

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: Politics and Society in Britain

Professor Marc Blecher

Fall 2003

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 these days, class is far less prominent in theory, analysis, and action than race and gender. This is due partly to the fact that the US has a large middle class, 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 amount 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 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 an important subject of study in Politics 911 and, depending on your interests and choices, perhaps in 912 as well.

Our inquiry has two interlocking parts. Politics 911 is a seminar involving reading and discussion. Before each reading assignment, I will set a question or two to guide you. Please keep a reading log for your own notes followed by a few sentences that respond to my question(s) and raise any other comments or issues that the reading may have prompted in your mind. Bring them to the Center each class day, where I will begin each class by reading your short responses (I am not interested in perusing your reading notes, which are, of course, just for your personal use.) While I am doing that, you will be busy with guided reading of the day’s newspapers (see below). 911 will preoccupy us more during the early weeks of the semester.

It sets the stage for your independent field research projects under the rubric of **Politics 912**. I expect you to:

- § identify **early on** a topic of interest related to the themes of 911;
- § formulate an 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 Dye, Dean Koppes, the Department of Politics, Mudd Library, the London Program Center and Committee, 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*).

I expect you to read a newspaper every day. Our objective is not only or even mainly to keep abreast of events, but also to analyze the ways in which events are portrayed in newspapers with readerships from different classes and political perspectives. On class days, I will bring several newspapers to class. From 10:00 to 10:15 or so, while I am reviewing your reading responses, you will form several small groups and, together, read and analyze the coverage of one or two major issues of the day. When you and I have finished our respective tasks, class will begin with discussion comparing the various paper's treatment of the issues at hand. On days when we do not meet, I also expect you to read a newspaper or two; perhaps you can get together with flat-mates to share the cost and to discuss the contents.

Our reading and research will also be interspersed with trips afield, films, and attendance at theatrical performances. From 28-30 September, we will journey to Yorkshire, where Dave Douglass, a miner, labor activist, and writer whose work we will be reading, will introduce us to the devastating effects of the closure of the coal pits in his home town of Doncaster, and the heroic efforts of Yorkshire men and women to cope with the disaster that has befallen them and their communities.

I will evaluate your work in 911 on the basis of your reading responses and on your participation in our discussions. In evaluating your contribution to discussion I will emphasize the extent to which it 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 CPC (comments-per-class) or WPC (words-per-comment). So do not feel that you have to be brilliant or loquacious every time you 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 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 as reflected in your research logs.

Please purchase the following books from the History Department Waterstone's on 82 Gower Street (corner of Torrington or Byng Streets), which is holding them for you:

Simon Gunn and Rachel Bell, *Middle Classes: Their Rise and Sprawl*

Joel Krieger, *British Politics in the Global Age*

Jack London, *People of the Abyss*

Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*

George Monbiot, *Captive State*.

Andrew Pilkington, *Racial Disadvantage and Ethnic Diversity in Britain*

Ken Roberts, *Class in Modern Britain*

George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*

Jeremy Seabrook, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Class, Caste and Hierarchies*

Hilary Wainwright, *Reclaim the State*

Martyn Waites, *Born Under Punches*

In addition, I will distribute photocopies of:

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *Imagining the New Britain*, chapter 2.

Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited*

David Douglass, *Pit Sense versus the State*, pp. 5-28 and 81-90

Kahn, Peggy, "Coal Not Dole: The British Miners' Strike of 1984-85"

Joel Krieger, *European Politics in Transition*, part III

Mike Marqusee, *Anyone But England: Cricket, Race and Class* (selections)

Saville, John, "An Open Conspiracy: Conservative Politics and the Miners' Strike, 1984-85"

Finally, we may also read Royce Turner, *Coal Was Our Life*, if I can procure copies. I will advise you further on this title.

Schedule of Classes, Topics, Readings and Assignments

N.b. Classes normally meet on Monday-Thursday mornings from 10 AM to 1 PM. Other activities outside these hours are **highlighted thus**. Readings are **due** by the morning of the day listed; *i.e.*, they are to be done the **in advance** of the classes for which they are listed.

Please also note that London Program 900 (*The Danenberg Lectures on British Culture and Society*) will normally, though not always, meet on Thursday afternoons.

Tuesday, 9 September: **The English**

Discussion of Jeremy Paxman, *The English* and Jilly Cooper, *Classes* (already read)

Wednesday, 10 September: **Theories of Class**

Anthony Giddens and David Held, *Classes, Power and Conflict*, pp. 3-39, 60-87 (handout)

Wednesday, 11 September, **1:30 PM**: **Brief Field trip to the National Portrait Gallery** (to view the portrait of Richard III

Thursday, 11 September: **Class in Theory and Practice**

Jeremy Seabrook, (*The No-Nonsense Guide to*) *Class, Caste and Hierarchies*

Thursday, 11 September, **6 PM**: **Dinner at my home, with screening of *Richard III***

Monday, 15 September: **British Politics and Political Economy, I**

Joel Krieger, *European Politics in Transition*, part III, chapters 6-9.

