

BRITISH SOCIETY

Being British

- The British are proud of being British, but they are not actively patriotic.
- They are individualistic, so they feel comfortable when you mean Britain or the British government (they don't like the feeling that they are personally representing their country).
- Decrease in national confidence. Opinion poll in the 1990s showed low degree of attachment to the country:
 - ♦ 1/3 said there was nothing about Britain to feel proud of
 - ♦ 1/2 would emigrate if they could
- Previously there was a rather patronizing attitude to foreigners and foreign ways. These days, foreign ways were admired (resentfully?) and there is greater openness to foreign influences.
- However, with openness goes vulnerability:
 - ♦ Patriotism may take a defensive form
 - ♦ For instance: worries about loss of British identity in the EU
 - ♦ Maybe the reason why they cling to certain distinctive ways (e.g. driving on the left, different systems of measurement)

Ethnic minorities

- First half of the 20th century:
 - ♦ Assumption that they were nearly all Anglo-Saxon
 - ♦ Despite substantial immigration from continental Europe (largely visible)
- 1950s
 - ♦ Black Caribbean people recruited
 - ♦ Since then there are 2 million Afro-Caribbean and Asian people (approx. 6% of Britain's population)
- They concentrate mainly in:
 - ♦ London and Leicester
 - ♦ Birmingham
- Target of discrimination in class and social status:
 - ♦ Since mid 1960s several race relation acts to eliminate racial discrimination
 - ♦ But also laws introduced to restrict immigration, which seem to thwart non-white immigrants

Family life

- There have been changes in family life in recent years, caused by:
 - ◆ People living longer: many old people live alone following the death of their partners
 - ◆ New laws: e.g. the law that made it easier to get a divorce
 - ◇ The number of divorces has increased
 - ◇ 1 in every 3 marriages end in divorce, so there are a lot of one-parent families
 - ◇ Though most divorced people remarry and may take responsibility for a second family
 - ◆ Changes in society: they are more tolerant now of unmarried people, meaning unmarried couples or single parents:
 - ◇ Increasing proportion of men and women living together before marriage
- The family group:
 - ◆ Smaller than in the past
 - ◆ Members keep in touch, but see less of each other than used to (e.g. due to work)
 - ◆ Each generation is keen to become independent of parents and establish own family unit
- Is Britain really in moral decline?
 - ◆ Safer to say that moral values are changing. There is less attention paid to traditional definitions of immorality, and greater emphasis on personal morality rooted in kindness and respect for others
 - ◆ However many would say 'yes' and point at:
 - ◇ High divorces rate
 - ◇ High non-marital birth rates
 - ◇ The former being evidence of fundamental failure to be kind or respect to others

Health

- Improved considerably if compared to 50 years ago. Reasons:
 - ◆ Better housing and education
 - ◆ A higher standard of living
- Major contributors to poor health:
 - ◆ Unemployment
 - ◆ Poverty
 - ◆ Poor housing
 - ◆ Bad diet

- One worrying feature: rates of people dying of heart disease and strokes are among the highest in the world and increased over the past few years:
 - ◆ One of the main reasons is that people eat more convenience food and fast food
 - ◆ Attempts have been made to improve the British diet (e.g. BBC1's Fat Nation – The Big Challenge)

Young people

- Despite media reports, not all of them are punks or football hooligans. There is a wide cross-section of youth:
 - ◆ Young Conservatives to Rastafarians
 - ◆ Skinheads to pupils at expensive private schools
- Generally speaking, they are optimistic, can-do generation:
 - ◆ They want to better themselves through education
 - ◆ They aspire to traditional values, e.g. preferring the idea of marriage and family stability to partnerships, possibly because of the trauma of parents divorcing.
 - ◆ However, they are more isolated than their parents' generation: only 1 in 5 feel part of a community
- Problems associated with being young:
 - ◆ At school: problems with discipline and behaviour
 - ◆ Crime and drug-taking
 - ◆ Yob culture: any young person who displays a disregard for orderly behaviour and disrespect for their elders.

