

# U.S. and British Perceptions of Class<sup>1</sup>

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This research tests one aspect of the widely held belief that Americans are less class conscious than Europeans. Analysis of subjective class placements in the United States and Great Britain indicates that there is virtually no difference in the way social structural position is used to define middle- or working-class placement. The lack of any statistically significant interactions suggests that class is as clearly perceived in the United States as in Great Britain. The conventional wisdom about differences in the class consciousness of the two societies is probably the result of the substantial differences in the class basis of party affiliation and voting. Given the similarities in the perception of class, the political differences would be better explained by structural differences in the party systems than by psychological differences in the voters themselves.

At least since Tocqueville, part of the accepted wisdom about the United States has been that it lacks a well-developed class consciousness such as can be found in the labor movements of Europe. Bottomore (1965, p. 51) summarizes the familiar argument that the United States has "an inherited ideology of classlessness." Ossowski ([1957] 1963) has attributed this classlessness to a belief in the American Creed and its associated image of society as a "scheme of gradation." Such a graded hierarchy is incompatible with the bounded or dichotomous model of class. These observations and others like them accept as proven that class divisions are not well *perceived* in the United States.

These observers are, of course, not blind to the structural inequalities in the United States. Indeed, it is the existence of these "objective" inequalities which makes the psychological and cultural differences from Europe seem especially noteworthy. For instance, even when Lipset and Bendix (1967) thought they had found no differences in mobility rates between Britain and the United States, they still endorsed the idea that there were significant *psychological* differences because of the United States' "ideological egalitarianism." Treiman and Terrell (1975) in another mobility study

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also cite the common belief that class is less salient in the United States, although in a foresighted footnote they acknowledge that this belief rests on virtually no rigorous empirical research. Kahl (1957, p. 174) has also noted the lack of systematic evidence for this widely held belief.

The research reported first in this paper attempts such an empirical assessment. The weight of the evidence suggests that there is, in fact, little difference in class perceptions between Britain and the United States. At least in the separation of a working class from a middle class, the popular U.S. and British definitions are remarkably similar.

Yet the results should not be interpreted as still another instance of the substantial "homogenization" of industrial societies. Belief in that convergence, supported in part by the high cross-national correlations of prestige rankings (e.g., Hodge, Treiman, and Rossi 1966), is perhaps just as misplaced as the belief in the United States' unique classlessness. The research reported in the second half of the paper demonstrates considerable *structural* differences between the two societies, particularly in their political party systems. The greater class structuring of British politics is probably the source of the belief in greater class consciousness, but the results suggest that the structural differences may arise without any underlying psychological differences.

This paper concentrates on the more cognitive aspects of class consciousness: the perception of class positions. More elaborate analyses (e.g., Giddens 1973; Mann 1973) identify the perceptions of class as only the lowest of several levels of class consciousness. But if class perceptions are the lowest level, then they are also the most fundamental. Unless one sees society as divided into well-defined classes, one can hardly develop positive identification with one class or hostility to the other, much less imagine some alternative social structure. Nevertheless, the conclusions from this research must be limited to the question of British-U.S. differences in class perceptions. Possibilities about differences at other levels of class consciousness will be considered only briefly.

The strategy invoked to detect cross-national differences in class perceptions relies on a comparative analysis of responses to the familiar subjective class-placement question (Centers 1949; Campbell et al. 1960). In spite of the common interpretation of this question as an index of class identification, it can be interpreted also as only a simple *cognitive* judgment. Responses to the question are instances of how people assign the descriptive labels "middle class" or "working class" to specific social actors—in this case to themselves. Affective identification would require further evidence (see Landecker 1963). As in most recent cognitive research (see, e.g., the collection in Shepard, Romney, and Nerlove 1972), the stimulus characteristics that determine the cognitive judgments can be inferred from the empirical relationships of the stimulus characteristics (e.g., education,

income, occupation) with the class placements. Thus, if class is more clearly perceived in Britain, the relationship of subjective class placement to its structural antecedents, particularly to *class* indicators, ought to be stronger. But, if the empirical relationships are similar in the two countries, class labels are being assigned according to the same rules, and there is no noticeable difference in the ability to identify people's class membership on the basis of their structural position.

This strategy extends the work of the earlier class-placement literature, which also used the strength of the association between social structural position and class placement as an index of the clarity of class self-perceptions. Hodge and Treiman (1968, p. 541), for instance, interpret a squared multiple correlation of .196 as evidence of a "failure of class consciousness to crystallize around economic groups." (But see Jackman and Jackman 1973.) The important question then becomes how the strength of this association varies across social contexts. Vanneman and Pampel (1977) make an attempt in this direction by comparing strengths of association across 16 industries. But since class has more societal than organizational referents, a more promising direction to investigate is the comparison of class perceptions across national contexts.

#### METHODS

The most critical requirement for cross-national survey analysis is to select equivalent samples responding to equivalent questions that are coded into equivalent categories. This must be done without so standardizing the methods that each society's distinctive characteristics are eliminated for the sake of equivalency (see Burawoy 1977). Fortunately, the studies utilized in this research employed quite comparable designs. Where problems of comparability remain (or are inherent in the nature of the national differences), the preferred resolution should be to utilize multiple specifications in order to obtain some rough estimate of the bias introduced by either too little or too much standardization.

