

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

POLITICS 911: CLASS, GENDER, RACE
AND POLITICS IN THE UK

and

POLITICS 912: RESEARCH WORKSHOP:
CLASS AND POLITICS IN BRITAIN

Professor Marc Blecher
Spring 2012



*"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 power at all levels.

Of course, class is not the only significant form of social cleavage. Both American and British society are sharply divided along gender, national 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 and, depending on your interests and choices, perhaps in 912 as well.

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Our inquiry has two interlocking parts. **POLITICS 911** is a seminar involving reading and discussion.

911 sets the stage for the research and writing of **POLITICS 912**, to which 911 gradually gives way to allow more time for your research and writing and for individual meetings with me and whole-class meetings to share your work with your colleagues. In 912 I expect you to:

- § identify **EARLY ON** a topic of interest related to any of the themes of 911;
- § formulate a plan for studying it, including initial hypotheses, proposed substantive content and organization, and the materials to be used in your research, which **MUST** include field research;
- § collect that material by delving into an appropriate aspect of London life (with library research forming only a background);
- § keep a log of your research activities;
- § write up your findings in successive drafts of a paper that will be 6,500 to 10,000 words (\approx 25-40 pages) in length and that will be of publishable quality.

The papers will become chapters of a book, to which I will write an introduction. It will be distributed to each of you and to President Krislov, Dean Decatur, the Department of Politics, Mudd Library, the London Program Center, Committee and Board, the Admissions Office, and the Office of Communications. My hope is that the best chapters can be submitted to an appropriate journal (such as the [Journal of Young Investigators](#) or the [Undergraduate Research Journal for the Human Sciences](#)).

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We will make significant use of Blackboard blogs.

- § To encourage reflective reading, help you retain what you have read, and help me guide and calibrate what we do in class, for each class session in which we will be discussing reading, I expect you to write on Blackboard a short response to questions about the works we are confronting that I will have posed in advance. You are also invited to comment there at any time on what others in the class have written. Start a debate! Take analytical risks. You may also use the blog to raise questions on which you would like help from me or your colleagues.
- § I use the blogs primarily to promote your learning - they help you process and retain the material - rather than 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 and for the quality of our colloquy more broadly, I do factor heavily into my evaluation of your work simply whether you have done them seriously and regularly.
- § Please have your blogs done by 8:00 AM. **THIS DEADLINE IS FIRM** because that's when I start preparing for class. Moreover, the blog closes at 8:00 AM, both to enforce this deadline and also because I do not want students making up missed blogs later in the semester; the whole point of the blogs is to do them day-in, day-out, not subsequently in order to meet a requirement.
- § Another main purpose of the blogs is to begin our conversation before we have come face-to-face in class, so as to enrich the latter. Therefore, **PLEASE READ YOUR COLLEAGUES' BLOGS BEFORE EACH CLASS.**

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I will evaluate your work in 911 on the basis of your blogs and on your participation in our discussions. 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.

I will evaluate your work in 912 based not only on the quality of your paper. Research is a risky business, as you will learn; often much serious, hard work does not pan out. I will, therefore, evaluate your papers on the basis not only of their quality, but also of the assiduity and resourcefulness of your research process, including successes and dead-ends, as reflected in your research logs.

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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. London is blessed with a wide range of papers from serious to tabloid (“red tops”) and from left to right. To wit:

	Serious	Serious tabloid	Tabloid
Daily Mail		Petit-bourgeois Right	
Daily Telegraph	Right (anti-Murdoch)		
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. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, we will review the papers in class, so you’ll need to spend some time on them in the morning. In the early morning, I’ll send you an e-mail that will identify a key story for the day and assign you which paper I’d like you to cover. In class, I’ll expect you to (co-)present a two-minute report on how the paper reported that story, and also on what its lead was (if it was different) and how it reported it.

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 a week after broadcast. TV 2 is noted for *Newsnight* (broadcast 10:30-11:20 PM and streamed for a week on the web) and *Daily Politics* (12-1 PM and streamed for a week).

