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New Times revisited: Britain in the 1980s

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ABSTRACT

The authors in this volume are collectively engaged with a historical puzzle: What happens if we examine the decade once we step out of the shadows cast by Thatcher? That is, does the decade of the 1980s as a significant and meaningful periodisation (equivalent to that of the 1960s) still work if Thatcher becomes but one part of the story rather than the story itself? The essays in this collection suggest that the 1980s only makes sense as a political period. They situate the 1980s within various longer term trajectories that show the events of the decade to be as much the consequence as the cause of bigger, long-term historical processes. This introduction contextualises the collection within the wider literature, before explaining the collective and individual contributions made.

KEYWORDS

1980s; Thatcherism; neoliberalism; contemporary British history; new times

In a now well-known set of essays collected from *Marxism Today*, Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques compiled a series of pieces delineating the shape of the ‘new times’ that they felt characterised 1980s Britain. Building on Hall’s analysis of the politics of Thatcherism from 1979, the essays explored—amongst other concerns—the social and cultural developments that flowed from an increasingly ‘post-fordist’ economy, the implications of the breakdown of the post-war consensus, the challenges to Keynesian economic frameworks and the shifting sociopolitical solidarities emerging as rivals to class.¹ Whereas Hall’s earlier work encouraged the left to take Thatcherism seriously as a hegemonic project, now Hall and Jacques wanted to challenge accounts of the 1980s that positioned ‘Thatcherism’ centre stage as the driving force of the decade. They wanted to argue that Thatcherism was not inevitable; to decouple the social, economic, institutional and cultural conditions of the 1980s from the ascendancy of ‘Thatcherism’.

Embedded within such a position was a broader and longer view of social and cultural change in ‘post-fordist’ times. Cumulatively, the ‘new times’ essays contended that Britain had qualitatively, but incrementally, changed during the 1980s. Diversity, fragmentation and differentiation were replacing homogeneity and standardisation as the defining characteristics of advanced capitalist societies. If this analysis was often rooted in an understanding of longer and deeper historical processes, the arguments were unequivocally motivated by a politics of the present and future. The subtitle of the collection—‘the changing face of

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politics in the 1990s'—epitomised the forward-looking nature of many of the contributions. While the individual essays eventually compiled within the *New Times* volume variously focussed attention on questions of identity, consumption and citizenship, the general thrust of the collected works pointed overwhelmingly to the political: sketching what had changed in post-war Britain and defining the forms of progressive politics that might be appropriate for the 'new times' described.

The *New Times* collection argued that alternative political formulations, albeit predicated on a reformulation of the left, were viable and available. In this sense, the 'new times' thesis was not, in fact, all that new. As Alex Campsie shows in his contribution to this special issue, this was something of a 'rebranding' of longer standing attempts by new left intellectuals to find alternative points of contention and constituencies around which left-wing politics might frame its agendas.² Jacques and his collaborators depicted their work as dramatically 'new' to make bold claims that would resonate with the largely well-educated, metropolitan readership that *Marxism Today* cultivated and, indeed, required. *New Times* should not, however, be regarded as a hollow, presentational project. As Stuart Hall previously emphasised, 'we can only renew the project of the left by precisely occupying the *same world* that Thatcherism does, and building from that a *different* form of society'.³ Tacitly acknowledged within the essays was the aspiration to continue picking apart the idea that Thatcherism was the inevitable result of—and was legitimated by—social and cultural change. Separating the ascent of Thatcher from the historical circumstances which facilitated her trajectory remains an important theme for historians reflecting on the 1980s. While this collection of articles is not an attempt to 'update' the *New Times* project, it does follow in their footsteps, continuing the work begun by the *New Times* writers.

Like the *New Times* authors, the historians collected here in various ways uncouple the social, economic and cultural changes of the decade from the politics of the period. Moreover, they suggest that even the politics of the era need not be overdetermined by 'Thatcherism'. In the case of left politics in London and Sheffield, internal dynamics and precedents shaped developments in the 1980s, as much as the external force of 'Thatcherism'.⁴ The authors collected here also contribute to the work of historicising and destabilising understandings of 'neoliberalism'; they illuminate, on the one hand, the reach of a 'thin' version of 'neoliberal' ideas within British culture (for example, in the institutions promoting wider share ownership in the 1980s); but, on the other hand, they suggest that 'neoliberalism' never became hegemonic in the decade, with phenomena like the mass giving of Band Aid disrupting simple readings of the decade as one where individualism triumphed.⁵ Thus, the papers contribute in various ways to showing that Thatcher and Thatcherism were not inevitable, and were not the sole guiding force of or analytic framework through which we should understand the 1980s. There were other, longer, economic, technological, social and cultural trajectories that account for historical phenomena occurring during the decade.

In the process of illuminating other forces shaping the 1980s, the papers collected here draw attention to 'ordinariness' as a central—but contested—discursive theme in the decade and a productive avenue for historical inquiry. Different discourses of 'ordinariness' can be found in these papers. It was mobilised to try to sell popular share ownership, to justify vigilance in the protection of homes and underpin forms of community activism; often it was framed to undermine a politics of 'class'. As Raymond Williams suggested, 'culture is ordinary', encompassing the 'common meanings and directions' of a society. The ordinary, everyday and banal facets of culture are, thus, productive territory to explore at any moment.

It becomes particularly pressing to explore discourses of 'ordinariness' at a time when claims to represent the 'ordinary' were frequent and highly politicised.⁶ The varied deployment of 'ordinariness' within these papers suggests, however, that vernacular discourses associated with the notion did not necessarily point in any single, straightforward direction and proved resistant to party politicisation.⁷ Whether giving accounts of their position in society in interviews with researchers, making demands of the state as citizens, investing and failing to invest in new share schemes, participating in charitable giving from their living rooms or personalising their politics, individuals with very different subjectivities laid claim to authenticity and 'ordinariness' in this period.⁸ We must understand the differences, matches and mismatches between versions of 'ordinariness' in the 1980s in order to understand what political work the concept did, as well as, the historical work it allows us to do.

