

高级英语选修课教材 · 当代国家与社会系列 (引进版)

Contemporary Britain

(Second Edition)

当代英国 (第二版)

[英] 约翰·麦考密克 (John McCormick) 著

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This is a book about Britain, written for anyone looking for a brief and accessible guide to this remarkable country. Like others in the *Contemporary States and Societies* series, it makes no assumptions about prior knowledge: it provides the key facts and figures that are needed to place Britain in context with other countries – especially its European neighbours – but it also ties the facts together with explanatory analysis. It is deliberately short and concise, and makes no claims to being comprehensive. If it can help its readers better appreciate the key themes and concepts in British political, social and economic life, dispel some of the myths that too often interfere with an understanding of the country and its people, and offer suggestions for further research, it will have succeeded in its mission.

I am a political scientist, but I have tried to make sure that all the key dimensions of life in Britain are covered, from history to geography, economics, society, culture, and politics. My background and credentials will shed light on the approach, and on my arguments and conclusions. I was born in Britain and am still a British citizen, but I have spent most of my life living somewhere else. I was brought up in Kenya, went to boarding school in Britain, attended university in South Africa, and then lived in London from the winter of discontent in early 1979 to the height of Thatcherism in 1986. Since then I have lived in the United States, although I return to Britain at least once every year, most recently spent the second half of 2005 on sabbatical at the University of Sussex, and still closely follow developments in Britain. I see Britain both from near and from far, and because I come and go I am more conscious of the changes that have come to Britain than if I lived there full-time. My approach is also inevitably coloured by my experiences in the United States, by the fact that I specialize in comparative politics, and by my interest in the European Union. All of this gives me a peculiar (idiosyncratic?) perspective on my home country.

The first edition of this book was published in 2003, and was bought by readers in many countries around the world, especially in Europe and North America. It is always good to know that a book has struck a chord, and I hope this second edition will be as useful as the first. As well as taking account of new scholarship published since 2003, it has been thoroughly updated and amended to take account of the fallout from the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the enlargement of the European Union in 2004–07, the 2005 general election, and Tony Blair's departure in 2007. The arguments have been refined, new data has been inserted (most of it from the Office of National Statistics), new boxes and tables have been added, and every chapter has been lengthened by about 10 per cent.

It was my publisher Steven Kennedy who first suggested that I write the book, and he has helped guide its development with his usual good humour and fine judgement, so it is to him that I owe my primary gratitude. My thanks also to an anonymous reviewer who looked over and commented on Chapter 3, and to Stephen Wenham and Brian Morrison for their fine work on the production. This second edition is heavily influenced by my 2005 sabbatical, which gave me a chance to experience the new Britain for six months. My wife Leanne made the transition easily, and probably learned more than she had ever anticipated about the British education system and the National Health Service. And my sons Ian and Stuart enjoyed my ongoing attempts to acculturate them into the ways of their other homeland. To all three, this second edition is dedicated with much love.

JOHN McCORMICK

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List of Abbreviations

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
EEC	European Economic Community
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EU	European Union
GDP	gross domestic product
IRA	Irish Republican Army
ITV	Independent Television
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NHS	National Health Service
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PR	proportional representation
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SNP	Scottish National Party
TUC	Trades Union Congress
VAT	value added tax

Notes: For convenience, the terms ‘Britain’ and ‘British’ are used throughout, even though the book is about the United Kingdom. Currency conversions are made at the rate of €1.50 and \$1.90 to the pound, the prevailing figures in mid-2006.



Map 0.1 Political features of the UK

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Introduction

Britain is one of the most influential countries in world history. Out of that small cluster of islands off the northwest coast of the European continent came three developments that literally changed the world: the industrial revolution, the parliamentary system of government, and the English language. It is impossible to talk of economic change without referring back to the inventions that spawned the industrial revolution, and the impact of the writings of Adam Smith and John Maynard Keynes on our ideas about capitalism. It is impossible to talk of political change without referring back to the origins of the British democratic model, and the impact of the writings of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and others. And it would be difficult for the citizens of different countries to exchange their views without the help of English, which has become the international language of business, communications, diplomacy and – increasingly – everyday conversation.

