

Class in the Long Eighteenth Century: Britain and Beyond
(University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany, 4-6 April 2025)

Continuing the long tradition of the **Landau-Paris Symposia on the Eighteenth Century**, we welcome both established scholars and early career researchers to our 2025 conference in Essen, Germany. The LAPASEC series focuses on the literature and culture of the British Isles of the period, but it is also open to topics relating to the British colonies, France, Germany, and further afield. The conference will also include a panel showcasing the doctoral projects of emerging scholars. We encourage both current PhD students and those planning to begin a PhD in the near future to apply. For those in the early stages of their academic careers, we are seeking to fund travel, accommodation, and related conference costs. We invite 20-minute papers in English or French with a discussion time of 10 minutes; contributions to the PhD panel are expected to be 10 minutes with a discussion time of 10 minutes.

One half of the world knows not how the other half live...
Title of a pamphlet, published anonymously in 1752¹

The long eighteenth century witnessed a host of social changes that affected print culture to varying degrees. The centrality of urban culture, the pulse of individualism, the bourgeois clubs, the consumerist disposition of European nations, political confrontations, fiscal economies affected by war, trade relations, and travel circuits, all were part and parcel of that era. From the South Sea Bubble to the hunger riots of 1766 to the abolitionist attacks, the social structure of England proved to be both adaptable and resilient.

In 1986, Linda Colley observed that “no period of British history has been more ruthlessly anatomized in the search for social tensions and class consciousness” than the long eighteenth century.² Indeed, the lasting impact of classic critical interventions published in the 1960s-1980s by Eric Hobsbawm, E.P. Thompson, Christopher Hill and others is indubitable, and Colley’s remark on the abundance of scholarship focussed on class in Britain seemed entirely justified then. Today, however, it appears that many cultural phenomena are primarily discussed with foci set on race or gender. Among the three very useful categories of race, class and gender, class has become somewhat unfashionable, with Paul Langford’s *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (published in 1989) being the last major work dedicated to class in the eighteenth century.

Often, a stratified vision of Britain as a set of class dualisms ruled the imagination: rich-poor, aristocrat-peasant, upper-lower, gentry-crowd, patrician-plebeian, fashionable-labouring. Penelope J. Corfield, however, complicates a binary view of societal dynamics when she observes in her recent monograph on Georgian Britain that “as the tectonic plates were shifting in the upper and middle echelons of society, so too were changes afoot ‘below’, among the masses. The ‘labouring poor’ or ‘lower orders’ were turning into ‘workers’, with all the implications that terminology entailed.”³ Regardless of terminology, concepts of “class”,

¹ Anon, *Low-Life: or one half of the world knows not how the other half live, being a critical account of what is transacted by people of almost all religions, nations, circumstances, and sizes of understanding...* (London, 1752).

² Colley, “Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain 1750-1830”, *Past & Present*, 113 (1986), p. 98.

³ Corfield, *The Georgians: The Deeds and Misdeeds of 18th-Century Britain* (2022), p. 287.

“rank”, “order”, “station”, or “degree” were, of course, in flux and perceptively discussed in Britain well before Marx. The question of social rank and class identity was more often than not couched in a rhetoric of privilege, meaning that the inclusion of other paradigmatic factors clouds an already cloudy image of class dynamics. For example, one recurring uncertainty was whether gender weighed more than social status in particular circumstances like those related to individual experiences and identity formation. Clearly, class and its discourse warrant a renewed inquiry as they underpin almost every other intellectual debate of the period.

Our conference aims at augmenting the relevant issues of race and gender in the eighteenth century with reflections on their respective class dimension, and at bringing together a diverse range of approaches and methodologies.

Possible themes may include, but are not restricted to:

- The advent of the middle classes
- Social mobility and its perceived absence on the Continent
- The French Revolution and its reception
- Class anxieties and social unrest
- Manners and Morals
- Humanitarianism and institutions for the destitute
- Travel writing and international perspectives on class in Britain
- Economic changes
- Class and the metropolis, and class beyond the metropolis
- Class, authorship and literature
- Class in Romanticism
- Education and social ladder
- Politics and religion
- Philosophy
- The visual arts and music
- Class and material culture (architecture, furniture, fashion etc.)
- Print media and public discourse
- Class and nostalgia
- Revisionist histories of class
- Class, colonialism and slavery

Selected contributions will be considered for inclusion in a volume of conference proceedings.

Conference languages: English and French

Convenors: Prof. Dr. Christoph Heyl, Anjali Rampersad, M.A., Christian Feser, M.A.

Deadline: Please e-mail your proposal* (c. 250 words), contact information and a brief biographical note (c. 100 words) to the conference organisers (lapasec_essen@uni-due.de) by **5 June 2024**.

* With the submission of your proposal you consent that any data you submit will be saved by the organisers until the end of 2026 (or the publication of the conference proceedings). As part of our funding application, your data will be shared with the Université franco-allemande/ Deutsch-Französische Hochschule (UFA/DFH). Your e-mail address will be used for the limited purpose of informing you about updates and news relating to the conference and will not be passed on to any third parties, including UFA/DFH.