The countries compared in this research are the United States and Great Britain. This particular comparison offers both advantages and disadvantages. The research can benefit from a rich background of literature in each country on both class perceptions and political behavior as well as specific cross-national comparisons between the two (e.g., Treiman and Terrell 1975). Another important advantage is the common language. While translation problems are always difficult in cross-national research, they are especially problematic in research which depends so heavily on class labels. Other methods (see, e.g., Laumann and Senter 1976) may be better suited to studying class perceptions without utilizing class labels. The disadvantage of the British-U.S. comparison is that the two societies may not

be different enough (see, e.g., Mann 1973). However, this is not a major problem for this research since the second half of the paper demonstrates quite substantial differences at the political level that are not found at the social psychological level.

*Statistical analyses.*—The British-U.S. comparison is based on the statistical relationships of the same set of stratification variables (class, education, income, occupational prestige) with each of three cognitive-behavioral variables (subjective class placements, party affiliation, and voting). Class placements are a dichotomy, party affiliation resembles a linear scale, and voting is a three- or four-category classification; three somewhat different techniques are best suited for regressing these three dependent variables on the stratification variables.

Probit analysis is used with the dichotomous class-placement variable. The results can be interpreted in much the same manner as conventional linear regression, but probit analysis avoids the erroneous assumption of linear relationships entailed with least-squares methods (including multiple-classification analysis). Instead a more plausible S-shaped curve is fitted. Log-linear techniques, often used for categorical data, are also less appropriate than probit analysis because the analysis seeks to estimate the *continuous* relationships of class placements with years of schooling, occupational prestige, and income. With the substantially unilinear party affiliation variable, ordinary least squares is suitable to estimate the relationships with the stratification variables. With the inherently nominal classification of the voting analysis, discriminant function analysis is used to order the voting alternatives so as to maximize the relationships with the stratification variables.

Only for the class-placement analysis is the dependent variable a sufficiently comparable measure in the two countries to justify the pooling of the two samples for an "analysis of covariance" design. For the party-affiliation and voting comparisons, separate country analyses are computed, and the different results will be described but are not tested for statistical significance.

*Class placements.*—The questions about class self-placement are virtually identical for the two countries. Both were preceded by a "class awareness" question (see Campbell et al. 1960, p. 343), and all respondents regardless of their answers to the class-awareness question were asked to place themselves in the working or middle class.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Part of the British sample was asked an *open-ended* class-placement question which was then coded into working- and middle-class categories. These respondents were supposed to have been eliminated from the analysis, but a programming error allowed them to remain. Subsequent analysis showed that there was no difference between the open-ended and forced-choice formats in determining the relationship of class placement to the social structural variables, so the open-ended responses were kept in the sample for this and the subsequent political analyses.

*Party affiliation.*—Party-affiliation questions were similar in each country, although strength of party identification was indicated by three categories in Britain (“very strongly,” “fairly strongly,” and “not very strongly”) and only two in the United States (“strong” and “not very strong”). To improve comparability, the two strong categories were collapsed for the British data.

The biggest difference between the two countries is the three-party system in Britain. Approximately 10% of the British electorate identify with the Liberal Party. Two different approaches were used to accommodate the British system. The simplest approach, but the one requiring the greatest assumptions, was to code the Liberal Party identifiers, along with non-affiliators, at the midpoint of a scale that ranged from strong Labour Party affiliation to strong Conservative Party affiliation. A similar scale was constructed from the U.S. data with independents scored at the midpoint. These roughly equivalent party-affiliation scales could then be regressed on the class and status variables in each country. A second approach went to the other extreme of requiring as little equivalence as possible by using discriminant function analyses on all the possible class-affiliation categories in each country. Since the results of the two analyses were quite similar and since a discriminant analysis is reported for the voting data, only the results from the simple regression are reported for party affiliation.

Although the party-affiliation scale is scored in a seven-interval code for both countries, the British variance is far larger than the U.S. variance (see table 1), and it is impossible to be certain how much of this apparent difference in polarization is due to stronger party affiliation in Britain and how much is an artifact of the differences in question wording. Both standardized and unstandardized coefficients are reported, therefore, since comparison of the unstandardized coefficients would assume, probably incorrectly, equivalence of measures across the two countries, but the standardized coefficients equate variances across countries, probably an overcorrection that eliminates the stronger British polarization. However, either set of coefficients is adequate for the broad kinds of comparisons to be made in this research.

*Voting.*—Several national elections are encompassed by the surveys in each of the countries. Since voting is, by definition, a nominal response, discriminant function analyses were employed to examine the impact of the class and status measures.<sup>3</sup> In Britain four categories were used: Labour, Conservative, Liberal, and no vote. In the United States only three categories were used: Democrat, Republican, and no vote, except for 1968

<sup>3</sup> The dangers of arbitrarily assigning these categories to a Left-Right continuum have been well documented by Ogmundson (1975) and will be apparent in the results presented below. The discriminant function analysis may be the most appropriate method to avoid any a priori coding of political parties.

when a fourth category was included for a Wallace vote. The British surveys include voting for elections in 1964, 1966, and 1970. The U.S. data include the 1968 (Humphrey-Nixon) and 1972 (McGovern-Nixon) elections. To expand the range of elections, retrospective data on the 1964 (Johnson-Goldwater) election are also analyzed. Each election is analyzed and reported separately.