It is in the sphere of the 'ordinary' or 'everyday' that bold claims about social, political, economic and cultural change within and beyond the 1980s might be tested—claims relating to the decisive impact of 'Thatcherism', 'neoliberalism' or 'individualism'. Of course the relationship between the ordinary and the political is not always obvious; for example, to some, privatisation might have been as much about the changed experience of waiting for the bus as investing in financial services.⁹ Searching for the history of the 'ordinary' and the 'everyday' will aid us in writing the history of the late-twentieth century because these were the spaces which neoliberalism supposedly diffused throughout society, through the creation of *Homo Economicus*.¹⁰ Similarly, others have looked to the everyday to deny that 'ordinary life' is ever apolitical, and to find points of resistance against neoliberalism.¹¹ But even when we acknowledge that it is possible to see, as Joe Moran observes, 'the reality of, and potential for, historical change in the most ordinary phenomenon', these essays show that the ordinary is revealing, but not straightforward—whether the subject is the Sheffield radical, social survey participant, minority voter, Neighbourhood Watcher or Band Aid viewer.¹²

This introduction will discuss three key challenges facing those working on contemporary history and the 1980s in particular. We will then outline recent developments in the historiography that have started to offer a more complex view of the 1980s and the post-war period as a whole, and to address some of those problems. Finally, we will reflect in more detail on how the papers collected here add to these emerging historiographical themes and offer a new view of the 1980s not as 'overdetermined' by Thatcher but as transected by other currents and forces.

The three issues we want to highlight with the historiography of the 1980s relate to Thatcherism, social democracy and neoliberalism, and all three are, of course, linked. The first point is that Thatcher is too often positioned as the 'guiding force' of the decade, and 'Thatcherism' is too often taken as the central analytical category. There are obvious reasons why historians of 1980s have often framed their works around Thatcher: this was a decade neatly bookended by the rise and fall of her governments. In the plethora of popular accounts of the 1980s that have started to appear, Thatcher appears to have decisively shaped political and cultural events. With titles such as *Bang!*, *No Such Thing as Society*, *When the Iron Lady Ruled* and *Rejoice! Rejoice!*, several things are striking: the lack of nuance; the desire to make Thatcher either the saint or scourge of a decade; and a determination to understand political, social, cultural or economic developments visible in and after the 1980s as manifestations of Thatcherism or some related variant—usually 'neoliberalism'.¹³ In these popular works, turns to culture and society are all too often the entertaining sideshows in a story dominated by Westminster, and the key question is always related to Thatcherism; thus, in Andy Beckett's

Promised You a Miracle, it seems obvious that the main question one might ask of the oeuvre of the pop-band ABC is the extent to which it was 'Thatcherite'.¹⁴

We can see this tendency, too, in works for an academic audience. Political histories naturally focus on Thatcher, and are often framed within the long-running debate about the ideological coherence and lineage of 'Thatcherism'. Richard Vinen's *Thatcher's Britain*, for example, argued that the contingent, 'événementiel', 'pragmatic' aspects of Thatcherism have been neglected, and that what Thatcherism was really about was 'power'.¹⁵ Scholars have also assessed Thatcher's effects from a huge number of angles. Hay and Farrell's edited collection attempts to 're-assess' the history of the decade through the analysis of policy, and explicitly frames the study around the question of the effects of 'Thatcherism'.¹⁶ We see a similar centring of Thatcher in efforts to move towards the social and the cultural. The contributors to Ben Jackson and Robert Saunders' edited collection might be variously interested in class, gender, religion or decolonisation in the 1980s, but all approach their subject with the political, generally with Thatcher herself, as a key point of reference.¹⁷ Other works have assessed her effects on popular culture, discourses of the 'underclass', and theatre.¹⁸ Thus, as historians we have tended to ask not 'where did these changes come from?' but, 'what was Thatcherism?'; 'how far did Thatcherism cause this?' To put it in the terms of a 1989 edited collection (these questions seem as old as Thatcher herself): what was the 'Thatcher effect'?¹⁹ But taking up such an agenda becomes potentially reductive. As Stephen Brooke has suggested, we need to take the 1980s out from the shadow of Thatcherism and look for other 'guiding forces' for the events of the decade. This, he argues, will avoid 'flattening' our historical understanding of the decade and allow us to avoid an analytical framework predicated on the notion that Thatcher was, as popular histories of the decade assume, 'the guiding spirit of the age'.²⁰

The historiography on the 1980s reflects a wider issue in contemporary British history. Perhaps more than any other period, post-war British historiography is dominated by a periodisation and narrative structure taken from *political* history. We can see this, for example, in Brian Harrison's two volumes for the Oxford History of Britain series covering the post-war period. Deeply impressive surveys of all aspects of Britain, these volumes nonetheless, and unlike the series' volumes on earlier periods, lack clear narrative thrusts lying outside the political.²¹ Moreover, it is striking the extent to which this periodisation and the analytical categories it uses have been drawn from contemporary political rhetoric—'Thatcherism', 'neoliberalism', 'social democracy', and the 'postwar consensus' are all terms that have been prevalent in political debate since at least the 1970s. Indeed, just at the moment when Paul Addison was developing the thesis of the 'postwar consensus', Keith Joseph and Thatcher herself were constructing a narrative of a 'progressive consensus' adhered to, 'in varying degrees by all political parties ... and among social commentators generally' in the post-war period, waiting to be smashed by her new approach.²² Few works of synthesis have appeared that offer a periodisation which does not roughly divide the post-war period into three: first, the triumph of social democracy in the post-war settlement; second, its developing problems under the pressure of primarily economic contradictions (the failure of corporatism and Keynesian demand management in the face of inflation); and finally, the triumph of 'neoliberalism'.²³ While there might be much that is original and compelling in works such as Selina Todd's analysis of working-class social and cultural life and politics in the period 1910–2010, it reflects such a historical arc.²⁴