Rich and poor

- Family expenditure patterns changed during 1980s – households spent:
 - ◆ Less of their income in food
 - ◆ More on housing and transport
- Millionaires in the UK:
 - ◆ Property, land, shares and other assets
 - ◆ Included members of the aristocracy and the Royal family, pop stars, supermarket owners, comedians, actors, writers and inventors
- The worst-off:
 - ◆ The unemployed
 - ◆ People living on the state pension

- ◆ Single parents
- ◆ Some ethnic groups
- People in Britain are very conscious of class differences

The Class System

- Class consists of a combination of components:
 - ◆ Wealth
 - ◆ Education
 - ◆ Social circle
- Different combinations can take place:
 - ◆ A relatively poor but highly educated family may find itself associating with wealthier but similarly highly educated families
 - ◆ A traditional landowning but less highly educated 'gentry' family will probably associate with other landowners of similar educational level
 - ◆ Schools– there are one or 2 expensive private schools which cater for the less intelligent children of the upper elite of the country. These children are likely to remain part of the elite. On the other hand, upper middle class children who go to an ordinary local state-funded school may function comfortably in a wider range of social classes.
- Within families:
 - ◆ Major class differences may exist between grown-up children and their parents
 - ◆ Marriage outside one's class is much more common than it used to be, so the 'extended' family. Including cousins will probably include people who in their social life belong to quite different social classes.
- Historians say the class system has survived in Britain because of this flexibility of its. As a result, it has never been swept away by an evolution and an awareness of class forms a major part of most people's sense of identity.
- Despite this fluidity, the elite of society takes care to protect itself:
 - ◆ It sends its children to be educated privately at a public school, where its children obtain a better academic education than normally possible in state-funded schools
 - ◆ Through these schools they also obtain a sense of social superiority
- The different classes have different sets of attitudes and daily habits:
 - ◆ They tend to eat different food at different times of day
 - ◆ They like to talk about different topics using different styles and accents
 - ◆ They enjoy different pastimes and sports

- ◆ They have different values about what things in life are most important
- ◆ They have different ideas about the correct way to behave

THE CLASS SYSTEM – SOCIAL CLASSES IN BRITAIN

- Upper–middle–class senior civil servants, profession, then you management and finances
- Middle–class middle managerial
- Lower–middle–class Junior managerial / clerical, non–manual workers
- Skilled working–class
- Semi–skilled / unskilled working class
- Residual dependent on state benefit, unemployed, occasional part–time

CLASS AND ACCENT

- The most obvious and immediate sign of class comes when a person open their mouth
- What he/ she says gives a clue to his/ her attitude or interest, which are indicative of class
- But more indicative than what the speaker says is the way that he or she says it
- Important to understand the distinction – standard British English vs. non–standard British English
 - ◆ SBE: The grammar and vocabulary used in public speaking, radio and TV news broadcasts, books and newspapers
 - ◆ N–SBE: Most working class people use lots of words and grammatical forms in their everyday speech
- So, the clearest indication of a person's class is often his or her accent:
 - ◆ The most prestigious accent is known as 'received pronunciation' (RP)
 - ◆ It is the combination of standard English spoken with RP accent that is usually meant when people talk about 'BBC English' or 'Oxford (university) English', or 'the Queen's English'
- These days, however, nobody wants to be thought of a snobbish:
 - ◆ The word 'Posh' illustrates it is. It is used to mean 'of a higher class to mine' and it is normally used with negative connotations
 - ◆ Working–class people are traditionally proud of their class membership and wouldn't usually wish to be thought of as belonging to any other class
 - ◆ 'Inverted snobbery' phenomenon: middle–class people try to adopt working–class values and habits because they think that working classes are better (i.e. more honest) than the middle–classes
- The segregation of the classes has become less rigid:
 - ◆ A person whose accent shows that he/she is working–class no longer prohibited from most high–status jobs for that reason alone
 - ◆ Nobody takes elocution lessons any more in order to sound more upper–class. It is now acceptable for radio and television presenters to speak with 'an accent' (i.e. Not to use strict

RP)

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