

OBERLIN COLLEGE
DANENBERG OBERLIN-IN-LONDON PROGRAM
AND DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS

LONDON PROGRAM/POLITICS 911:
CLASS, GENDER, RACE AND POLITICS IN THE UK
(COVID-19 EDITION)

Professor Marc Blecher
Spring 2020



*"The flight time today is five hours in first class
and twelve and a half in coach."*

Class cleavages shape our lives in profound and multifarious ways. Yet Americans, including social scientists, tend not to be very conscious of class. Even on the left, over the last several decades class has been far less prominent in theory, analysis, and action than ethnicity, gender, nation, race and sexuality. This is due partly to the fact that the US has a large middle and class - or at least its middle class thinks itself to be large - whose ideology it is that class is not a significant form of social cleavage. Moreover, many people of the working class, which in other countries and times has been more class conscious, believe that they too are "middle class". Americans' low level of class consciousness is also partly a result of historical factors: the absence of a class-based revolution, and the presence of so many cleavages based on race and nationality deriving from the huge flows of voluntary and involuntary immigration. By contrast, in Britain class cleavage is far more deeply rooted in popular consciousness. We have come to London in order to lift the veil, to raise the issue of class, and to examine its relationship to political power.

Of course, class is not the only significant form of social cleavage. British society is also sharply divided along gender, ethnic and racial lines. If we are more

aware of them, we are often less aware of the intermediations between them and class. This too is a subject of study in Politics 911.

Our course is a seminar, supplemented by various outings in our great city – to museums, galleries, sites, institutions, screenings and performances – as well as guest visits. Its success, therefore, depends much more on everyone's active participation than on what I do. Your job is to come to class having done all the readings and prepared to discuss them. My job is to help create the conditions for our collective project in active learning.

While I have been able to make some preliminary plans for our outings and guests, many of them are still coming into focus, and many more will emerge as they come to our attention. This syllabus's schedule, therefore, is very much an ongoing work in progress. I will be updating it as we go, and will alert you when I do. I urge you to participate actively in shaping what we do. That is, as you spot something around town that you believe would be worthwhile, please let me know. Likewise for readings you believe might be appropriate for our seminar sessions.

Bloggging is essential to Politics 911. In fact, it is the only writing you will be doing. There are no formal papers (and certainly no exams!).

- § To encourage reflective reading, help you retain what you have read, and help me organize calibrate what we do in class, before each session I expect you to write on Blackboard a short response to questions I will have posed in advance. You're also welcome to comment there at any time on what others in the class have written, or on any related issue. Start a debate! You may also use the blog to raise questions on which you would like help.
- § I use the blogs to promote your learning, not to evaluate it. I want you to think and write your blogs freely and creatively, and to take risks. Therefore I do not grade them. But because I view them as very important for your learning, I do factor heavily into your final grade simply whether you have done them seriously and regularly. If you do all of them, you've got an "A" for 50% of the course. (The other 50% is based on your contribution in class.)
- § Specifically, I ask you to post your blog the end of the day before each class. That's a firm deadline – indeed, I close the blog to new entries at that time (though the blogs remain visible) – for two reasons. First, I need them to finish preparing for class each morning. Moreover, the blogs are a process, not a product; the whole point is to help you learn by doing them week-in, week-out, not at the end of the term in order to meet a requirement.
 - § That is, while I always try my best to be flexible and accommodate students' needs, I cannot accept missed blogs at the end of the term, for the reason stated in the third point above. (Moreover, at the end of the term, you will be way too busy finishing your 912 papers!)
- § At each class, I will distribute a summary of your blogs, which will serve as an agenda for our discussion. These will also contain the blog prompts for next time.
 - § Before you embark on each set of readings, please be sure to consult the blog prompts. They are intended to help you navigate the readings, by providing my sense of what's especially important in them. That is, they are a guide to helping you be an active, critical reader, not just an object or vessel for the author's message.
- § On each morning before class, join me in preparing for class by taking a few moments to log in to the blog to read what everyone has written.

I will evaluate your work in 911 on the basis of your blogs and on your participation in our discussions. (There is no formal written work.) In doing this I will emphasize the extent to which what you write and say demonstrates your engagement with the material, *i.e.*, your efforts to comprehend it critically. I will not emphasize anything like a ratio of “right” to “wrong” answers (even if I knew what they were!) or the statistics, even if I kept them, on your WPB (words per blog), CPC (comments-per-class) or WPC (words-per-comment) 😊. So do not feel that you have to be brilliant or loquacious every time you write a blog or open your mouth just because discussion will, ultimately, be evaluated; that is, after all, not what I am evaluating, and doing so will not improve our seminar.