The social democracy/neoliberalism narrative has some real and obvious utility. However, it swiftly looks problematic when you probe under the surface, and, even more problematically, making use of this as a dominant grand narrative leads to a tendency for all social and cultural change to be read as a the result of, or collapsed into, these discursive and political changes. This is particularly the case in the various entertaining and extensive accounts of post-1945 Britain from authors like Peter Hennessy, David Kynaston and Dominic Sandbrook. As they weave their way evocatively through the post-war decades, there is no sense that any overarching interpretative framework will be provided outside of the political. Once they reach the 1980s, it seems inevitable (as in the accounts of McSmith, Stewart, Beckett and Turner) that Thatcher will provide the principal organising structure of their books, and that their discussions of culture and society will be ornaments hung onto an essentially political analysis and periodisation. Our intention here is not to deny the existence of profound political change in the decade. Thatcherism was a hegemonic project (as Hall argued), albeit one that looks less coherent and messier when scrutinised at a less abstract level. But we need to attend to other social, cultural, economic and technological dynamics at work to properly understand the period. 1979 should not always be the turning point in the story. As recent work has begun to talk of the ‘mid-twentieth century’ as a coherent period for some purposes, questioning the view of the Second World War as transformative, so we should do the same for 1979.²⁵

Finally, we have to note the problematic ways in which the term ‘neoliberalism’ has often been used. There is an undoubted tendency for some left-wing activists, and indeed political scientists, to deploy a rather ambiguously sketched concept of ‘neoliberalism’ as a catch-all analytical framework for understanding the present. ‘Neoliberalism’ too often here means ‘everything we don’t like’. There are some good reasons for seeing the ‘ascent of neoliberalism’ as a useful account of the period from the 1970s to the present, but we need to be precise in how we use this term as an analytical category. Are we using it to refer to a narrow body of political-economic ideas developed and peddled by a self-conscious group of scholars?²⁶ If so, we must be attentive to change in the content of those ideas over time as well as their diffusion beyond intellectuals and related think tanks and into the mainstream. Alternatively, should the term be deployed as a marker of the most recent structural contradictions of capitalism which have facilitated the dominance of finance across the globe?²⁷ Or are we interested in this as a ‘governing rationality’ or ‘biopolitics’ through which all forms of human activity and humans themselves are economised or financialised?²⁸ In addition to taking care not to use it sloppily as an analytical category, we should be prepared as historians to historicise the term ‘neoliberalism’ itself and be precise about its chronologies. This has been done all too rarely within the existing historiography.

Of course, in setting out these three interlinked themes within the existing historiography, we must also acknowledge that the works above offer many valuable readings of the period. Debates about what Thatcherism is and what its effects were are vitally important ones, even if they should not be the sole line of enquiry. Moreover, this collection builds on the contributions of a number of important recent—and a few not so recent—developments in the historiography, which have already pointed towards how we might write a more nuanced story of the 1980s.

First, there is a variety of work complicating simple understandings of Thatcherism as the result of the ‘crisis’ of social democracy that emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s. Insightful genealogies of Thatcherism have highlighted its roots in longstanding strands of

Conservatism, going back to, for example, the 'property-owning democracy' of the interwar period, the One Nation group of the 1950s and the populist, right-wing new social movements of the 1960s, like Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers' and Listeners' Association.²⁹ Furthermore, scholars have shown how Thatcher, Thatcherites and the right-wing media carefully constructed a particular narrative of the 1970s and the 'winter of discontent' as structural crisis, in order to make credible the Thatcherite 'medicine'.³⁰ The 1970s is better seen not as a decade of organic 'crisis' but as one where various evolving problems and the variety of solutions put forward to remedy them created a 'marketplace of ideas': a difficult decade, but one ripe with potential.³¹ Thatcherism was not simply a response to a particular crisis, but constructed the first accounts of that 'crisis'.

From another angle, various scholars have started to complicate the relationship between 'Thatcherism' and its 'neoliberal' inheritance. For a start, the political economists loosely grouped under the label 'neoliberal' were extremely diverse in their thinking; scholars now usually divide 'neoliberalism' into at least three schools: early German *ordo-liberals* interested in the free (unplanned) economy and the strong state, the Austrian School associated with Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises and the Chicago School associated with Milton Friedman.³² Building on this work, accounts of specific policy areas have begun to offer more nuanced analyses of the precise nature of the neoliberalism which influenced Thatcherite reforms; for example, it was 'ordo-liberal' logic which was most evident in the Thatcherite pensions reforms.³³ Meanwhile, others have focused on the personal beliefs inculcated by Thatcher's Methodist, small-town, lower middle-class upbringing, stressing the interplay of these ideas with 'neoliberal' ones in the shaping of 'Thatcherism'.³⁴ This was, thus, about more than just neoliberalism, and it was not always in tune with every brand of 'neoliberal' ideas.

At the same time, the chronology of the 'neoliberal' moment has been unpicked. Economic historians have offered new pre-histories of the application of 'neoliberal' economic policies to the British economy *before* Thatcher, and pointed to the importance of actors from the business community, as well as economists and politicians, in bringing about the 'neoliberal revolution' well before Thatcher came to power.³⁵ Scholars of international relations have highlighted how, just as Britain was looking more to American 'neoliberal' ideas, we also witnessed the growing significance of Europe, if not culturally then legally and economically: the importance of the European Convention of Human Rights increased profoundly within the UK—especially in the NGO sector—while the Single European Act moved Britain substantially towards European integration.³⁶

Further complicating the picture, historians have begun to trace the pre-history of 'neoliberal' ideas (like the Enterprise Zones that transformed some British cities in the 1980s) within the Liberal and Labour Parties of post-war Britain.³⁷ Ideas which can be seen as 'neoliberal'—stressing individual freedom, choice and the market—were attractive to some on the left of the political spectrum as well as the right, well before 'Thatcherism'. In 1976, Jim Callaghan famously told the Labour Party conference that Britain could no longer 'spend [its] way out of a recession'.³⁸ Meanwhile, other ideas made the transition in the opposite direction: for example, the idea of the 'congestion charge', repackaged as social democracy under Ken Livingstone in the 1990s, originated as a neoliberal idea, albeit one that Thatcher could not abide.³⁹ Some major policy shifts of the 1980s had roots in a bewildering complexity of places: neoliberalism, social democratic paternalism *and* radical counterculture. As Barbara Taylor has pointed out, the end of the asylum in Britain was called for by neoliberals who wanted to shrink the state, left-wing reformers shocked by abuses, patients

organised into 'consumer' movements, and counter-cultural anti-psychiatrists like R.D. Laing.⁴⁰ It was not only right-wing critics but also many of those who had been most committed to modernist planning and redevelopment of the built environment who were disillusioned with such an approach by the 1970s.⁴¹ This work cumulatively contributes to a view of Thatcherism not as the inevitable solution to a pervasive crisis of the 1970s, or the outcome of decades of development of 'neoliberal' political economy peddled by a core of right-wing ideologues.⁴² Rather Thatcherism is a contingent outcome; there were other possible roads not taken.