Finally, I'd be remiss if I failed to mention *The News Quiz*, a hilarious program (or, as we Londoners would write it, programme) in which noted comedians make very good fun of the week's news. It's on BBC Radio 4 from 6:30-7 PM on Fridays and streamed for a week. It runs in eight-week seasons, so it's not always on.

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Early during the first week of the term, please purchase the following books at the specific bookshops listed.

Ken Roberts, *Class in Contemporary Britain* – Waterstones, Gower Street

Daniel Dorling, *Injustice: Why Social Inequality Persists* – Bookmarks, 1 Bloomsbury Street

Later in the term, Bookmarks will also be stocking for us:

Tracy Chevalier, *Falling Angels*

David Douglass, *Ghost Dancers*

Finally, I am still looking for alternatives for Lindsey German, *Material Girls* and Andrew Pilkington, *Racial Disadvantage and Ethnic Diversity in Britain*, so we'll hold off on those for the moment.

The rest of our readings are articles that you will find either on Blackboard or in your e-mail, as I'll explain in due course.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES, TOPICS, READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

(* - Digital copy e-mailed and/or on Blackboard.)

	TOPIC	READING	ACTIVITIES
February 6	Introduction; Watching the English	Fox	
February 7	British Politics	Krieger chapter*	
February 8		Krieger chapter*	
February 9	Theories of Class	Giddens and Held*	<i>Blood Brothers</i>
February 13	Political Sociology of Class in Britain	Roberts 1-2	
February 14		Roberts 3-4	
February 15		Roberts 5-7	
February 16		Roberts 8-9	<i>Juno and the Paycock</i>
February 20	Injustice and Inequality in Britain	Dorling, 1-4	
February 21	Classism and Working Class Demonization	Jones, Introduction & 1-3	
February 22		Jones, 4-6	
February 23		Jones, 7-Conclusion	
February 27	Health	Marmot Report, Executive Summary & chapters 1-2*	Richard Smith and Lois Quam visit class
February 28	Visit to Museum of London		
February 29	Class and Gender, 1	German, 1-4	
March 1	Class and Gender, 2	German, 5-9	<i>Billy Elliot</i>
Friday and the weekend		Read South Shields websites (to be e- mailed to you)	
March 5	Projects (meetings)	Douglass, selections from <i>A Miner's Life</i> *; Kahn, "Coal Not Dole"*	
March 6	Miners, 1	Douglass, <i>Ghost Dancers</i> , pp. 1-87	<i>The Pitmen Painters</i>
March 7	Miners, 2 South Shields preparation	Douglass, <i>Ghost Dancers</i> , pp. 87-158; Read more South Shields websites	

March 8-11			South Shields weekend
March 12	Recap the weekend		
March 13	International Capitalist Class	Sklair, "The Transnational Capitalist Class and Contemporary Architecture in Globalizing Cities"*	Leslie Sklair visits class, followed by walking tour
March 14	Class and Gender at the Dawn of the Twentieth Century	<i>Falling Angels</i>	<i>The Madness of King George</i>
March 15		<i>Falling Angels</i>	Tracy Chevalier visits class; Highgate tour
March 26	Projects (meetings)		
March 27	Marx walking tour		Marx walking tour
March 28	Projects research (no class)		
March 29	Projects (meetings)		
April 2	Projects (meetings)		<i>After Miss Julie</i>
April 3	Projects research (no class)		
April 4	Race	Pilkington, chapters 1-4	
April 5	Projects (meetings)		<i>The Awkward Squad</i>
April 9	Projects (meetings)		
April 10	Projects research (no class)		
April 11	Race and Ethnicity	Pilkington, chapters 5-8	
April 12	Projects (meetings)		
April 16	Projects (meetings)		Visit to the Bank of England, 2-4:15 PM
April 17	Projects		
April 18	Life and Work on Low Pay?	Toynbee?	
April 19	Projects (meetings)		Parliament visit, 12:30-3:30 PM
April 23	Projects (meetings)		
April 24	Projects		
April 25	Projects (class)		
April 26	Projects (meetings)		Bethnal Green School

April 30	Projects (meetings)		
May 1	Projects		
May 2	Projects		
May 3	Projects (class); course conclusion ☹		