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Britain is still a newspaper culture, thank goodness; you’ll notice, for example, that BBC Radio 4 and Television 2 include in their news reports surveys of what the newspapers are saying. Unlike the US, London is blessed with a wide range of papers from serious to tabloid (“red tops”) and from left to right. To wit:

	Serious broadsheet (or former broadsheet)	Serious tabloid	Populist Tabloid
Daily Mail		Petit-bourgeois Right	
Daily Telegraph	Right (anti-Murdoch); the paper of “The City” (<i>i.e.</i> , bankers and lawyers)		
Evening Standard		Right (Murdoch)	
Express		Right	
Financial Times	Center		
Guardian	Left		
Independent	Center left		
Mirror			Left
Observer (= Sunday version of the Guardian)	Left		
Sun			Right (Murdoch)
Times	Right (Murdoch)		

I expect you to read one or two every day. Try them all until you’ve experienced the range. (Online is fine too, though some charge for subscriptions, so you might prefer paper until you’ve identified a favorite.) Our objective is not only or even mainly to keep abreast of events, but to analyze the ways in which events are portrayed in newspapers with readerships of different classes and political perspectives. At the start of each class, we will review the papers in class, so you’ll need to spend some time on them in the morning.

The BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), known with a combination of affection and derision as “Auntie Beeb”, is also an excellent source of news. Its Radio 4 is particularly noted for *Today* (6-9AM), *The World at One* (1-1:30 PM), *PM* (5-6 PM), and *The World Tonight* (10-10:45 PM), all of which are broadcast on radio and the internet and are also streamed on a “listen again” basis for 30 days after broadcast on [BBC Sounds](#). TV 2 is noted for [Newsnight](#) (broadcast 10:30-11:20 PM and streamed for a 30 days) and *Politics Live* (11:15 AM-noon and streamed for 30 days).

Finally, I'd be remiss if I failed to mention [The News Quiz](#) (30 minutes) and [The News Quiz Extra](#) (45 minutes) a hilarious program (or, as we Londoners would write it, programme) in which noted comedians make very good fun of the week's news. *The News Quiz* is broadcast on BBC Radio 4 at 6:30 on Fridays, and *The News Quiz Extra* on Mondays at 11 PM. Both are streamed for 30 days. It runs in eight-week seasons, so it's not always on; as of this writing, it's in the middle of a season, and you can still catch up on all the episodes already broadcast.

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As for our readings, I will put chapters and articles on Blackboard. You're on your own to procure copies of books that you need to purchase. So please look ahead and get cracking on lining them up to avoid last-minute rushing around. You already know that I rely on e-books wherever possible; if you haven't tried it recently, Kindle generally allows both highlighting and commenting, and is available on all devices. For print books, if you can avoid the indispensable but pernicious Amazon, the best critical and academic bookshops for us are Bookmarks (a leftie specialist just around the corner) and the UCL (University College London) Waterstones at 82 Gower Street, a short walk from the Center and your flats. But London is still blessed with many wonderful bookstores small and large — too many to catalogue here, but easy enough to ferret out.

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COURSE FORMAT

We will experiment with two changes from the first half of the course. First, let's see if we need to meet twice a week. (On campus, advanced seminars such as our only meet once weekly.) So we'll definitely meet each Monday, at the times set out below. Each week at the end of Monday's class we'll decide whether we'd also like to meet Wednesday.

Second, we will try a new format. For each class, I ask two of you to act as "leaders" — *i.e.*, to work together to prepare and circulate discussion questions two days in advance of class, and then to lead the discussion of them. See the weekly schedule below (which covers 910 and 911). The idea is to produce investigative questions that encourage everyone to think analytically and critically about the material we are reading, and to reflect on its political significance. Please send them to everyone in the class by the appointed times on the schedule. Then I ask everyone else to produce a short blog on those questions. Finally, on class day, I ask the leaders to say the first word, but of course not the last, taking notice of what classmates have written on the blog, and then to lead the discussion. The class should move quickly to discussion; so I am thinking of leaders' opening remarks as catalytic, not performative.

Classes will happen over Zoom, so if you have been living on a different planet — lucky you! — and have not yet gotten and familiarized yourself with Zoom, please do so. I'll set up a "meeting" for each class and invite you to join it.

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GRADING

Grading is based entirely on the quality of your blogs and your contributions to discussion.