For these reasons alone, Britain is an important subject of study. But there are other motives as well: life is all about change, and few societies have seen such dramatic changes in the last 200 years as Britain. It has one of the oldest continuously functioning political systems in the world, yet the character of that system has been altered in response to philosophical and popular pressures. It once had the world's biggest economy, yet has found itself having to adapt to a post-imperial economic environment coloured by competition from the United States, Japan and its bigger European neighbours. It has a long history of social stability, yet British society has undergone a fundamental reordering in the last two generations. The signs of change continue to be found everywhere:

- in the growing racial, religious, national and cultural diversity of British society
- in the redefinition of the class system that for so long determined how Britons related to each another, but which has been diluted by improved education, the rise of the middle class, the growth of the consumer society, and by new levels of affluence and social mobility

2 Introduction

- in demographic shifts as the British live longer, as the idea of the family is redefined, and as Britons move away from the old assumptions of the welfare state towards a stakeholder society in which benefits are determined by the extent to which individuals have played by the rules
- in the altered balance of power among government institutions as the executive becomes more powerful and Europe becomes more influential
- in the changing relationship between local and national government, and in the rebirth of Scottish, Welsh, Irish and even English nationalism, which has redefined the meaning of 'Britain' and 'Britishness'
- in the new attitudes of voters towards government, in the questions raised about the nature of the electoral system and the balance among the major political parties, and in the rise of alternative channels through which citizens can express their views on politics
- in dramatic developments in communications technology, with satellite, cable and digital options changing the character of television, and the internet revolutionizing the way that people communicate
- in shifts in the direction of economic policy, from the interventionist approaches of the postwar years to the free-market approaches introduced in the 1980s by the Thatcher government, and perpetuated by her successors
- in the redefinition of Britain's place in the world as it has moved from being a global and imperial power to a regional and European power, and as it asks itself questions about whether its future lies with the European Union, the Atlantic Alliance, or both.

In the chapters that follow, the causes of these changes will be examined, and an attempt made to understand the effects on contemporary Britain. Along the way, the book makes two core arguments. First, it rejects claims of the decline of Britain as overstated. Since the 1960s and 1970s, there has been a bandwagon effect among academics, journalists, political leaders, who often bemoan the loss of Britain's pre-eminent economic position in the world, complain that the British political system has failed to meet the needs of the citizens of a modern democracy, and find evidence of decline in everything from lowered educational standards to inefficient public services, challenges to law and order, threats to the environment, and even the failure of British sports teams to win international competitions. Studies of postwar Britain are littered with words such as *angst*, *melancholy* and *discontent*.

Adjustments were certainly needed following world war and the end of empire. Where Britain was once the world's dominant military and imperial power, the world's richest country, the biggest creditor nation in the world, and the self-appointed standard-bearer for Western culture and civilization, it

Table 0.1 Quick facts about Britain

Official name:	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Capital:	London
Area:	244,103 sq km (94,249 square miles)
Population:	60.2 million
Population density:	246 per sq km (650 per square mile)
Population growth rate:	0.6%
Languages:	Overwhelmingly English, with some regional languages (Welsh, Gaelic)
Religions:	Predominantly Christian (mainly Anglican, Catholic and Presbyterian), with growing Muslim and Hindu minorities
GDP (2004):	\$2,124 billion (€1,570 billion, £1,067 billion)
Per capita GNP:	\$33,630 (€24,852, £16,900)
Distribution of GNP:	70% services, 29% industry, 1% agriculture
Urban population:	89%
Literacy:	99%
Infant mortality:	6 per 1,000 live births
Life expectancy:	78.5 years
Government type:	Parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarchy
Administration:	Unitary
Executive:	Prime Minister and Cabinet
Legislature:	Bicameral Houses of Parliament; House of Lords (currently undergoing structural reform) and House of Commons (646 members). Lords are appointed; MPs are elected for renewable terms of a maximum of five years
Party structure:	Multiparty, with two dominant parties (Labour and Conservative) and several smaller parties Judiciary: House of Lords is highest court of appeal until Supreme Court is created in 2008
Head of state:	Queen Elizabeth II (1952–)
Government:	Labour Party (1997–)