N.b. This weekend you should also plan to get a good start on reading *Richard III*, since we are busy Monday afternoon, and Monday evening may not suffice

Monday, 15 September, **2 PM**: **Screening of *Looking for Richard***

Tuesday, 16 September: **Discussion of *Richard III***

William Shakespeare, *Richard III*

Tuesday, 16 September, **7:15 PM**: **See *Richard III* at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre**

Wednesday, 17 September: **A: Further discussion of *Richard III*; B: British Politics and Political Economy, II**

Joel Krieger, *British Politics in the Global Age*, Parts 1 & 2 (*i.e.*, pp. 3-76)

Thursday, 18 September: **Class in the UK: An Overview**

Ken Roberts, *Class in Modern Britain*, chapters 1-3

Thursday, 18 September, 7:30 PM: *Blood Brothers*, Phoenix Theatre, Charing Cross Road (just south of the Tottenham Court Road tube stop)

Monday, 22 September, The Working Class, I

Ken Roberts, *Class in Modern Britain*, chapter 4

Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*, chapters 4 and 5

Tuesday, 23 September: The Working Class, II

George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier, Part I*

Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited*, pp. 97-115

Wednesday, 24 September: Individual meetings on 912 projects

Thursday, 25 September: The Working Class, III

Royce Turner, *Coal Was Our Life*

Peggy Kahn, "Coal Not Dole: The British Miners' Strike of 1984-85" (handout)

John Saville, "An Open Conspiracy: Conservative Politics and the Miners' Strike, 1984-85" (handout)

David Douglass, *Pit Sense versus the State*, pp. 5-28 and 81-90

Sunday, 28 September - Tuesday, 30 September: Trip to Doncaster

Martyn Waites, *Born Under Punches*

Wednesday, 1 October: Day off ☺

Thursday, 2 October: The Working Class IV

George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier, Part II*

Monday, 6 October: Class cancelled for Yom Kippur

Tuesday, 7 October: The Working Class IV

Jack London, *People of the Abyss*

Tuesday, 7 October, 2 PM: *People of the Abyss* walking tour of East London

Wednesday, 8 October: Individual meetings on 912 projects

Thursday, 9 October: The Upper Class

Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*, chapter 1

Ken Roberts, *Class in Modern Britain*, chapter 7

Monday, 13 October: **The Middle Class, I**

Simon Gunn and Rachel Bell, *Middle Classes: Their Rise and Sprawl*, chapters 1-3
Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*, chapters 2 and 3

Tuesday, 14 October: **The Middle Class II**

Simon Gunn and Rachel Bell, *Middle Classes: Their Rise and Sprawl*, chapters 4-7 and conclusion
Ken Roberts, *Class in Modern Britain*, chapters 5-6

Wednesday, 15 October: **Individual meetings** on 912 projects

Thursday, 16 October: **Summing Up**

Ken Roberts, *Class in Modern Britain*, chapters 8-9

Monday, 20 October - Thursday 23 October: Fall break

Monday, 27 October: **Class and Gender, I**

Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*, chapter 8
Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited*, pp. 1-96

Tuesday, 28 October: **Class and Gender, II**

Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited*, pp. 117-234
Joel Krieger, *British Politics in the Global Age*, chapter 5

Wednesday, 28 October **and** Thursday, 29 October: **Individual meetings** on 912 projects

Monday, 3 November: **Class and Race and Ethnicity, I**

Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, *Imagining the New Britain*, chapter 2
Andrew Pilkington, *Racial Disadvantage and Ethnic Diversity in Britain*, chapters 1-4

Tuesday, 4 November: **Class and Race and Ethnicity, II**

Andrew Pilkington, *Racial Disadvantage and Ethnic Diversity in Britain*, chapters 5-7

Wednesday, 5 November: **Individual meetings** on 912 projects

Thursday, 6 November: **Class and Race and Ethnicity, III**

Andrew Pilkington, *Racial Disadvantage and Ethnic Diversity in Britain*, chapter 8
Joel Krieger, *British Politics in the Global Age*, chapter 6

Monday and Tuesday, 10-11 November: No class; full-time work on 912 projects

Wednesday, 12 November **and** Thursday, 13 November: **Individual meetings** on 912 projects

Monday, 17 November and Tuesday, 18 November: **Class, Race and Sport**

Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918-1951*, chapter 9

Mike Marqusee, *Anyone But England: Cricket, Race and Class*, selections (handout)

Wednesday, 19 November and Thursday, 20 November: **Individual meetings** on 912 projects

Monday, 24 November: **Class, Political Economy and Politics I**

George Monbiot, *Captive State: The Corporate Takeover of Britain*, chapters 1-5

Tuesday, 25 November: **Class, Political Economy and Politics II**

George Monbiot, *Captive State: The Corporate Takeover of Britain*, chapters 6-11

Wednesday, 26 November: **Individual meetings** on 912 projects

Thursday, 28 November: Thanksgiving (no class)

Monday, 1 December: **Class, Political Economy and Politics III**

Joel Krieger, *British Politics in the Global Age*, chapters 7-10

Tuesday, 2 December: **Class, Political Economy and Politics IV: Popular Responses**

Hilary Wainwright, *Reclaim the State: Experiments in Popular Democracy*, pp. ix-109

Wednesday, 3 December: **Class, Political Economy and Politics V: Popular Responses**

Hilary Wainwright, *Reclaim the State: Experiments in Popular Democracy*, pp. 110-203

Thursday, 4 December: **Individual meetings** on 912 projects

Monday, 8 December: No class: final day for polishing papers.

Tuesday, 9 December: No class: papers due.