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READING AND PERFORMANCES SCHEDULE

	<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>READING</u>	<u>ACTIVITIES/NOTES</u>
3 February	Introduction: The UK	Martin Upham, <i>Britain Explained</i> (hard copies to be loaned), Chs. 1-8	
5 February	Introduction: Class	<u>Theory</u> : Giddens and Held, <i>Classes, Power and Conflict</i> (on Blackboard), pp. 1-12 <u>Practice</u> : Upham, Ch. 12 Sam Friedman and Daniel Laurison, <i>The Class Ceiling</i> (purchase, available as a Kindle book), Introduction	<i>The Canary and the Crow</i> , Arcola Theatre, 7:30 PM
8 February			Marx in London walking tour (optional)
10 February	Class in the UK, I	Friedman and Laurison, Chs. 1-6	
12 February	Class in the UK, II	Friedman and Laurison, Chs. 7-11	
23 February			<i>Blood Brothers</i> , Richmond Theatre, 7:30
17 February	The Working Class, I	Owen Jones, <i>Chavs</i> (purchase, available as a Kindle book), Preface to the 2012 edition, Preface to the 2016 edition, Introduction, Chs. 1-4	
19 February	The Working Class, II	Owen Jones, <i>Chavs</i> , Chs. 5-8 and Conclusion	

24 February	Class and Politics, I	Geoffrey Evans and James Tilley, <i>The New Politics of Class: The Political Exclusion of the British Working Class</i> (on Blackboard), Chs. 1-4	
26 February	Class and Politics, II	Evans and Tilley, <i>The New Politics of Class</i> , Chs. 5-10	The Haystack , Hampstead Theatre, 7:30
2 March	Race and Ethnicity and Politics, I	Alice Bloch and John Solomos, <i>Race and Ethnicity in the 21st Century</i> (on Blackboard), Chs. 1-5	Pass Over , Kiln Theatre, 7:30
4 March	Race and Ethnicity and Politics, II	Bloch and Solomos, <i>Race and Ethnicity</i> , Chs. 6-10	I, Daniel Blake , BFI Stephen Street Screening Rooms , 2:30
9 March	Gender and Politics, I	Helena Kennedy, <i>Misjustice: How British Law Is Failing Women</i> (purchase print edition), Introduction and Chs. 1-4	
11 March	Gender and Politics, II	Kennedy, <i>Misjustice</i> , Chs. 5-9 and Conclusion	
EXTENDED SPRING BREAK 😞			
30 March	Privatization I	James Meek, <i>Private Island</i> (purchase; e-book available from Verso)	Leaders: Caleb and Xander
1 April	Privatization 2	Screen Sorry We Missed You (I will attempt to organize reimbursement for the \$12 rental fee, so please keep a digital receipt.)	Leaders: Paris and Fox
6 April (+ 8 April if necessary)	Public Housing	John Boughton, <i>Municipal Dreams: The Rise and Fall of Council Housing</i> (purchase; e-book available from Verso)	Leaders: Olivia and Ben

10 April (Optional)	1) The Miners' Strike of 1984-85; 2) The Surveillance State		1: Wonderland (and this interview with the playwright and her miner father) 2: Wild
13 April (+ 15 April if necessary)	Education	Melissa Benn, <i>School Wars</i> (purchase; e-book available from Verso)	Leaders: Sid and Jinfan
20 April (+ 22 April if necessary)	Brexit	James Meek, <i>Dreams of Leaving and Remaining</i> (purchase; e-book available from Verso)	Leaders: Bri and MJ

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WEEKLY SCHEDULE

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
910	BY 2 PM CDT/3 PM EDT/8 PM BST: Leaders prepare questions for Tuesday, Marc posts	BY 5 PM CDT/6 PM EDT/11 PM BST: Everyone blogs	10 AM CDT/11 AM EDT/4 PM BST: <u>Class meets</u> ... BY 3 PM CDT/4 PM EDT/9 PM BST: Leaders prepare questions for Thursday, Marc posts	BY 5 PM CDT/6 PM EDT/11 PM BST: Everyone blogs	10 AM CDT/11 AM EDT/4 PM BST: <u>Class meets</u> ...		

911	<p>BY 5 PM CDT/6 PM EDT/11 PM BST: Everyone blogs</p>	<p>10 AM CDT/11 AM EDT/4 PM BST: <u>Class meets</u> ... IF WE ARE MEETING ON THE WEDNESDAY: BY 3 PM CDT/4 PM EDT/9 PM BST: leaders prepare questions for Wednesday, Marc posts</p>	<p>IF WE ARE MEETING ON THE WEDNESDAY: BY 5 PM CDT/6 PM EDT/11 PM BST: Everyone blogs</p>	<p>IF WE ARE MEETING ON THE WEDNESDAY: 10 AM CDT/11 AM EDT/4 PM BST: <u>Class meets</u></p>			<p>BY 5 PM CDT/6 PM EDT/11 PM BST: leaders prepare questions for Monday, Marc posts</p>
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