*Stratification measures.*—The principal class division used in this study is the manual/nonmanual dichotomy.<sup>4</sup> This division has been the one most often employed in earlier research on class placement (Centers 1949; Dalia and Guest 1975) and on political affiliation (Alford 1967; Butler and Stokes 1969). This usage follows Weber ([1921] 1968) and a long tradition of class analysis (e.g., Lockwood 1958; Goldthorpe et al. 1969; Giddens 1973). Although there is substantial doubt that this dichotomy now describes the most significant class division in the labor force (see, e.g., Hamilton 1972; Braverman 1975; Poulantzas 1975; Wright 1976), it is a kind of “common denominator” for the other proposed class analyses. The debate over the proper class lines is not unimportant, but an evaluation of all the possible models would distract us from the main purpose of the cross-national comparison. Since the analysis controls for education, income, and occupational prestige differences, we can be confident that the coefficient for the dichotomy reflects some true class division and not just correlated status differences (see Dahrendorf 1959).

Occupations are assigned prestige scores developed by Siegel (1971), as in most of the past research on class placement (Hodge and Treiman 1968; Jackman and Jackman 1973; Vanneman and Pampel 1977). This procedure relies on the now well-validated assumption that the U.S.-derived scores are not substantially different from British rankings (Hodge et al. 1966).

Income data are available only for the total family income in the United States and for the head of household or respondent in Britain. The U.S. family income data are multiplied by 0.8 to approximate head-of-household income (see Lebergott 1964), but some doubt must remain about the comparability of these effects. For both countries, income is coded to the mid-point of the survey codes and then translated to 1967 U.S. dollar equivalents by adjusting for the prevailing exchange rate ( $\$2.80 = \pounds 1$ ) and for changes in the consumer price index. The logarithm of this number is used in the analysis because it seems reasonable that class placements reflect proportional rather than absolute increases in income.

Education is also difficult to make equivalent across the two countries.

<sup>4</sup> The manual/nonmanual dichotomy was coded in both countries according to the U.S. Census classification, assigning all service workers to the manual category. The U.S. classification differs in minor respects from the British system (e.g., postal clerks and railway conductors are nonmanual in the U.S. system but manual in the British system, and police officers are manual in the U.S. system but nonmanual in Britain).

Treiman and Terrell (1975) found that in Britain the *type* of schooling (secondary-modern vs. grammar and public schools) and post-secondary education (e.g., teachers' college, technical college, and even night school) had effects on occupational attainment. In accounting for middle-class placement, these qualitative distinctions ought to be included in the model along with the common scale for years of education. The problem is to construct comparable qualitative measures from the U.S. data. The solution followed here is to seek rough equivalents in the U.S. educational data where possible and elsewhere to add the remaining British variables separately. (The comparability of the educational variables proves to be less troublesome than first expected since the effects of the "qualitative" schooling variables are surprisingly small and, where significant, not very different in the two countries.) Four dummy variables have been created to estimate the effects of these qualitative differences in education. Trade-oriented postsecondary schools include night schools and apprenticeships in Britain and "vocational and technical training programs" in the United States (ICPSR 1975, p. 184-85). Two college dichotomies have been created: one for both countries which distinguishes any type of college education, and one for Britain which distinguishes university education from teachers' or technical colleges. Finally, for Britain, the kind of secondary schooling is dichotomized into the secondary-modern track versus the "elite" track (grammar school, public school). No equivalent U.S. variable can be constructed, although if the data were available it would be interesting to test whether the U.S. "prep" school, admittedly a more limited phenomenon, might not have the same class-defining characteristics as the British grammar and public schools (cf. Mills 1956; Domhoff 1967).

*Samples.*—The U.S. data are derived primarily from four election-year surveys (1966, 1968, 1970, and 1972) undertaken by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. The British data are from three surveys (1963, 1964, and 1966; supplemented in the voting analysis by 1970 reinterviews) which were part of the "Study of Political Change in Britain 1963-1970" (Butler and Stokes 1969).

Several restrictions are placed on the samples to achieve equivalence and analytic clarity. Since much of the analysis focuses on the role of the occupational structure, the samples are restricted to those persons currently in the labor force or whose husbands are in the labor force. Because labor force participation is not fully reported for British widows<sup>5</sup> and because the sample of persons over 65 who are still in the labor force is especially unrepresentative of that age group, the analysis is restricted to the 21-65

<sup>5</sup> In what must be one of the worst examples of the implicit sexism of our social science research, for female respondents, the husband's labor force participation was reported as the head-of-household data, even when the husband was dead (ICPSR 1972, p. 384).

age range. Because minorities present special problems for research on class perceptions (Jackman and Jackman 1973; Goyder and Pineo 1974), the analysis is restricted to whites in each country, there being insufficient non-whites in the British sample for an adequate comparison.

Sex differences also present problems in research focusing on occupation. There are, as we shall see, important differences between men's and women's jobs with regard to class structure. Also, married working women present the problem of two occupations in the household, both of which seem to affect class placements (Ritter and Hargens 1975). The approach taken here is to divide the sample into two overlapping subsamples: one of employed men and wives of employed men, and a second subsample of women in the labor force. For the former sample, the man's occupation is utilized in the analysis, while for the latter the woman's own occupation is utilized whether or not she was married. Both men and women are included in the first sample since the men's use of their own job for class self-placement is not very different from wives' use of their husband's jobs for self-placement. And both married and unmarried women are included in the second sample since there is little difference in the effect of their own occupation on class self-placement.

