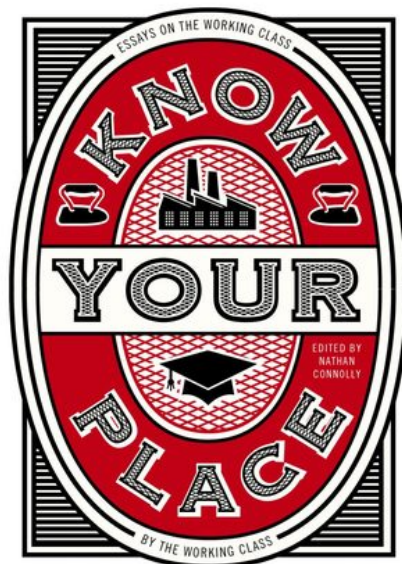




Know Your Place

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In 21st century Britain, what does it mean to be working class? This book asks 24 working class writers to examine the issue as it relates to them.

Examining representation, literature, sexuality, gender, art, employment, poverty, childhood, culture and politics, this book is a broad and frst hand account of what it means to be drawn from the bottom of Britain s archaic, but persistent, class structure.

Know Your Place Details

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From Reader Review Know Your Place for online ebook

Grace - bread&butterbooks says

I've been thinking about what this review will say for months, because I've spent months with this book, slowly making my way through the essays when I need a friend. This book has been a support for me through a difficult transition, through my master's degree and through entering the 'real world', and now as I work two part-time jobs. I've been used to reading books, especially while I was a literature student, that are for the middle class, by the middle class. I have found academia alienating, snobbish, and exclusionary. When I find any book that can provide me with working class heroes, or any content that speaks to my experiences at all, I hold them close to my heart and defend them fiercely. This immediately became one of those books.

This is essential reading for any Briton who considers themselves working class or low income. The contributors are massively diverse, not just in race and gender, but the book also represents many generations, which I've found enormously helpful. It is a wide compilation of experiences.

I can't thank Nathan Connolly, Dead Ink, and all the contributors enough for this book. I have had a lonely, painful time working through identity crisis after identity crisis, and only this book has soothed me. I am not alone and having written proof of that is an unspeakable comfort.

Nicole says

Collections like this are so vital. I'd love to see a fiction collection from working class writers as well.

Particular highlights for me were Dominic Grace's 'The Death of a Pub', Sylvia Arthur's 'Britain's Invisible Black Middle Class', Kit de Waal's 'An Open Invitation', Sam Mills' 'The Benefit Cuts', Wally Jiagoo's 'Glass Windows and Glass Ceilings', Rebecca Winson's 'Disguised Malicious Murder', Ben Gwalchmai's 'Where There's Shit, There's Gold', Alexandros Plasatis' 'The Immigrant of Narborough Road' and Peter Sutton's 'Education, Education, Education'.

Enid says

We should all read this book. It jolts one out of any cosy complacency. As one writer says -it is hard to better yourself when cleaners are paid the basic wage and looked down on as if they hardly existed. The collection of essays here go some way, I imagine, to help non "working class" people understand!

My one beef with the essays in the book is that maybe because so many of these people are in writing / the media and are London based they do not realise that other socio-economic groups had, and have, gripes as well about the ease with which they can achieve their goals.

Not everyone else had, or has, enough money when growing up or has networks to land a great job.

Not everyone else felt entirely at ease at their Uni either; there are more groups than a working class and a moneyed upper class in this country!

Lots of people DO land a job without the help of networks-eg nurses, teachers, retail managers, local authority employees, civil servants.

This is not to deny the enormous hardship of trying to study in a bedroom shared with siblings, of having no

spare cash for when the washing machine breaks down, and no money for trips or meals out, or new shoes. Nor does anything excuse the shocking remarks of some teachers who are reported here to have been less than helpful when their pupils had a dream for the future. Nor the snobbism of some about the plays, the art, the "cultural" capital certain people feel they have.

Having grown up in a small village, I knew a wide variety of people and saw something of their lives; from farm laborers to the "lord of the manor", but probably nowadays with more people being city dwellers and ghettoisation of classes, and of races too, into largely separate housing areas that is not so common. But how wonderful to hear the praise for the neighbourly community spirit that exists in some social housing areas, but is sadly lacking in many of our smart, suburban, owner occupied housing elsewhere.

Katy says

This took me an entire month to read because the only copy I could get a hold of was on audiobook, and audiobooks are my struggle. That said, this is an utterly brilliant collection. It covers such a variety of topics, from queer families to immigration to accents to council estates. I highly recommend it to anyone who is interested in reading about the intersections of race and class or to anyone who wants to hear about working class experiences from working class people instead of from people who were educated at Eton.

