown. Steckel assembles a wide range of evidence on heights, and shows that the 'biological standard of living' as proxied by stature was probably quite good in the high middle ages. From the twelfth century, decline set in, with average male heights reaching a minimum of 166.2 cm in the eighteenth century.

© Economic History Society 2006