and twenty-first century literature and culture' returns to examining the journalistic 'slumming' of the 19th century, now applied to the council estates. Here Cuming explores surveying and narrating the council house estate through the work of, inter alia, Paul Harrison, Tony Parker, Michael Young and Peter Willmott, Lynsey Hanley's 'insider' estate account and fiction such as Alice Irvine's *The Road is Red* and Monica Ali's *Brick Lane*. Cuming concludes that accounts that take into consideration 'the subjectivity and viewpoints of particular individuals in specific circumstances result in portrayals of mass housing estates, that, against the dominant narrative, reveal images of heterogeneity, ambivalence and difference' (p. 212).

Despite some over-elaborate theorising and an erratic use of vignettes in her account of the diversity of housing interiors and the reactions to these interiors Cuming injects nuance into the housing story. The book could have made more use of mainstream housing literature such as Chris Allen (2008) *Housing Market Renewal and Social Class* and Alan Mayne's (1993) *The Imagined Slum: Newspaper Representation in Three Cities 1870–1914*, but it is a valuable contribution to unsettling the normal in housing discourse.

In her conclusion Cuming refers to a fight-back against dominant portrayals of council housing as revealed in the New Era housing estate in Hoxton, London. The 'Brexit' vote, with its high turnout on 'social' housing estates to vote 69% in favour of leaving the European Union, ought to be a reminder that disparaging others may produce unwanted consequences for the 'liberal elite'.

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Peter H. Lindert and Jeffrey G. Williamson (2016), *Unequal gains: American growth and inequality since 1700*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, £27.95, pp. 424, hbk.

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Peter Lindert and Jeffrey Williamson are among the most prominent economic historians of their generation, and have been collaborating with each other for more than four decades. One important strand of their work has been concerned with the conceptualisation and measurement of living standards, most notably, perhaps, in relation to the longstanding debate over the standard of living during Britain's industrial revolution (see e.g. Lindert and Williamson, 1983). However, an even more consistent theme has been the study of inequality, most obviously within the United States but also elsewhere (see e.g. Lindert and Williamson, 1976; 1985; 2003).

Their current work builds on these foundations to offer a new synoptic history of trends in American growth and inequality since the early-eighteenth century and incorporates a great deal of new data which have only become fully accessible in recent years. It makes particular use of new (or relatively new) information on the distribution of income and wealth, and pay scales, in colonial America by Alice Hanson Jones, Jackson Turner Main and Gloria Lund Main. It also supplements these data with information obtained from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) which has been assembled by Steven Ruggles and his colleagues at the University of Minnesota's Population Center.

One of the main challenges faced by the vast majority of economic historians is the need to draw inferences from often fragmentary data, and this means that the findings which are drawn from such studies always have a somewhat contingent nature. However, it is surely worth meeting this challenge if we wish to understand the present in its own historical context.

The book seeks to challenge a number of conventional assumptions about the history of economic growth in the United States and the distribution of its spoils. The authors argue that many economic historians continue to encourage the view that average incomes in the United States continued to lag behind UK incomes until the start of the twentieth century (cf. Maddison, 2006: 264). In opposition to this view, they argue that the comparative history of incomes in America/the United States and the UK went through a series of different stages. American living standards exceeded British standards during the colonial period; fell behind during the War of Independence; rose again during the first half of the nineteenth century; fell during the Civil War; and then rose once more.

Lindert and Williamson also chart the history of income inequality over this period. They argue that colonial America was a relatively egalitarian society, but that inequality grew substantially during the first half of the nineteenth century. The overall level of inequality remained broadly unchanged during the second half of the nineteenth century although its precise contours changed dramatically in the aftermath of the Civil War. This period was followed by an unprecedented period of growing equality ('the greatest levelling of all time') between the 1910s and 1970s, at the end of which inequality once again increased.

The finding that Americans enjoyed a higher average income and – by implication – a higher standard of living than their British counterparts on the eve of the American Revolution may seem less surprising to historians who are familiar with other welfare indicators. During the last 30–40 years, historians on both sides of the Atlantic have used information about the heights of a variety of different groups to shed new light on their health and wellbeing, and one of the first fruits of this endeavour was the discovery that native-born white Americans had achieved near-modern height standards during the second half of the eighteenth century (see e.g. Fogel, 1986). Anthropometric historians have also argued that the average heights of native-born white Americans declined on the eve of the American Civil War, a finding which has given rise to a long-running debate on the causes of the 'antebellum puzzle' (e.g. Komlos, 1996). The authors make very little reference to this literature, although it is arguable that their findings with regard to income inequality should play a larger part in it.

Lindert and Williamson's findings offer a more nuanced account of the causes of economic inequality than Thomas Piketty's recent survey and may even be seen, in some respects, as a direct challenge to it. Piketty (2014: 25) attributed what he saw as a long-term tendency in favour of greater inequality to one 'fundamental' factor, namely the tendency for the average annual rate of return on capital to grow more rapidly than the economy as a whole. In contrast, Lindert and Williamson emphasise the importance of specific historical episodes, and specific policy choices, in shaping the ebb and flow of inequality. They pay particular attention to the importance of such factors as changes in economic, social and fiscal policy; fluctuations in the population age structure and the labour supply; the importance of education; technological development; international trade; and financial regulation, and they also emphasise that there is nothing in the historical record to support the view that efforts to reduce inequality must necessarily hamper growth.

Although the study of inequality may seem a rather bleak subject, this is, on the whole, an optimistic study. The authors argue that the solutions to growing inequality are clearly visible – 'like hundred dollar bills lying on the sidewalk' (p. 262). Their book was published a little over six months before the result of the 2016 Presidential election, and it remains to be seen how many of its recommendations will be adopted by the newly-elected incumbent of the White House.

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Martin Wright (2016), *Wales and Socialism: Political Culture and National Identity before the Great War*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, £24.90, pp. 275, pbk.
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'Like all Celts they are Socialists by instinct'. So wrote Keir Hardie of the Welsh in the Labour Leader during the six-months coal strike (or perhaps lock-out) in the South Wales valleys in 1898. His view has perhaps been confirmed by the dominance of the Labour Party in Wales throughout the twentieth century since the end of the first world war. Even today it is the one part of Britain where Labour is in power. But Wales was a slow developer. Until the mid-1880s it was only a limited convert to the call of class solidarity promoted by labour and socialist evangelists even in the southern coalfield. To early propagandists like Bruce Glasier it was 'an unknown land', remote, marooned in its mountains, cut off from the rest of the country by the prevalence of its unintelligible native language. In Cardiff, Sam Hobson of the ILP felt himself to be 'an outsider'. The Welsh themselves, dominated by chapel-going Liberalism, were slow to respond to the new socialism. There seemed no accessible Welsh word for it. Sosialaeth sounded totally alien. The more natural Cymdeithasiaeth was seldom used. And then, in a series of dramatic changes in social culture between the mid-1880s and the first world war, a massive transformation occurred. By 1914 radical patriots could speak confidently of uniting 'the red dragon and the red flag'. It is this transformation that forms the theme of Martin Wright's fascinating monograph, the work of an Englishman who has learnt Welsh and chairs Llafur, the social history society. It is the latest in the excellent, long-running series 'Studies in Welsh History' published by the University of Wales Press. (The present reviewer should declare an interest as one of the founding editors, many moons ago).