Laura says

A mixed bag of essays - all of them interesting in their own way. It doesn't quite hang together as a whole book, but I'm not sure that's the point anyway. Definitely worth dipping in and out of until you've read them all

Jackie Law says

Know Your Place is a collection of twenty-three essays written by working class writers about their experiences of being working class in Britain today. The writers' families identify with a variety of colours and cultures, which add to the way they are perceived by themselves and others. Most of the writers appear to have attained a university education, and to have moved away from the environment in which they were raised. The essays explore the effort required to push against perceptions, the cost of trying to realise their potential in spaces dominated by those whose background is one of greater privilege.

The collection opens with *The First Galleries I Knew Were Black Homes*, in which Abundance Matanda talks of art, accessibility, and who decides what is valued. It argues that the supposed elite of the art world should not assume that the unrepresented are culturally deprived.

"Being a black working class woman, I exist on the peripheries, in the shadows of British society. It's scarily likely that you might not see me or my experiences portrayed at all, let alone wholesomely in our visual culture or art history."

The author's peers do, however, know about art and heritage. The problem, as in many of the issues raised in the following essays, is breaking through the barriers erected by traditional gatekeepers who do not always see a need to facilitate change.

In *The Pleasure Button: Low Income Food Inequality*, Laura Waddell discusses the joy experienced when consuming fatty, salty food, which is accessible where healthier entertainments are beyond limited budgets. Those who can afford to drive to a large supermarket and stock up on fresh fruit and vegetables will often shake their heads at the dietary choices of those living in poverty, ignoring the causes. This reaction, to blame the poor for their situation, is a recurring theme.

Several of the authors discuss the positives of growing up working class, which includes the comfort of belonging and a feeling of community. In *The Death of a Pub*, Dominic Grace recalls a drinking establishment he frequented in south Leeds, where generations of the same families would get together after a hard days graft. It may have been a rough place but these were blokes enjoying friendly banter over a well earned pint at the end of a long day. Unfortunately, to me, it was reminiscent of the attitude of the wealthy to their London Clubs which ban women as this would change member's freedom to talk and act as they choose. The working man's pub appeared intimidating to those who did not belong to that socioeconomic group.

Many of the essay authors' parents worked hard to enable their offspring to progress through education. Those who made it to better schools write of the challenges this brings. Just as work colleagues may not appreciate the difficulties presented by a lack of parental contacts or financial backup, so classmates did not understand why house size and quantity of possessions could cause embarrassment. There are also casual preconceptions, such as the assumption that a package holiday to Benidorm is somehow less admirable than a bespoke journey through a remote corner of Asia.

There are discussions on benefits, sexuality, visibility and the culture of blame. There is a correlation between poverty and mental health as well as the obvious physical effects of poor nutrition. In *Where There's Shit, There's Gold*, Ben Gwalchmai looks at rural poverty and the jobs he took as a child living in Wales. *The Housework Issue (The Other One)* asks why certain jobs are looked down upon, especially those that provide benefit to many.

"We, working class women, and all of us, have been sold a lie. The fabrication that if we work hard, do the right thing – whatever that means – that we'll be ok and get the good stuff. We'll get the status, and a good sense of pride, and if we're not ok we deserve our poverty; it's our own fault because we're not working hard enough.

The inconvenient truth is that a badly paid and low status job with no prospects like cleaning keeps you poor. Hard work does not lift people out of poverty or issue status, not if you scrub toilets for a living anyway."

In *Reclaiming the Vulgar*, Kath McKay asks who defines good taste, and who cares. Value judgements have been attached to many things, including how people furnish their homes, dress and speak. This results in sizeable portions of the population being silenced, their voices somehow deemed unworthy. In *The Wrong Frequency*, Kate Fox explores the judgements made about those who speak with regional accents. Class differences are reinforced by perceived regional stereotypes.

Many of the essays deal with belonging and the disconnects successful social mobility can introduce. In *What Colour is a Chameleon*, Rym Kechacha discusses the necessity of talking and acting differently in order to gain acceptance.

"I have heard too many people frown when they hear me speak, too many people assume I haven't read that book they're talking about [...] I know that no one is fooled about my origins, and I don't even know if I want them to be."

The final essay, *You're Not Working Class*, is by the editor of the collection, Nathan Connolly. In it he asks what the term even means. There are those who try to delegitimise others who identify as working class.

They are thereby complicit in attempting to silence someone who does not conform to their expectations.

To be better understood it is necessary to be heard and these essays provide a platform from which marginalised writers may speak for themselves. From the quality of the arguments presented it is clear that they are more than capable of elucidating cogent and balanced opinions. The stories they tell provide a lesson a wider audience would undoubtedly benefit from learning. This is a recommended read.

