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Mike Savage. *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. xiii + 282 pp. $39.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-958766-7; $90.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-958765-0.

Reviewed by Guy Ortolano (New York University)
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After mapping more than 150 years of discussions about the English national character, Peter Mandler's 2006 book by that title (*The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* [2006]) ends with a surprise. Following the Second World War, which would seem to have vindicated the notion of inherent and laudable national traits, the notion of character itself abruptly declined. From the 1950s, with "character" talk foundering, social scientists increasingly turned to the study of "identity" instead. By contrast with character, which resides within each of us, identity is relational, locating us within groups. But who has the authority and ability to define social groups, and how do their definitions gain traction with the public at large?-Mike Savage's important new book, *Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940*, examines the process by which a generation of social scientists refashioned their disciplines so as to answer these and related questions in mid-century Britain.

Savage initially set out to revisit social scientific studies from the 1950s and 1960s, mining their data to write a historical sociology of popular identities since the war. But as he proceeded, he found his focus shifting, from the findings of past researchers to the questions they asked. His object of study became not popular identities, but the techniques by which such information was elicited, techniques that, together with mounting institutional clout and intellectual authority, he labels the "social science apparatus." That apparatus is the subject of this book, which maps a shift from the "gentlemanly social sciences" that persisted through the Second World War to a "technical intelligentsia" that predominated by the late 1950s. Savage focuses primarily (though not exclusively) on academic sociology, rereading the archives of seven landmark studies to reveal and examine their assumptions and methods. The researchers thus become the researched, a move that has stirred controversy in social scientific circles–for instance, in a critical review by the pioneering sociologist (and key source for the book) Ray Pahl, with a reply by Savage, published in the *Sociological Review*.[1] (Pahl passed away shortly after this exchange was published.)

The resulting rich, dense book addresses such wide-ranging topics as the relationship between the social and the spatial in sociological research, the impact of shifting socio-intellectual relations on the industrial working class, the closure of the intellectual world examined here by digital technologies, and the implications of Savage's analysis for sociologists today. The core narrative, though, tracks the development of sociology, a field that "did not really exist as a specialist academic subject until the 1950s" (p. 119). Prior to that moment, Savage shows, sociology figured as a synthetic field, grounded in such institutions as the British Academy and the British Sociological Association (BSA). The BSA was established in 1950, and that late date offers a reminder that there was nothing inevitable about the contrary path the field eventually took. It is, therefore, a misreading to suggest that this book narrates the "rise" of sociology: sociology did not simply rise, it was transformed, and Savage deftly recovers the fitful and contested process by which it emerged as the specialized discipline that we know today.

That development was facilitated by institutional opportunities in plateglass universities, but the most important factor was an overhaul of sociology's objects and methods. By the "moment of sociology" in 1962, the discipline had been reconfigured as the study of a particular version of the "social"–an entity isolated in time (thus not amenable to historical inquiry)–and lifted out of space (so that local studies could yield knowledge about the nation as a whole). Its objects of study became not the margins of society, but the everyday and ordinary. As ordinary lives in everyday places became subjected to systematic analysis, the researcher's normative judgments shifted from the identification of subjects ("deviants") to the validation of methods ("objective"). Two of

the book's strongest chapters (the third being a fascinating account of the search for an English "Middletown") focus on the development of key methodological tools, the qualitative interview and the random sample survey. All the while, Savage is alert to the costs of these developments, for instance, the displacement of the interviewing experience of female social workers by a "new kind of masculine expertise" wielded by credentialed sociologists (p. 186).

These core chapters–on Middletown, the interview, and the survey–masterfully historicize the concepts, assumptions, and methods of the refashioned sociology. They succeed in part because they do not depend on the dichotomy between "gentlemanly" and "technical" expertise that characterizes the preceding section, a dichotomy that tends to collapse mid-century intellectual history into one thing or another. It is also the case that Savage does not follow through on one of his most intriguing insights, the suggestion that ordinary people internalized social scientific categories and concepts. He offers telling examples of that phenomenon toward the end of the book, but he does not demonstrate the process that yielded that result with the attention that distinguishes his discussion of the 1950s. Yet Savage is certainly onto something here, as suggested by Matthew Hollow's recent article on the Park Hill Estate. Hollow shows that Park Hill's architects led the public to articulate their needs in terms compatible with further architectural management. Hollow's article focuses on the period after Savage's main story has left off, but his findings fit neatly, and suggestively, with Savage's larger account.[2]

None of this detracts from the fact that Savage has written an exemplary postwar history. His book's subtitle, *The Politics of Method*, refers to its aim of inspiring reflection among social scientists, but *Identities and Social Change* should spur methodological considerations among historians as well. Rather than collaborators, from whom he might borrow data, postwar sociologists became his subject, amenable to historical analysis. This act of distancing himself from a seemingly familiar subject is essential to postwar historiography, which otherwise has little to offer but the confirmation of hunches or indulgence of nostalgia. Yet despite the distance that Savage establishes from these sociologists, there are implicit similarities between their approaches, as they all strive to view the commonplace–whether in the past or all around us–as if for the first time. In 1962, Savage's "moment of sociology," Kingsley Amis noted the prominence, but also the peculiarity, of such an approach: "This island is now full of voices announcing with an air of discovery that people do football pools and watch television and go dancing."[3] Or, he might have added, design random sample surveys.

Notes

[1]. R. E. Pahl, review of *Identities and Social Change since 1940: The Politics of Method*, by Mike Savage, *Sociological Review* 59, no. 1 (2011): 165-176; and Mike Savage, reply to R. E. Pahl, *Sociological Review* 59, no. 1 (2011): 176-181.

[2]. Matthew Hollow, "Governmentality on the Park Hill Estate: The Rationality of Public Housing," *Urban History* 37 (2010): 117-135.

[3]. Kingsley Amis, "Martians Bearing Bursaries," *Spectator* (April 27, 1962): 554.

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