The resulting sample includes 3,538 U.S. and 3,512 British employed men and wives of employed men, and 1,236 U.S. and 1,085 British employed women. These are not, however, the effective degrees of freedom for the analysis since respondents are weighted according to the demands of the sampling design (ICPSR 1972, p. iii) and the requirements of this research.<sup>6</sup>

## RESULTS

*Subjective class placement.*—For each variable, table 1 reports either percentages or means and standard deviations, separately for each country. There are significant differences between Britain and the United States on all class and status variables, although the income differences are by far the largest. While the U.S. sample is almost evenly divided between middle-class and working-class identifiers, in Britain the working-class identifiers outnumber the middle-class identifiers by more than two to one. These differences are more pronounced than but not essentially different from the

<sup>6</sup> In each country weights were added so that each survey year was weighted equally (to the harmonic mean of the respective samples [Winer 1971]). The British study presented an additional problem of the use of panel study respondents in the yearly surveys so that the original total of 5,652 responses reflects only 2,922 distinct individuals. While it might be justified to ignore the lack of independence among reinterviewed persons, a conservative estimate was utilized by weighting all British data by a factor of 0.517 to reflect the true number of respondents. A final adjustment was made so that the U.S. and British data would be weighted equally in the analysis, by weighting each country's data to the harmonic mean of the two countries' weighted sample sizes.



## U.S. and British Class Perceptions

TABLE 1  
MEANS AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS FOR U.S. AND BRITISH SAMPLES

	EMPLOYED MEN AND THEIR WIVES		EMPLOYED WOMEN	
	United States	Great Britain	United States	Great Britain
% middle-class identifiers . . .	47.0	26.3	49.6	31.5
Party affiliation . . . . .	-.33 (1.97)	-.42 (2.53)	-.38 (1.98)	-.01 (2.58)
% Democrat/Labour vote:				
Election 1 . . . . .	53.0	47.0	55.1	39.2
Election 2 . . . . .	27.2	50.1	30.3	42.6
Election 3 . . . . .	29.8	41.3	27.3	31.8
% Nonmanual employment . . . .	55.5	34.1	64.4	48.8
NORC prestige . . . . .	43.6 (13.9)	38.3 (13.7)	39.4 (14.1)	32.1 (13.1)
Income (1967 \$U.S.) . . . . .	8,389 (4,771)	2,891 (1,492)	6,754 (4,423)	2,291 (1,327)
Education (in years) . . . . .	12.3 (2.1)	10.7 (1.3)	12.3 (2.0)	10.9 (1.3)
% postsecondary technical schools	12.7	27.2	16.3	23.3
% college . . . . .	37.5	18.4	31.1	12.6
% elite secondary . . . . .	N.A.	19.0	N.A.	18.7
% elite college . . . . .	N.A.	3.6	N.A.	2.2
N . . . . .	3,538	3,512	1,236	1,085

NOTE.—Standard deviations in parentheses; N.A. = not available.

1948 data reported by Buchanan and Cantril (1953). Among the nine nations they studied, Britain had a very low rate of middle-class identification, while the U.S. rate was slightly below average.

The greater middle-class identification in the United States is more than explained by the higher status of the U.S. sample. When all the class and status variables are controlled in a probit analysis on class placement for the pooled sample (table 2), the country coefficient shows Britons to be *more* likely to identify with the middle class. It actually requires more education, income, and occupational prestige to be middle class in the United States than in Britain. That is, comparing people from the U.S. and Britain with the same occupation, education, and income, it is the British who are more likely to place themselves in the middle class. The likely explanation is the control for the substantial reported differences in income between the two countries. These income differences probably exaggerate the differences in standard of living between Britain and the United States. If the income variables in each country are recalculated as a proportion of that country's mean income (i.e., if country differences in income are ignored), Britain again becomes somewhat less middle class ( $-0.304$ ) than the United States.

The pooled sample results in table 2 reflect the same patterns found in earlier research (see Vanneman and Pampel 1977). For men's occupations, both class and occupational prestige have independent and significant ef-

TABLE 2  
 PROBIT ANALYSES OF MIDDLE-CLASS PLACEMENT  
 FOR THE POOLED SAMPLES

	Coefficient	Standardized	<i>t</i>
Employed Men and Their Wives			
Manual/nonmanual . . . . .	.4407	.216	9.59
NORC prestige . . . . .	.0113	.159	5.41
Income (log of \$U.S.) . . . . .	.5402	.392	10.35
Education (in years) . . . . .	.1352	.241	8.50
Technical schools . . . . .	.0648	.025	1.15
College . . . . .	.2333	.096	2.88
Country . . . . .	.2625	.131	5.80
Employed Women			
Manual/nonmanual . . . . .	.1237	.061	1.53
NORC prestige . . . . .	.0121	.174	3.22
Income (log of \$U.S.) . . . . .	.2914	.238	4.45
Education (in years) . . . . .	.1713	.311	5.90
Technical schools . . . . .	.0651	.026	.67
College . . . . .	.3967	.164	2.61
Country . . . . .	.1685	.084	2.13

fects, although *the class variable is somewhat stronger*. Subjective class placements are determined to some extent by position in the class structure and not just by rank along a status scale. For women’s jobs, however, there does not appear to be any class division.<sup>7</sup>

The most important results are the “analysis of covariance” comparisons of coefficients for the two countries (table 3). For convenience, separate coefficients for each country have been computed from the main effect and interaction terms, although the *t*-statistic reported reflects the significance of the interaction term. We can develop a better understanding of the size of the British-U.S. differences by translating the coefficients reported in table 3 to estimates of the percentage point increases that would result from a given change in each of the stratification variables. (Since the relationship is not linear, this slope has to be evaluated at a particular point on the curve. For convenience, we will calculate the estimates at the 50% probability point, at which an individual would have equal probabilities of being placed in the middle or working class.) Among the employed men and their wives, a nonmanual position increases the probability of middle-class placement 16 percentage points for the U.S. sample and 18 percentage points for the British. This is a negligible and nonsignificant difference. If class lines are less apparent to U.S. workers, there is little evidence of it

<sup>7</sup> Other analyses, not reported in detail here, experimented with alternative definitions of class divisions but failed to find any significant relationship for women’s jobs. Including clericals with manual workers did not improve the relationship of the class dichotomy for women’s jobs ( $b = 0.045$ ), although it did for men’s jobs ( $b = 0.536$ ).