Suzanne says

An uneven, but absolutely worth your time, collection of essays about the working class in Britain.

There are a few essays that dip into irritating academia-speak like 'intersubjectivity' and 'phenomenological terms' and 'visually and materially cultivating manifestations of our values,' but many more that are clear, fascinating and thought-provoking. The collection gets better as it goes along, and the last five full essays are really good, especially Alexandros Plasatis's 'The Immigrant of Narborough Road.'

Arlene says

Love this. Absolutely ticks all my boxes for 'wide range of perspectives from voices that don't get heard enough'. Fascinating collection.

Caroline says

Recommended reading for anyone wanting to understand what it means to be working class in the UK today. Such a wide variety of essays included here, and not a bad one in the bunch.

I took my time over this one, reading a couple of essays each week. There are so many interesting voices in this collection that it seemed a shame to sit down and try and listen to them all at once.

Richard Newton says

Class is not a UK invention and is not unique to the UK, but there are some unique characteristics about the UK class system. Although it will have some universal appeal, in many ways this is a very British book exploring the experiences of being modern, British working class. I thought this was very good. The writing is a little variable, but generally of a high standard and in many cases really excellent.

The essays are enlightening, and often uncomfortable reading for someone in a more privileged situation. This a good thing as it knocks a level of smugness out of and a degree of self-awareness into the reader - and I believe many middle class readers would benefit from reading this book.

It's interesting for describing the working class experience - mostly in terms of what it is not - it is not privilege, it is definitely not middle class. The picture that comes across mainly is of disadvantage. One or two of the writers also describe some of the positives, such as sense of community, often missing in middle

class groups. But the positives are limited. Only one writer explores the nature of the rural working class.

It's no criticism of the book, but I would have been interested in a little more exploration of what it means to be working class. Not just in the sense of the experience of being working class, but what makes one person working class and another not. There are some obvious features, but it is not just about money and privilege as a couple of the writers make clear they now have middle class lifestyles, and yet still consider themselves working class. The last essay, by the book's editor, touches on this, but it is not fully explored.

Robyn (FailFish) says

This was an excellent collection of essays. Many of them were extremely thought-provoking and they all brought new and interesting perspectives on the various aspects of being 'working class'. There were elements of humour and joy mixed in with frustration and anger, and despite many of the essays being quite different they all tied together very well. I loved the variety of themes being explored. In particular, I loved Gena-mour Barrett's 'Living on an Estate Gave me a Community I Never Knew I Needed' discussing the positives of growing up in a close-knit estate community versus a middle-class urban neighbourhood - a refreshing narrative compared to many in the media. Kate Fox's 'The Wrong Frequency' was also brilliant, and Laura Waddell's 'The Pleasure Button: Low Income Food Inequality' resonated on many levels. Rym Kechacha's 'What Colour is a Chameleon?' was beautifully honest and introspective, and possibly my favourite essay of them all (although as so many were excellent it is very hard to choose).

The single niggle - and it is a very small niggle - with the entire book was that I couldn't get the first author's 'voice'. I thought she penned an essay on a very important subject, but unlike the other authors I couldn't quite get into her voice and perspective. However, it may just be that I lack understanding on the subject - or the fact that as a reader, I have always struggled with books written with colloquialisms.

This is an extremely important anthology that allows a generally poorly-represented group of people to discuss their culture and experiences with the world. Highly recommended.

enricocioni says

I read this collection as an outsider—as an Italian, and as someone who's so far enjoyed a life of relative privilege. I wanted to read Know Your Place because I want to learn more about the country I've lived in for almost a decade, and in which I plan to live for the foreseeable future, and I particularly want to know more about the stories that are usually excluded from the official narrative. And, speaking of official narratives, ever since the Brexit referendum, voices from all sides have tried to persuade me that, as an EU migrant, the British working class should be my natural enemy, and it made sense to try to counter these voices by reading a book written specifically by working class authors. And, now that I've finished it, I this book has given me an empathy upgrade, and a few more layers of resistance towards media or political narratives that demonise the working class.

Siân Esther says

A collection of essays written by working class writers about being working class.

I'll let people make up their own mind about the individual essays some of which I LOVED and others I didn't really connect with at all.

But there is value to this collection: and the stories that did connect with me REALLY did.

Laura says

Really enjoyed this. The stuff on the North and accents was particularly interesting, but it also made me consider views and angles I'd never thought of before (e.g. the girl who grew up with two mums in the era of Section 28). I'm off to Google them all now - I definitely want to hear more of these marginalised working-class voices. Mission accomplished, lads!

Jayne says

Great variety

This is an excellent collection of essays describing working class experiences of all types. I had feared that it might be a little repetitive but the variety is huge. I definitely recommend it to anyone interested in the working class in the 1970s and beyond.