Furthermore, in analyses of the success and failure of 'Thatcherism', we have many which emphasise the extent to which Thatcherism *failed* in its hegemonic aspirations. As early as 1989, Ivor Crewe wrote that Thatcher's attempts to change British values was 'the crusade that failed'.⁴³ Thatcher also failed to strip out Keynesian demand management from government as completely as she wanted.⁴⁴ Though she did succeed in changing the balance of spending on different elements of the welfare state, she did not permanently shrink overall government spending as a proportion of GDP.⁴⁵ As Stephen Brooke has suggested, we can see 'the stubborn persistence of social democracy in the attempt to construct a different world of social democracy at the local level', as well as in support for the NHS and the revolt against the Poll Tax.⁴⁶ The effect of these accounts of Thatcherism is to suggest that not only was Thatcherism not inevitable, but that it was not even that successful on its own terms. Nevertheless, in these accounts, Thatcherism, neoliberalism and their effects on Britain in the 1980s remain centre stage.

There are, however, some significant pieces of historical research already taking the developments of the late twentieth century out of the 'shadow' of Thatcherism. To take just a few; in studies of race and empire, Stephen Howe's longer and more capacious account of the end of empire allows us to see the racial tensions and imperial aftershocks of the 1980s as part of a longer unravelling of the British Empire.⁴⁷ Jordanna Bailkin has shown how the end of empire was a key force structuring the development of the welfare state: we cannot understand this merely as a social democratic project.⁴⁸ Lucy Robinson takes a view from the ground up of soldiers' views of the Falklands war, which can be seen as one of Britain's last imperial engagements.⁴⁹ Broadening the historiographical perspective to fit the British narrative into broader global, transnational and international developments is one important way that some historians have de-centred Thatcher's Britain. Most obviously, the economic challenges Britain faced during 1970s were global, with the collapse of Bretton Woods and the Sterling Area, as well as the subjection of the British economy to an IMF structural adjustment programme, providing the context for the recasting of economic and political institutions by the 1980s. But the global was never just about the economy, while political and cultural changes were by no means straightforward effects of economic changes. Transnational networks played a large part in the development of many 'new social movements' organised around issues like race or sexuality.⁵⁰ Broader global trends and international politics drove the development of movements focused on peace and nuclear disarmament.⁵¹ Andy Jones's paper in this collection picks up on this, showing how the politics of Band Aid in Britain must be situated in the context of global poverty and humanitarian crisis. Placing the national in the context of the global offers much potential to rethink narratives of post-war British history.⁵²

In the contributions of scholars more focused on the 'ordinary', the 'everyday' and the national sphere, we also find work de-centring 'Thatcherism' from accounts of the 1980s.

Examinations of 'class' identities and discourses in the late twentieth century have displaced Thatcher from the centre of their stories. Mike Savage, Jon Lawrence, and John Davis all suggest that the emergence of working-class individualism does not have to be a product of a Thatcherite 'colonization' of cultural, social and political spaces.⁵³ Sam Wetherell examines community arts in Hackney in the 1970s and 1980s, showing how by the end of the 1970s 'class as a primary category of social analysis was beginning to be displaced by other categories', tracing this shift not to Thatcherism but to other dynamics in left politics and society.⁵⁴ Gavin Schaffer suggests that the emergence of alternative comedy during the 1980s was as much part of a longer tradition of radical humour as a specific response to Thatcherism itself.⁵⁵ Matt Worley's work on the 'Oi' movement within the punk scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s depicts it as related to but not reducible to Thatcherism: 'opposed to Thatcher's assault on the industrial and cultural cornerstones of British working-class life whilst simultaneously baulking at the stultifying bureaucracy of Labour social democracy and rarefied identity politics of the left.'⁵⁶

When it comes to gender, sexuality and the family, historians have been even quicker to offer narratives which decentre Thatcher from accounts of the 1980s. The conservative social ideals associated with Thatcher appeared far from hegemonic by the 1990s.⁵⁷ The increased number of women entering into the workforce, changes in family structure, with the rise of divorce and cohabitation, and, although fraught and contested, the increased visibility and acceptance of alternative sexualities, were all indicative of the ambiguous social and cultural outcomes of any political revolution that took place during the 1980s.⁵⁸ Jeffrey Weeks has perhaps come closest to offering an account of the post-war period in Britain that offers an alternative driving force, and alternative narrative arc, to the dominant political periodisation. In *The World We Have Won*, Weeks suggests seeing the period as one of patchy but gradual individual liberation and 'new individualism'. He suggests that this has been won by individuals themselves, in a process occurring at the molecular level of society, driven by individuals' deepest desires for freedom and self-expression.⁵⁹

This collection of essays builds on these works and others which have begun to offer narratives in which the social and cultural developments of the 1980s are not only narrated in relation to Thatcherism, but placed in the context of longer term trajectories that cut across the decade. The essays collected here contribute to the project of taking the 1980s out of the 'shadow' of Thatcherism, giving a more complex account of 'Thatcherism' and 'neoliberalism', and demonstrating that Thatcherism was not inevitable. We now turn to examining how, in their various ways, the authors do this.