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TABLE 3  
PROBIT ANALYSES OF MIDDLE-CLASS PLACEMENT BY COUNTRY

	United States	Great Britain	t (diff)
Employed Men and Their Wives			
Manual/nonmanual.....	.408	.461	.57
NORC prestige.....	.011	.010	-.36
Income (log of \$U.S.).....	.472	.660	1.70
Education (in years).....	.140	.121	-.49
Technical schools.....	-.028	.100	1.08
College.....	.232	.172	-.35
Elite secondary.....	N.A.	.128	1.21
Elite university.....	N.A.	.041	.16
Employed Women			
Manual/nonmanual.....	.046	.203	.94
NORC prestige.....	.014	.009	-.69
Income (log of \$U.S.).....	.296	.304	.05
Education (in years).....	.049	.341	4.52
Technical schools.....	.214	.066	-.72
College.....	.736	.287	-1.38
Elite secondary.....	N.A.	.057	.31
Elite university.....	N.A.	-.576	-1.25

in these data. The association of manual work with the working class and nonmanual work with the middle class is nearly as strong in the United States as in Britain. And in both societies, the association is made only for men's occupations.

Occupational prestige, income, and education also have similar consequences for class placements in the two societies. A 14-point prestige difference in a man's occupation (approx. 1 SD) would increase the probability of middle-class placements by 6% in both countries. A 50% rise in income would increase middle-class placements by 8% in the United States and by somewhat more, 11%, in Britain. Another year of school would increase middle-class placement by 6% in the United States and 5% in Britain. Over and above the effects of additional years of school, college experience would increase middle-class placement by 9% in the United States and 7% in Britain (8% if the college was a university, not a teachers' or technical college). Technical training would not increase middle-class placement in the United States (in fact, the estimate is that it would decrease by 1 percentage point), but in Britain the increase would be only 4 percentage points, a nonsignificant difference. Public and grammar school education in Britain would directly increase middle-class placement by only 5 percentage points, a nonsignificant effect. Most of the effect of this elite secondary training is probably mediated through subsequent occupational and income gains.

For employed women there are also small and nonsignificant differences in the effects of class, occupational prestige, and income. Education does present some differences, however. Middle-class placement is more responsive to an additional year of school among British women (a 13 percentage point increase). The U.S. women are less concerned with the quantity of schooling (only an estimated 2 percentage point increase per year) than with having college experience (an enormous 29 percentage point increase as against 11 percentage points for British women) or even technical training (an 8 percentage point increase for the U.S. women, 3 percentage points for the British women).

But the striking result in table 3 is the overall similarity of effects in both countries. For the employed men and their wives *none* of the interaction effects are significant, and for the employed women only years of education is different. Nor are the two qualitative schooling variables that could be scored only in Britain statistically significant. When all the interaction terms are added to the model, the difference in the likelihood  $\chi^2$  statistics is not significant for the employed men and their wives,  $\chi^2 (8) = 6.43, P > .50$ , but is just significant for the employed women,  $\chi^2 (8) = 17.89, P < .05$ .

The overall similarity of the results supports the interpretation that the distinction between the middle class and the working class is made as easily in the United States as in Britain. Indeed, the cognitive rules used in relating objective position to subjective placement are almost identical. An additional year of education or a proportional raise in income will increase the likelihood of middle-class placement as much in the United States as in Britain.

*Party affiliation and voting.*—Unlike the class-placement data, there are substantial differences between Great Britain and the United States in the political analyses. The greater *class* appeal of the British party system is evident in table 4. The most striking differences are found in the manual/nonmanual class coefficients. Among employed men and their wives, dichotomous class is *four times* more important for party affiliation in Britain than in the United States. Among the employed women, class has substantial effects in Britain but none in the United States. Even the comparison of the standardized coefficients reveals a far greater relationship of class position and party affiliation in Britain than in the United States. The standardized coefficients also show that in Britain the class position of employed men is easily the strongest determinant of party affiliation, while in the United States education is as important as the manual/nonmanual division.

Among the employed men and their wives, higher income also seems to be more strongly related to Conservative affiliation in Britain than to Republican affiliation in the United States. Among the employed women,

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TABLE 4  
REGRESSIONS ON PARTY IDENTIFICATION BY COUNTRY

	UNITED STATES		GREAT BRITAIN	
	Coefficient	Standardized	Coefficient	Standardized
Employed Men and Their Wives				
Manual/nonmanual.....	.276**	.070	1.063**	.197
NORC prestige.....	.007*	.048	.010	.055
Income (log of \$U.S.).....	.068	.020	.604*	.102
Education (in years).....	.066	.068	.190**	.086
Technical schools.....	.038	.058	.202	.034
College.....	.250	.058	.234	.030
Elite secondary.....	N.A.	N.A.	.275	.042
Elite university.....	N.A.	N.A.	-.686**	-.093
R <sup>2</sup> .....	.042	...	.132	...
Employed Women				
Manual/nonmanual.....	-.265	-.064	.596*	.115
NORC prestige.....	.013	.090	.018	.091
Income (log of \$U.S.).....	-.0430	-.016	-.126	-.027
Education (in years).....	.084	.083	.240	.119
Technical schools.....	.356	.067	.418	.067
College.....	.032	.007	.769	.095
Elite secondary.....	N.A.	N.A.	-.992	-.056
Elite university.....	N.A.	N.A.	.269	.041
R <sup>2</sup> .....	.021	...	.109	...