inevitably had to self-reflect as conditions changed. But what the doomsayers usually failed to point out was that most of the change was relative rather than absolute. The British today – in the famous phrase of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan – have never had it so good. The British economy is one of the biggest and freest in the world, its government and bureaucracy are more responsive, and society is thriving: the British live longer and healthier lives, they have more access to education than ever before, they are on average

much wealthier, their environment is cleaner, and their individual rights are better protected than at any time in their history. Of course there are problems and imperfections, and there always will be, but this is just as true of any other wealthy liberal democracy.

The second core argument is that the British must wake up to the reality that they are Europeans, and that Britain's future lies with the European Union. Britain was slow to appreciate the possibilities of European integration, was late joining what was then the European Economic Community, has dragged its feet over adopting the euro, and has developed a reputation – not always deserved – as a reluctant European. The sentimental British attachment to the United States continues to cast its spell, in spite of a growing chorus of questions about just how much Britain benefits from the 'special relationship'. Britain, argues Hugo Young (1999), has struggled for two generations 'to reconcile the past she could not forget with the future she could not avoid'. Like it or not, Britain is politically, economically, and socially bound to Europe. In a speech in London in October 2006, European Commission president José Manuel Barosso asked Britain if it wanted 'to drive from the centre or sulk from the periphery', and if it wanted 'to shape a positive agenda, which reflects its own agenda, or be dragged along as a reluctant partner'. It is time for Britain to leave behind its past, to understand where its future lies, and to show some positive leadership on Europe.

These and other arguments are explored in the chapters that follow. Chapter 1 provides the historical background. Beginning with the early invasions from the continent, it surveys the rise and fall of feudalism, the rise of the United Kingdom, political and economic changes, and the rise and fall of the Empire. It focuses in particular on postwar history, looking at key political, economic, social and cultural developments, notably the impact of Thatcherism, of membership of the European Union, and of the policies of the Blair administration.

Chapter 2 deals with the geography and resources of Britain – both natural and human. The first half discusses the geography, the natural resources, and the environment of Britain, and the second half looks at the people of Britain, focusing on recent demographic changes, and on the impact of immigration, nationalism, regionalism and race.

Chapter 3 looks at the British social system, beginning with a discussion about the evolution of the class system, then looking at the changing structure of the family. It examines the welfare system, the structure and state of British education, and ends with a review of the performance of the criminal justice system in maintaining law and order.

Chapter 4 examines the British system of government and its major institutions: the monarchy, the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Parliament, the

judiciary, the bureaucracy, and local government. It explains how they relate to each other, assesses their relative influence over the political process, and offers a critical review of the nature of British democracy.

Chapter 5 looks at politics and civil society in Britain, beginning with a discussion of the main features of British political culture, then looking at how Britons engage in politics through elections, political parties, interest groups and the media.

Chapter 6 turns to the structure and performance of the British economy. It begins with an overview of the structure of the economy, then assesses economic developments since 1945, contrasting the boom years of the 1950s with the crises of the 1970s, examining the changes wrought by Thatcherism, and assessing the renewed economic successes of the 1990s. It then looks also at the place of Britain in the international system and at the economic implications of Europe.

Chapter 7 provides a survey of British culture, beginning with a general outline and an analysis of the meaning of 'Britishness'. It then examines the state of the arts in Britain, with an emphasis on theatre, film, television and popular music. It looks at how the British spend their spare time, and ends with an examination of the role of sports and religion in national life.

Chapter 8 looks at Britain's changing place in the world. It examines key relationships, including those with the Commonwealth, within the Atlantic Alliance, and with the European Union, and argues that the first is weak, the second is deeply troubled, and the third is where Britain's future lies. It finishes with an assessment of the changing status of the British military.