Several of the papers in this collection focus on bringing the left out of the shadow of Thatcherism. Alex Campsie's article begins with a reassessment and historicising of the *New Times* papers themselves. Campsie argues the ideas found in the *New Times* collection must be related to longer term trajectories of new left thinking and long-standing attempts to construct a new role for progressive intellectuals.⁶⁰ This paper pushes us to reassess accounts of left thinking in the 1980s which see it as 'accommodating' itself to changed economic and social circumstances.⁶¹ *New Times* involved constructing particular accounts of economic and social change, and the project was shaped by Martin Jacques' particular political and cultural project. The *New Times* authors hoped that the new cultural experiences of urban life—the more mobile and democratic consumerism, leisure and activism of the city—could usher in a 'more democratic phase' of global capitalism. Here parallels might be drawn with Andy Jones's suggestion that Band Aid made charity less elite through association with the

seemingly 'classless glamour' of celebrities.⁶² The *New Times* debates, however, represented the continued negotiation between an enthusiasm for cultural democratisation and its egalitarian potential with efforts to place elites (albeit progressive ones) at the centre of such processes. So while *New Times* might be used to help us frame the decade, these debates had their own internal logics and contextually specific components which should not be forgotten when attempting to find intellectual starting points for understanding the 1980s.⁶³

The contribution from Daisy Payling on left politics in Sheffield similarly draws our attention to powerful *internal* dynamics driving intellectual and political projects of the left in the 1980s. Payling's essay thus contests the notion that the 'common enemy' of Thatcher promoted new forms of solidarity or proved a crippling obstacle to left-wing counter manoeuvres. It is well known that at the municipal level, the left had far more vitality in the 1980s than it appeared to have at national level, as in the GLC and in Sheffield.⁶⁴ However, the 'old' left politics of class and material interests is often contrasted with the 'new' politics of post-material social movements, with the 1970s being the key period of transition.⁶⁵ The 1980s were a period of introspection for the Labour Party as it sought new forms of collective solidarity to replace its class-bound and cloth cap image.⁶⁶ Yet outside the crucible of national politics, as Payling shows, the old and the new often lived side by side: a local authority like Sheffield was relatively successful in combining attention to 'traditional' class issues with 'new' identity politics. Gay rights proved, however, the exception here. But even then, the difficulties in accommodating gay rights into Sheffield city council's agenda owed much to Sheffield's local history and Socialist heritage. It was not simply a consequence of the new right discourse on homosexuality.⁶⁷ In a similar way to recent work on race in the women's movement by Natalie Thomlinson, which suggests that the women's movement was not fractured by Thatcherism but by the difficult ideological and emotional responses thrown up by the politics of race, Payling's essay shows that left-wing political movements were governed by their own internal dynamics and trajectories.⁶⁸

If dealing with the ideational complexities of late twentieth century politics provided a challenge to those working in Socialist local government, it proved even more difficult to the Conservative Party. Matthew Francis charts the history of the Party's attempt to cultivate a share of the 'minority' vote through the creation of the Anglo Asian Conservative and the National Anglo West Indian Conservative Societies, which began in 1976, a year after Thatcher had won the leadership of the Conservative Party. Although not disagreeing with Paul Gilroy and others who have suggested that Thatcherism was shot through with 'new', culturally based, racist assumptions, Francis offers an alternative, less well-known window onto the racial politics of the Thatcher era. Francis also shows that there were precedents for the Conservative Party's attempts to reach ethnic minority voters going back to the 1950s. There were also important continuities in how the Conservative Party sought to cultivate an electorate by offering seemingly 'apolitical' forms of associational life.⁶⁹ Ultimately, however, the Conservative Party proved unable to discuss immigration and race relations in a way in which the interests of ethnic minority electorates could be reconciled with its core vote during the 1980s.

Several other contributions remain focused on right-wing politics, and seek to scrutinise the reach of 'Thatcherism' by assessing its existence outside policy frameworks, opinion polls or Conservative intellectual traditions. Alison Light has suggested that the 'politics of everyday life could be as easily read from the suburban semi as from the doings of politicians and their ilk.'⁷⁰ As Light puts it, we should aim to understand not only formal ideologies, but also

'the least articulate level of conservatism'.⁷¹ As Amy Edwards shows, the processes and institutions through which the financial revolutions of the 1980s were 'normalized' were as important to diffusing a 'thin' version of 'neoliberal' common sense as academic theorising. Edwards highlights the contradictions between those ideologues who had pushed for a nation of stockholders for several decades and the different institutional mediators and stakeholders in the promotion of Conservative governments' financial reforms. She shows that we need to take into account a wider range of actors than simply politicians and economists in order to understand how 'Thatcherite' policies became embedded in everyday life. In particular, Edwards shows the activities of financial institutions, driven by the profit motive above all, were key to the promotion of consumer capitalism.⁷² Chris Moores, too, shows how in the Neighbourhood Watch movement, police, purveyors of home alarm systems and local activists were important to embedding in everyday life at the neighbourhood level the values of self-reliance. It is possible to read Neighbourhood Watch as a form of grass-roots Thatcherism, but this was imperfect; simultaneously pervasive and thin.⁷³

As suggested in Edwards' conclusion, despite the aim of Thatcherites and financial institutions to make people into self-conscious and self-improving financial consumers, it seems unlikely that they had any great success in the 1980s.⁷⁴ A similar picture of relative *failure* on the part of Thatcherism comes from Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite's article. Here political claims about class during the 1980s, made by both left and right, are contrasted to the more complicated understanding of class identities found in the discourses of 'ordinary' individuals. In contrast with political or historical claims about the decline or resilience of class-based identities in the 1980s, the interview testimonies analysed suggest the instability of the subject both before and during the decade. They also suggest that far from engaging with Thatcherite discourses of 'class', people tended to draw on their personal and family history, their understandings of social and cultural change and popular culture, in giving accounts of the changed 'class' landscape of 1980s' Britain.⁷⁵ The 1980s did not see the wholesale abandonment of class-based self-signifiers that Thatcher hoped for. But neither did ordinary people continue to identify themselves as working class in defiance of the political changes above them.⁷⁶ Rather, the truth lies somewhere in between. As Sutcliffe-Braithwaite shows, class continued to be an important cultural marker, though often it was divorced from older understandings of class as position in structures of economic and political power. However, people continued in large part to identify, and to care about, major inequalities in British society.⁷⁷ As with many of the other contributions, this suggests that while Thatcher may have had, to return to the words of Hall, a 'stronger sense of the epochal changes' that were taking place, she had little control over these.