\*  $P < .05$ .

\*\*  $P < .01$ .

income is not important for party affiliation in either country. In each country occupational prestige is either nonsignificant or less important than the class dichotomy; there do not appear to be any marked differences between the two countries.

The differences in education relationships also appear less substantial than the class and income differences. Although few of the education variables have statistically significant relationships, this is somewhat misleading since the "education effect" is spread over multiple measures. If we ignore the type of schooling (i.e., the dummy variables) and include in the model only the number of years of education, the education coefficient is significant for both countries in all the subsamples. There are complex differences, however. The *unstandardized* coefficient for years of education is larger in Britain than in the United States, indeed approximately three times as large. The *standardized* coefficients for years of education are smaller in Britain than in the United States because of the larger American variance in education and the smaller variance in strength of party affiliation. Thus, while one additional year of schooling leads Britons further toward a strong Conservative affiliation than it leads Americans toward Republican affilia-

tion, one standard deviation of years of schooling accounts for somewhat less of the variance in party affiliation in Britain than in America.<sup>8</sup>

Table 4 also shows that the multiple correlation of party affiliation with the entire set of class and status variables is much stronger in Britain than in the United States. The comparison confirms our expectations that the British party system is more stratified than the U.S. system.

Since stratification position is closely related to subjective class placement in both societies but to party affiliation only in Britain, it is not surprising that subjective class placement also is related to party affiliation only in Britain. If the class-placement dichotomy is added to the regressions reported in table 4, it has a substantial effect for British employed men and their wives ( $b = 1.55$ ) and British employed women ( $b = 1.87$ ). The standardized coefficients are 0.276 for the employed men and their wives and 0.337 for the employed women, both coefficients by far the largest in their equations. Thus, subjective class placement is *the most important determinant* of party affiliation in Britain. In the United States it is difficult to show that the same class-identification variable has any effect at all on party affiliations. The coefficients for U.S. employed men and their wives (0.10) and for employed women (0.22) are both less than twice their standard errors, and the standardized coefficients (0.025 and 0.055, respectively) are negligible.

The data on voting (table 5) show even more telling differences between the two party systems. In Britain, party voting is arrayed along the status hierarchy in the expected manner, with Conservative voters at the top and Labour voters at the bottom. Liberal Party voters are, sociologically, quite close to Conservatives, and the nonvoters are positioned between the two major parties. The pattern is quite consistent across the three elections. But the U.S. pattern is altogether different. In the United States neither party captures the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, although George Wallace came close in 1968. The major social division in the U.S. electorate is between voters and nonvoters. The typical working-class response in the United States is to abstain. This is most noticeable in the 1972 election in which there was *almost no difference* between McGovern and Nixon voters on the first discriminant function defined by the class and status measures.

The discriminant function coefficients provide further evidence of the greater class orientation of the British party system. Among the data for employed men, the class dichotomy has consistently stronger effects in Britain than in the United States. Among the employed women the differ-

<sup>8</sup> The importance of education for U.S. party affiliation is also understated because of substantial nonlinearities on the dependent variable revealed in the discriminant function analysis. The two "Independent" groups that lean toward the Republican and Democratic parties are especially well educated.

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ences are less marked (partly as a result of the anomalous negative coefficient in the small sample for the 1970 election).

The class orientation of British voting is even clearer when the self-placement variable is added to the voting analysis. The results need not be reported in detail since the pattern of the coefficients is similar to the results reported in table 5. But in Britain, the subjective class factor has independent explanatory power of its own. The addition of class placement substantially increases the canonical correlation for all three elections in both British subsamples with the exception only of the small sample of employed women for the 1970 election. (Among employed men and their

TABLE 5  
DISCRIMINANT FUNCTION ANALYSES OF VOTING

	GREAT BRITAIN			UNITED STATES		
	1964	1966	1970	1964	1968	1972
Employed Men and Their Wives						
Centroids:						
No vote.....	-.211	-.082	-.062	-.477	-.534	-.546
Labour/Democrat.....	-.363	-.350	-.418	.014	.037	.171
Conservative/Republican.....	.465	.516	.438	.320	.366	.180
Liberal/Wallace.....	.386	.382	.061	...	-.363	...
Discriminant coefficients:						
Manual/nonmanual.....	1.262	1.456	1.509	1.004	.522	.207
NORC prestige.....	.006	.015	-.011	-.008	.009	.027
Income.....	.802	.546	.798	.776	.906	.820
Education (in years).....	.093	-.019	-.235	.165	.331	.261
Technical school.....	.005	-.163	.994	-.667	-.420	-.095
College.....	.586	.526	-.122	.359	-.439	-.132
Elite secondary.....	.648	.906	.958	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Elite university.....	-1.101	-1.202	-0.873	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Canonical.....	.363	.364	.357	.261	.341	.297
df.....	988	856	517	1,507	2,148	1,118
Employed Women						
Centroids:						
No vote.....	-.273	-.487	-.569	-.673	-.519	-.590
Labour/Democrat.....	-.476	-.473	-.467	-.174	.177	.187
Conservative/Republican.....	.525	.568	.355	.331	.201	.219
Liberal/Wallace.....	.373	.848	.761	...	-.252	...
Discriminant coefficients:						
Manual/nonmanual.....	1.114	.888	-.238	.276	.819	.462
NORC prestige.....	-.016	-.025	.009	.028	-.000	.001
Income.....	.333	.320	.345	1.150	.696	.713
Education (in years).....	.026	.248	.345	-.080	.241	.474
Technical school.....	.667	1.215	.563	.085	.233	-.880
College.....	1.314	1.109	1.261	.249	-.152	-.868
Elite secondary.....	1.167	.691	.637	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Elite university.....	.261	.691	-3.201	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Canonical.....	.428	.483	.446	.363	.290	.332
df.....	243	188	105	389	835	442

