The BBC’s pitch

It's said that the British are obsessed with class, but does the traditional hierarchy of ‘working’, ‘middle’ and ‘upper’ class really exist anymore? And does social class even matter in 21st century Britain?
Capitals Approach to Class

• BBC approached Mike Savage in 2009 to conduct web survey of class in conjunction with Lab UK

• Mike and Fiona associated with a ‘capitals approach’ to class defined in terms of economic, cultural and social capital

• Influenced by the work of French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, and his ideas on the significance of ‘cultural capital’ in stratifying contemporary society

• Draws on the work of leading sociologists at CRESC (Tony Bennett, Elizabeth Silva, Alan Warde)
Launch of Web Survey

• Web survey contained questions on income, the value of home and savings, cultural interests and activities and the number and status of people they know.

• Survey launched in January 2011 in conjunction with the BBC. Enjoyed considerable media attention including a spot on The One Show by Mike. Completed by over 161,000 respondents by April 2011

• Followed up with additional face to face survey of 1,026 respondents by survey organisation GfK to ensure representativeness. Additional 50 in-depth qualitative interviews conducted by the team in 2014.
The (in)famous seven classes (2013)

- Elite 6%
- Established mc 25%
- Technical mc 6%
- New affluent workers 15%
- Emerging service workers 19%
- Traditional wc 14%
- Precariat 15%
The Key Messages

• POLARISATION between top and bottom with identification of advantaged ELITE and a disadvantaged PRECARIAT

• FRAGMENTATION in the middle with the divide between the established middle class and traditional working class not so clear cut

• Class of early 21st century is NOT the same as class of early 20th century. Classes and class boundaries have CHANGED over time.
Public Response

- A further 164,000 members of the public completed the online survey taking the total sample to over 325,000

- Over 9M people had completed the ‘class calculator’ by the end of 2014. Extensive sharing via facebook and twitter

- The story went global with reportage in the New York Times and press interest in countries such as Brazil, Russia, China and Australia.
The Dynamics of Class Divisions

• Discussion of elite chimes with focus on grouping pulling away confirmed by Thomas Piketty’s book on wealth concentration

• Discussion of precariat captures the vulnerable working poor who do not have a living wage and are fearful of the loss of tax credits

• Middle groups feel insecure with growing concern that social mobility is declining and getting onto the housing ladder is getting more difficult.
A Tale of Two Campuses?
Who goes to university?
Universities and the British establishment

Post WWII Prime Ministers
Universities and the British establishment

Post WWII Prime Ministers...of whom graduates
Universities and the British establishment

Post WWII Prime Ministers...of whom graduates of the University of Oxford
Graduates in the Great British Class Survey

• Outside studies of specific elite occupations (judges, politicians, bishops, armed forces ‘top brass’ etc), little is known about outcomes for graduates of different universities

• By contrast, much known about inequalities of access (class, ethnicity) to different universities

• GBCS Wave I has 80,000+ graduates, with university name. Unique opportunity to investigate how university attendance affects social mobility
Graduates in the GBCS 7 classes
Alma matters
### Alma matters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Elite as %</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Elite as %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of London</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>University of Westminster</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City University, London</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>Aston University</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Oxford</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>University of Surrey</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London School of Economics</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>Non-university institution</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Cambridge</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>University of Durham</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King's College London</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>University of Manchester</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperial College London</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>University of Reading</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London South Bank University</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>University of Sussex</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Bristol</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>Heriot-Watt University</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University College London</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>University of Southampton</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen Mary, University of London</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>University of Birmingham</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Exeter</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>University of Nottingham</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-UK institution</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>University of Edinburgh</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Elite as per cent of a university’s graduates (GBCS)*
Creating and re-creating hierarchies

• Do universities create, or simply act as conduits for inequalities?