In fact, many of the papers collected here point to the conclusion that if there was an 'epochal change' in society and culture in the 1980s, it would be a gross error to call it 'Thatcherite'. Indeed, to pick up on a theme raised above, it is unhelpful to frame our analyses of social and cultural change in this period around the question of how 'Thatcherite' or how 'social democratic' it was. It is interesting to note just how often phenomena discussed in this special issue have been analysed by reference to these two categories. Band Aid, for example, was, as both Andy Jones's and Alex Campsie's contributions to this collection point out, seized on briefly by the *Marxism Today* authors as indicative of an anti-Thatcherite collectivist spirit. They soon reversed this judgement, however, and, as Campsie and Jones show, there was in some sense a 'common logic' between the politics of Thatcherism and Band Aid: Band Aid celebrated individual giving and dodged questions about the unjust

structures of the economic and social order, encouraging individual givers to feel as though the solutions to global poverty lay in their own pockets.⁷⁸ Similarly, Moores points out how Neighbourhood Watch was constructed by Thatcher as ‘Thatcherite’ but by Conservative ‘wet’ Douglas Hurd as offering a potential template for a post-Thatcherite Conservative vision of active citizenship.⁷⁹ Moores argues that Neighbourhood Watch encompassed elements of ‘Thatcherism’ but also a distinctively un-Thatcherite propensity to made demands of the state. What is interesting is both the extent to which phenomena of the 1980s are judged on the grounds of how ‘Thatcherite’ they are, and the problems that we immediately hit when we make this the central analytical question. Both Neighbourhood Watch and Band Aid can be seen as Thatcherite in some senses and as challenging Thatcherism in other ways—most obviously in the insistence of both that individualism is not enough, and that collective action is vital, and, indeed, *not diametrically opposed* to individualism.

What this points to is the suggestion that there is a cultural trajectory at work here which is not reducible to ‘Thatcherism’. It has often been suggested that the 1960s counterculture ushered in a heightened sense of individualism and social experimentation, which drove a thirst for the new which the marketplace was often best placed to meet, and which ultimately ushered in ‘Thatcherism’. In this narrative, Thatcherism was the denouement to a story of individual gratification unleashed by the 1960s.⁸⁰ But the cultural and social phenomena unleashed in the 1960s did not *only* flow into Thatcherism. They also, of course, sparked many of the enemies of Thatcherism: the *Marxism Today* authors, elements of the municipal left politics of Sheffield and the GLC.⁸¹ Understanding this bigger trajectory and not reducing it to a story of the ‘triumph of Thatcherism’ is important. It suggests that the view of the 1980s as a moment of ‘culture wars’ between the generation formed by the post-war settlement and the generation that came of age in the 1960s is not necessarily compelling.⁸² In fact, these two different sets of values can be seen not as opposites but as two different points on a spectrum. Following Weeks, we might characterise this trajectory as the development of a ‘new individualism’.⁸³ Of course, alternatives might be suggested, but it is clear that ‘Thatcherism’ does not provide a fully formed explanatory paradigm for understanding the period.

In addition to what we might call a ‘new individualism’, there are several other, bigger, trajectories which emerge in these papers, cutting across the 1980s, shaping the politics, society and culture of the decade. One is technology. As David Edgerton has emphasised for the period 1920–1970, historians need to take science and technology seriously.⁸⁴ Although technology is pretty much a constant driver of change across modern British history, that should not lead us to neglect its importance in the 1980s. While several of the articles compiled here touch on the ways that technology shaped the developments they describe during the 1980s, this does not necessarily feature as a central theme within their arguments: new private security technologies including CCTV and burglar alarms were central to the development of Neighbourhood Watch; advances in film and communications technology made the simultaneous broadcasting spectacle of Band Aid possible; touch screen and telephone technology made share-dealing possible in new ways; Sheffield’s gay politics relied on phone support and made use of shifts in printing technology; and it was changes in the media which informed the evolution of *Marxism Today*.⁸⁵ Beyond examinations of the computerisation of financial services, many works—including the essays collected here—have tended to hint at the powerful effects of technological shifts, as an ever-present contextual force, rather than explicitly examining their impact and relationship

with other significant transformative processes. But if technology is a key driver of change in post-war Britain, then historians need to be especially attentive to the specificities of technological changes taking place and their effects. It was, after all, during the 1980s that the computer was emerging as a common feature in offices and homes, and becoming a vital tool of political communication for parties and NGOs.⁸⁶ Given the flourishing historical interest in techno-politics and material histories of subjectivity, space clearly exists for further work examining the precise implications of new information technology as it impacted economically, culturally and socially during the 1980s.

A second longer trajectory cutting across the 1980s as the decade is described in this collection is the development of community politics from the 1960s onwards. Historians have begun to map this trend in British politics, but have, in general, focused on the left-wing manifestations of 'community politics'.⁸⁷ The influence of the movement on the Young Liberals and, thence, the Liberal Party has been noted but not much explored; nor have forms of urban community politics which might be less easy to define politically.⁸⁸ And the impact of community politics on the right of the political spectrum has been neglected. As Moores shows, however, 'community politics' crossed the left-right divide in this period, and can be found within the grass-roots activism of Neighbourhood Watch.

Turning from big trajectories to the politics of the everyday, we return to the theme of 'ordinariness'. As Jon Lawrence and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite have highlighted, the language of 'ordinariness' was central to Thatcher's construction of an alternative imagined political constituency which sidestepped the language of 'class'. Thatcher used the phrases 'ordinary people' and 'ordinary working people' repeatedly, in order to lump together a large central mass of British society, self-reliant workers, not privileged or hugely wealthy, not part of her imagined 'underclass'.⁸⁹ The discourse of 'ordinariness' was 'diffuse and mutable', however.⁹⁰ Work reanalysing social science interviews with 'working-class' people in the mid-twentieth century suggests that 'ordinariness' had been important to popular identities well before the 1980s.⁹¹ Again, Thatcherism was not the driving force behind the development of this discourse. The essays collected here contribute to understanding more deeply the different ways in which 'ordinariness' was constructed by different groups, and the ends to which it was mobilised in the 1980s.