wives the increases are from .363 to .411 in 1964, from .364 to .423 in 1966, and from .357 to .393 in 1970; among employed women the increases are from .428 to .472 in 1964, from .483 to .552 in 1966, and from .446 to .450 in 1970.) In contrast, class self-placement adds relatively little to the already weaker discriminant analysis of U.S. voting. (Here the increases among employed men and their wives are from .261 to .263 in 1964, from .341 to .342 in 1968, and from .297 to .298 in 1972; among employed women the increases are from .363 to .370 in 1964, from .290 to .299 in 1968, and from .332 to .341 in 1972.)

The discriminant function coefficients for subjective class also document the importance of class feelings for British voting. In five of the six British analyses, the standardized class-identification coefficient is the largest of the nine standardized coefficients. The unstandardized coefficients are 1.334, 1.458, and 1.182 for the employed men and their wives; and 1.290, 1.509, and 0.293 for the employed women. These are all larger than the coefficients for "objective" class position—that is, the manual/nonmanual dichotomy. More important, they are far larger than the comparable U.S. coefficients which are 0.260, 0.175, and  $-0.107$  for the employed men and their wives; 0.486, 0.656, and 0.627 for the employed women.

In summary, the subjectively felt class division appears to be the single best predictor of partisan affiliation and voting in Britain. It both mediates some of the effects of the structural variables and contributes independently. In the United States, however, class feelings play hardly any independent role in recent voting.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of the subjective class placement responses provides no evidence of differences in the clarity of social definitions of working-class and middle-class position. Class, occupational status, income, and education have the same relative importance in each society in determining class placements. The relationship between objective position and subjective placement is as strong in the United States as in Britain.

In contrast to the results on class perceptions, we have found substantial evidence of political differences. Similar differences have been noted before by Alford (1967). It is clear that the British party system is more closely linked to socioeconomic position in general, and to the class structure in particular. Britons affiliate with political parties and vote in a far more "class conscious" manner than do U.S. citizens.

Together, these two results suggest that the greater class structuring of British politics cannot be explained by any greater ability of Britons to think of themselves in class terms. Classes are as sharply defined in the U.S. consciousness as in the British. The difference is just that U.S. workers



do not translate their recognized class positions into votes at the polls as do Britons.

The problem of the more marked class structure of British politics remains to be explained. Why is British voting more class conscious if British voters are not? While alternative interpretations will be discussed below, the most straightforward conclusion is that the sharper class division in British politics owes more to the *structure* of the party system itself than to the consciousness of the voters. That is, we ought to seek explanations of political behavior directly in the dynamics of political institutions; inferences about the motivations of the actors are likely to be mistaken in attributing psychological differences. The more critical differences lie in the opportunities for class action provided by the political structures.

Such an explanation would still be consistent with most "personality" and social structure models of social behavior. In such models, behavior is determined jointly by a psychological predisposition and structural opportunity. *Both* are necessary for a given outcome. Conversely, and this is the point that is often neglected, *lack* of any given behavior may be the result of either inadequate structural opportunity or insufficient psychological predisposition. Opportunity without predisposition or a predisposition without a structural opportunity will have equivalent observable results. Without additional evidence it is impossible to decide which is the missing component.

This has been the problem with many explanations of cross-national differences in political behavior. The difficulties arise when we try to attribute the lack of class voting in the United States to the lack of motivation among the individual voters. U.S. voters *seem* not to be class conscious because they rarely vote or organize politically along class lines. But it may not be the psychological predisposition which is lacking; it may be only that no opportunity to express the predisposition is provided.

The present research cannot resolve this issue, but it can eliminate some of the more simplistic psychological explanations of the lack of class politics in the United States. In particular, people in the United States do not seem any less clear about their class position than the British. In this limited sense, they appear equally "class conscious."

A more likely explanation seems to be that the U.S. political system does not provide the necessary alternatives for U.S. voters to express their class identifications. Such an explanation is supported by the varying levels of class voting in different national elections (Guest 1974). Some contexts elicit more class voting than others. But in some elections the class issues are so swamped by other factors—personalities, images, foreign involvements—that there are few class issues dividing the candidates, or at least few that would be apparent to the voters. It seems unlikely that class consciousness, at least as that concept is used in most analyses, would

fluctuate so dramatically between elections. It is more reasonable to conclude that a sufficient reservoir of class consciousness exists in the population, to be tapped or not as fits the occasion.