• Global elites, mission groups, rankings and league tables

• Key message: the elite is a graduate class, but most graduates are not elite
  • Kelsall et al.’s (1972) *Graduates: the Sociology of an Elite*
Chapter 11: The Precarious Precariat: The Visible, Invisible People
The missing
Who was not in the survey
And why?
And what we did
Cultural life......

Bingo

Opera
A Good Meal

???

???????
Snobbery?

One’s Funny

One’s Boring
Class distinction and snobbery

Who is valued, what is valued, and why?

Who is de-valued, what is de-valued and why?
“SYMBOLIC VIOLENCE IS VIOLENCE WIELDED WITH TACIT COMPLICITY BETWEEN ITS VICTIMS AND ITS AGENTS, INSOFAR AS BOTH REMAIN UNCONSCIOUS OF SUBMITTING TO OR WIELDING IT.”

PIERRE BOURDIEU
Conclusions: The class war is over, the new politics of class is only just beginning.
The politics of classification

• People don’t feel class solidarity or loyalty, and the old solidaristic politics of class identification is now weak

• However, this allows the proliferation of class imagery, and the mobilisation of stigmatising labels and identifications

• This allows the educated middle classes to powerfully mobilise their ‘emerging cultural capital’ to generate pervasive forms of class snobbery
Satirical takes on the class calculator – ‘a knowing mode of cultural capital’
Stigma and the creation of ‘abject’ categories
The crystallisation of elite politics

• A new and confident wealth elite frames the political landscape and the old boundary between middle and working class boundary is losing political prominence

• The wealth elite is not a simple reworking of the old upper class, but a new corporate urban formation implicated in the economic transformation of Britain over recent decades

• There are spiralling and re-inforcing ‘top end effects’ where those at the apex pull away from those beneath them
Best and worst paid ‘higher professional and managerial’ class jobs

Weeky pay

- **CEOs**
- **Pilots**
- **Prod managers**
- **PR managers**
- **IT managers**
- **Army officers**

Categories:
- clergy
- probation
- humanities
- natural scientists
- business researchers
- chemists
- MEAN
The travails of meritocracy

- Enhancing mobility within the competitive education system will enhance, not reduce class inequality since those able to draw on the greatest resources will do better.

- There is a powerful ‘class ceiling’ where those upwardly mobile tend not to reach the most elite positions

- Educational institutions are themselves implicated in growing inequalities and ‘better education’ will not be a solution.
**AMOUNT OF RESPONDENTS**

**PERCENTAGE FROM SENIOR MANAGEMENT BACKGROUND**

**THE TEN JOBS WITH THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGE OF SM BACKGROUNDS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barristers &amp; Judges</td>
<td>55.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Practitioners</td>
<td>55.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brokers</td>
<td>53.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicitors</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEOs</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chartered Surveyors</td>
<td>51.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxation Experts</td>
<td>51.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Professionals n.e.c.</td>
<td>51.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing and sales directors</td>
<td>51.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actuaries, economists and statisticians</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**THE TEN JOBS WITH THE LOWEST PERCENTAGE OF SM BACKGROUNDS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Town planning officers</td>
<td>35.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT specialist managers</td>
<td>33.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT and telecomms professionals n.e.c.</td>
<td>33.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior professionals of education</td>
<td>32.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production managers and directors in construction</td>
<td>32.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programmers and software dev professionals</td>
<td>31.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT biz analysts, architects and systems designers</td>
<td>29.22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education advisers and school inspectors</td>
<td>29.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web design and development professionals</td>
<td>28.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT project and programme managers</td>
<td>27.12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

The steady accumulation of economic, social and cultural capital at the top is posing challenges to 21st century society akin to the challenge of climate change.

We will not address this challenge without questioning meritocratic assumptions that improving access is enough.

We need to find ways of renewing a politics of redistribution.
Social Class in the 21st Century

Mike Savage
Department of Sociology and International Inequalities Institute public lecture

Social Class in the 21st Century

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Suggested hashtag for Twitter users: #LSEclass