Matthew Francis's essay demonstrates how the Conservative Party in the 1980s deployed the values they associated with 'ordinariness'—thrift, enterprise, hard work and home-ownership—to attempt to appeal to ethnic minority voters, seeking to destabilise the centrality of the more difficult and politically sensitive category of 'race'.⁹² Edwards shows how financial institutions and Thatcherites used the language of 'ordinariness' to try to sell financial consumerism: they suggested that share-owning was now for the 'ordinary' citizen, and that they wanted to 'get stockbroking out of the ivory towers and into the high street'.⁹³ Thus, their propaganda played on and reinforced currents of populism and anti-establishment feeling in 1980s Britain, implying that share-ownership had been the preserve of a privileged, wealthy elite, but that now it was being thrown open to 'ordinary' people. Similarly, Neighbourhood Watch activists defined the movement by arguing that it existed for 'ordinary people' to take action to defend their neighbourhoods from the 'criminal element', thus positing 'ordinariness' as distinct from the underclass but also from the state. But, as some left-wing activists pointed out, 'ordinariness' could be constructed to be exclusive and exclusionary: if the police force encouraged Neighbourhood Watch among only those it considered 'ordinary', it might reinforce the discriminatory treatment meted out by the police

and other organs of the state to 'minority groups' like black people, gays or single parents and to those not living in suburban street properties.⁹⁴ 'Ordinariness' could be exclusionary on lines of class, race, gender and sexuality. Its power derived in part from the fact that it could *seem* to be almost an all-encompassing term, while in fact having limits. Where those limits lay depended on the individual or group laying claim to 'ordinariness'.

But the mutability of the language meant those limits could not be fixed by Thatcher or by any other single actor in the 1980s. People contested the meaning of ordinariness and claimed it for themselves. As Sutcliffe-Braithwaite's essay shows, the language of 'ordinariness' could be used by both people in white-collar and in blue-collar jobs in the 1980s; moreover, people could and did use *both* claims to be 'middle-class' *and* claims to be 'working-class' as evidence for their 'ordinariness'. 'Ordinary' here seemed to carry some of the same connotations that Thatcher ascribed to the term: it meant having to work for a living, not being part of an imagined 'underclass', and not being privileged or wealthy, or in a position of political influence. But where Thatcher wanted to construct ordinariness as a condition marked by her favoured 'bourgeois' values, some interviewees in the 1980s claimed that ordinariness meant being 'working class', or even 'poor'. If the 1980s was a decade when the 'ordinary' was distinctively valorised by both politicians and people, its precise meanings and limits were shifting and contested.⁹⁵

In a sense, the authors in this volume are collectively engaged with a historical puzzle: what happens if we examine the decade once we step out of the shadows cast by Thatcher? That is, does the decade of the 1980s as a significant and meaningful periodisation (equivalent to that of the 1960s) still work if Thatcher becomes but one part of the story rather than the story itself?⁹⁶ The essays in this collection suggest that the 1980s only makes sense as a *political* period. They situate the 1980s within various longer term trajectories that show the decade to be as much the consequence as the cause of bigger, long-term historical processes. We have drawn out in this introduction several broader trajectories and drivers of change: the internal dynamics of left politics, a new form of individualism, technological change, a vogue for 'community politics'; there are many others.

Notes

1. Hall and Jacques, eds., *New Times*; Hall, "Great Moving Right Show."
2. Campsie, "Socialism will Never be the Same Again."
3. Hall, ed. *Hard Road to Renewal*, 15.
4. Campsie, "Socialism will Never be the Same Again"; Payling, "City Limits."
5. Edwards, "Financial Consumerism"; Jones, "Band Aid Revisited."
6. Williams, "Culture is Ordinary", 75; see also Hilton, "Politics is Ordinary."
7. See Moores, "Thatcher's Troops?"; Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, "Discourses of 'Class'"; Edwards, "Financial Consumerism."
8. *Ibid.*; see also Jones, "Band Aid Revisited."
9. Moran, *Reading the Everyday*, 3–7; Hilton, "Politics is Ordinary."
10. Langley, *The Everyday Life of Global Finance*; Braedley and Luxton, "Competing Philosophies: Neoliberalism and Challenges of Everyday Life", 3–21; Martin, *Financialization of Daily Life*; Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 17–45.
11. See, for example, Harvey, *Rebel Cities*; Mirowski, *Never Let a Good Crisis Go to Waste*.
12. Moran, *Reading the Everyday*, 164.
13. McSmith, *No Such Thing as Society*; Stewart, *Bang!*; Turner, *Rejoice Rejoice!*; Chesshyre, *When the Iron Lady Ruled*.
14. Beckett, *Promised you a Miracle*, 185–191.