Two major limitations inherent in this analysis must now be considered. The first arises from the conceptualization of the class structure employed in the research, especially the restriction to middle class and working class as answers to the class-placement question. The second concerns other levels of class consciousness beyond the basic perceptions studied here.

This analysis of class perceptions has been constrained by the alternatives provided by the survey questionnaire—"middle-class" and "working-class." We have assumed that these are meaningful labels for the respondents, an assumption strengthened by the evidence that the vast majority of respondents will use these labels in systematic ways if asked to do so. The problem lies less in the validity of the two labels included in the analysis than in the omission of other class divisions that may indeed prove to be more salient in Britain. In particular, the British-U.S. differences that we are seeking may not occur along this middle-working division at all but might still be observed if respondents were asked to identify a more elite category or a dominant or ruling class. This intriguing question must go unanswered for now because we can look only at topics covered by existing data. But the data we have pertain to a matter that is not trivial. The popular definition of the working class is basic to the social identification of the progressive forces in industrial societies. Confusion over the boundaries or even the existence of a working class has been blamed for the lack of a genuinely socialist alternative in the contemporary United States. But the research reported here suggests that the structural position of the working class is perceived in basically the same way in the United States as in Britain. We can speculate that other perceptual differences do exist between the two societies, but in the reasonably accurate data we have we cannot find evidence for such a difference.

We also must consider other aspects of class consciousness that might still explain the political differences between British and U.S. voters. While there may be no cross-national differences in class perceptions, the politically important differences may be found only at the more fully developed levels of class consciousness. Landecker (1963), for instance, stresses the difference between cognitive and affective components of class consciousness. The present research has addressed the issue of cognitive differences only. It may be that, while class position is as clear to U.S. and British workers, Britons invest more affect in class identification.

However, the available data bearing on this question provide no support for British-U.S. differences at the affective level. One wave of the British survey and three waves of the U.S. survey included a question which asked respondents whether they felt close to their chosen class or not much closer

to people in that class than to people in other classes. Slightly over half of the respondents in each country reported feeling closer to their chosen class. But the British employed men and their wives were only 3.8% more likely to feel closer and British employed women only 3.5% more likely than their U.S. counterparts. Neither difference is statistically significant.

Another dimension of class perceptions sometimes included in studies of class consciousness is class awareness or salience, the degree to which survey respondents think of themselves in class categories. In this research, the British and U.S. samples were asked whether they thought of themselves as belonging to a class. Previous research using this question (Guest 1974) has linked such awareness to support for more "liberal" or collective-governmental strategies of social change as opposed to dependence on individual efforts. But there is no evidence of any substantial British-U.S. differences in class awareness either. If anything, U.S. respondents describe themselves as slightly more class aware than Britons (67.0% vs. 59.0% among employed men and their wives, 68.7% vs. 59.5% among employed women). Both differences are statistically significant. (A more complete log-linear analysis, not reported in detail here, shows that the greater class awareness in the United States is confined to the middle-class identifiers only.) Again, the data provide no support for higher levels of class consciousness in Britain.

Cross-national differences in other levels of class consciousness, such as those described by Giddens (1973) and Mann (1973), might be investigated with appropriate empirical research. For instance, the size of the relationship between subjective class placements and a wide range of political attitudes would provide some evidence of the "totality" of class considerations in each society. Differences in conceptions of an alternative social order are also subject to empirical testing. But at both these levels adequate data do not exist now. Our conclusions, therefore, must be limited to the simpler levels of class consciousness. While it might still be possible to maintain a hypothesis of psychological difference if we resorted to these other aspects of class consciousness, it is important to note that much of the earlier speculation on U.S. differences referred either implicitly or often explicitly to the poor perception of class in the United States. This argument is no longer tenable given the results reported here; U.S. workers recognize their position in the working or middle class at least as well as Britons.

The disjuncture between structural inequality in the United States and Americans' seeming indifference to class has long presented one of the intriguing paradoxes in the interface between society and the individual. Mills (1962) has set the agenda:

The fact that men are not "class conscious" at all times and in all places does not mean that "there are no classes" or that "in America everybody

is middle class." The economic and social facts are one thing. Psychological feelings may or may not be associated with them in rationally expected ways. Both are important, and if psychological feelings and political outlooks do not correspond to economic or occupational class, we must try to find out why, rather than throw out the economic baby with the psychological bath, and so fail to understand how either fits into the national tub." [Mills 1962, p. 317]

This way of framing the paradox has been endorsed by such different observers as Lipset and Bendix (1967) and Bottomore (1965).

Yet, the more detailed cross-national comparisons suggest that the problem has been wrongly conceptualized from the first. A paradox does indeed exist, but not the one usually posed. For it appears that, in terms of intergenerational mobility (Treiman and Terrell 1975) or political partisanship (tables 4 and 5), the United States is less rigidly structured than Great Britain. But this *weaker class structuration* (Giddens 1973) seems not to entail a less clear perception of one's class position. *This* paradox suggests two conclusions about the role of class perceptions in contemporary society. First, such phenomena as mobility and political partisanship may be far less important in facilitating class perceptions than was first supposed. Instead, class perceptions may be determined quite directly by the class system itself, in which case there is no need to disparage ordinary workers' abilities to recognize the system of privilege surrounding them. Second, we need to question assertions of causation in the other direction: that clarity of class perceptions is the major cause of greater political or social polarization. We should recall once again that the social phenomena of intergenerational mobility or party organization need not depend on individual-level psychological processes but have a social dynamic of their own that is best understood *sui generis*.

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