15. Vinen, *Thatcher's Britain*, 4–7, 57, 131. See also, eg Fry, *Politics of the Thatcher Revolution*, 109; Kavanagh, "The Making of Thatcherism", 219; Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State*.
16. Farrall and Hay, eds., *The Legacy of Thatcherism*.
17. Jackson and Saunders, *Making Thatcher's Britain*.
18. Hadley and Ho, eds., *Thatcher and After*.
19. Kavanagh and Seldon, eds., *The Thatcher Effect*.
20. Brooke, "Living in 'New Times'"
21. Harrison, *Seeking a Role*; Harrison, *Finding a Role*.
22. Thatcher, speech to the Institute for Socio-Economic studies, 'Let our Children Grow Tall', 15 September 1975, MTF, 102769, <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/102769>. See Addison, *Road to 1945*.
23. A few notable exceptions might be offered; interestingly, several edited collections contain chapters offering strikingly different periodizations and narrative arcs: eg Burk, ed. *The British Isles since 1945* (see especially Peter Mandler's contribution); Gunn and Vernon, eds., *The Peculiarities of Liberal Modernity in Imperial Britain*, (see especially Jon Lawrence's chapter, "Paternalism, Class, and the British Path to Modernity"), and Feldman and Lawrence, eds., *Structures and Transformations in Modern British History*, (see especially Alastair Reid's essay).
24. Todd, *The People*.
25. See eg Jones, *The Working Class in Mid Twentieth-Century England*.
26. Cockett, *Thinking the Unthinkable*; Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*.
27. Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*; Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.
28. Brown, *Undoing the Demos*, 17–111; Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*.
29. Green, *Ideologies of Conservatism*, 214–239; Green, *Thatcher*; Filby, *God and Mrs. Thatcher*; Francis, "A Crusade to Enfranchise the Many"; Whipple, "Ordinary People"; Whipple, "Revisiting the 'Rivers of Blood' Controversy"; Whipple, "Speaking for Whom?" See also Welshman, *Underclass*; Seaton, "Against the 'Sacred Cow'"
30. Hay, "Narrating Crisis"; Saunders, "Thatcherism and the Seventies."
31. Black, Pemberton, and Thane, eds., *Reassessing 1970s Britain*.
32. Jackson, "Freedom, the Common Good, and the Rule of Law"; Jackson, "At the Origins of Neo-Liberalism"; Mirowski and Plehwe, eds., *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*; Turner, *Neo-Liberal Ideology*; Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*.
33. Davies, "Neoliberalism and Thatcherite social policy."
34. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, "Neo-Liberalism and Morality"; Grimley, "Thatcherism, Morality and Religion."
35. Needham, "Britain's Money Supply Experiment"; Williamson, *Conservative Economic Policy-making*; Rollings, "Cracks in the Post-War Keynesian Settlement?"
36. Gamble, "Europe and America"; Cronin, *Global Rules*; Moores, *Civil Liberties and Human Rights*; Madsen, "France, the United Kingdom and the Boomerang."
37. Jackson, "Currents of Neo-Liberalism"; Wetherell, "Freedom Planned"
38. James Callaghan, Leader's speech, Blackpool, 1976, <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=174>.
39. Rooney, "The Political Economy of Congestion."
40. Taylor, "The Demise of the Asylum."
41. Saumarez Smith, "The Inner City Crisis."
42. See Cockett, *Thinking the Unthinkable*.
43. Crewe, "Values: The Crusade That Failed."
44. Keegan, in Campbell, Holmes, and Jones, eds., "Symposium: The Thatcher Years", 15; Tomlinson, "Tale of a Death Exaggerated."
45. Crawford, Emmerson and Tetlow, *A Survey of Public Spending in the UK*.
46. Brooke, "Living in 'New Times'", 27.
47. Howe, "Decolonisation and Imperial Aftershocks."
48. Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*.
49. Robinson, "Soldiers' Stories of the Falklands War."
50. See, eg Angelo, "The Black Panthers in London"; Power, *No Bath But Plenty of Bubbles*.

51. See, eg Nehring, *Politics of Security*; Grant, *After the Bomb*.
52. For a recent statement see Vernon, "The History of Britain is Dead."
53. Savage, "Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study"; Savage, "Changing Social Class Identities in Post-War Britain"; Savage, "Affluence and Social Change"; Savage, *Identities and Social Change*; Lawrence, "Class, 'Affluence' and the Study of Everyday Life"; Lawrence, "Social-Science Encounters and the Negotiation of Difference"; Davis, "The London Cabbie."
54. Wetherell, "Painting the Crisis."
55. Schaffer, "Fighting Thatcher with Comedy."
56. Worley, "Oi! Oi! Oi!"; 23; Worley, "Shot by Both Sides."
57. Moores, "Opposition to the Greenham Women's Peace Camps"; Filby, *God and Mrs. Thatcher*.
58. Weeks, *The World We Have Won*; Langhamer, *The English in Love*; Lewis, *End of Marriage?*; Connolly and Gregory, "Women and Work since 1970."
59. Weeks, *The World We Have Won*.
60. Campsie, "Socialism will Never be the Same Again."
61. See eg Cronin, *New Labour's Past*, Fielding, *The Labour Party*.
62. Jones, "Band Aid Revisited."
63. See Campsie, "Socialism will never be the same again."
64. Payling, "City Limits." See also Payling, "Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire."
65. Eley, *Forging Democracy*, 460–469; Lent, *British Social Movements since 1945*.
66. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, "'Class' in the Development of British Labour Party Ideology."
67. Payling, "City Limits"; Payling, "Socialist Republic of South Yorkshire."
68. Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women's Movement*.
69. See for example McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, McCarthy, "Whose Democracy?"
70. Light, *Forever England*, 16.
71. *Ibid.*, 17.
72. Edwards, "Financial Consumerism."
73. Moores, "Thatcher's troops?"
74. Edwards, "Financial Consumerism."
75. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, "Discourses of 'Class'"
76. Todd, *The People*, 318–359.
77. Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, "Discourses of 'Class'"
78. See Jones, "Band Aid Revisited."
79. Moores, "Thatcher's Troops?"
80. Frank, *One Market Under God*; Heath and Potter, *The Rebel Sell*.
81. See Thomson, *Psychological Subjects*, ch. 8.
82. Curran, Gaber, and Petley, *Culture Wars*, 31.
83. Weeks, *The World We Have Won*.
84. Edgerton, *Warfare State*.
85. Jones, "Band Aid Revisited"; Moores, "Thatcher's Troops?"; Edwards, "Financial Consumerism"; Campsie, "Socialism will Never be the Same Again."
86. Lawrence, *Electing our Masters*, 184; Hilton, *The Politics of Expertise*, 100; Moores, *Civil Liberties and Human Rights*, 253–254; Lean, 'Mediating the Microcomputer'.
87. See Ellis, "Pavement Politics"; Black, *Redefining British Politics*; Woodin, "Muddying the Waters."
88. See for exceptions, eg Lipiatt, "Red Guard versus Old Guard?."
89. Lawrence and Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, "Margaret Thatcher and the Decline of Class Politics"; Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, "Neo-Liberalism and Morality."
90. Lawrence and Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, "Margaret Thatcher and the Decline of Class Politics."
91. Savage, "Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study"; Lawrence, "Social-Science Encounters and the Negotiation of Difference."
92. Francis, "Mrs. Thatcher's Peacock Blue Sari."
93. Edwards, "Financial Consumerism."
94. Moores, "Thatcher's Troops?"
95. See Lawrence, "Paternalism, Class, and the British Path to Modernity."
96. See Marwick, *The Sixties*.

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