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A molehill of mange

Surveys and polls show misery on the march, but the real worry is their imbecilic conclusions



Peter Preston

The Guardian, Sunday 21 October 2007

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Ask a stupid question and you tend to get an absurdly gloomy answer. Read the polls, scan the surveys, and handcars to hell arrive as standard issue. We've never been more supposedly fearful of looming fate: of illness, rampant paedophilia and terror, of doom at the end of the world. Or is it just that too many opinion seekers (and formers) are driving us mad?

Consider: childhood is a blank canvas. Children don't come into this world spouting views about stress, climate change and internet porn. Children don't instinctively cower at the thought of life beyond the school gates. Those hundreds of primary school kids who talked to a Cambridge team for a Community Soundings report the other day were merely repeating what they'd heard adults say.

Worn down by tests at seven and 11? Up, in a trice, pop the teachers' unions to reiterate what their members think about these checks on pupil progress. It's too much strain, too heavy a burden. It fills children with needless neuroses. Look? See? The kids agree with us. Here's one more nail in the coffin of Labour's "target-obsessed culture".

Except that that's bunk served back to front. Those tests aren't pass-or-fail for seven-year-olds. Four years later, there's no throwback to the 11-plus either. What's being tested is the quality of the schooling and teaching on offer. It's making it as sure as we can that every child has a decent start to educational life. It highlights schools that are failing to cope. It picks out teachers who aren't up to snuff. Small wonder, in the closed community of the staff room, that such soundings are not exactly welcome. But this is a molehill of mange turned mountainous in the telling. It's only there because children have been primed to write it on that blank canvas.

And so the awful surveys grumble on. Do GPs think that longer surgery hours and Saturday morning clinics will improve the NHS? They don't. They fear (again) for the service they claim to love. Is glum old Gordon looking for a hot topic that has nothing to do with snap elections? Why, here's a handy government report on obesity. We could all be gargantuan or worse by 2050, costing the health budget a stonking £42bn a year. Dawn Primarolo, our skeletal new health minister, pops up on TV to pronounce the problem "as serious as global warming".

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And Maidstone's hospital shambles casts a parallel shadow. Will the service disintegrate under the growing burden of very sick, very aged people in desperate need of care?

But the true ailment here is big picture blindness. Climate change is a devastating challenge we're anxious to deny. Getting fat is unpleasant and unhealthy, but in most cases you can do something about it - not because Gordon Brown has turned up on GMTV with a few wise words, but because you can get off your butt. Lumping that in the same bumper bundle as global warming is imbecility. Talking about the horrors of Maidstone longevity while denouncing the horrors of increasing mortality via podge isn't so much unjoined up as totally dislocated thinking (but OK on the gloom front because the NHS collapses either way on Saturday mornings).

We're invited (Saturday's Guardian, page one) to lament a riven land where 89% profess to think we're still judged by our class - but where (page 35) great chunks of us haven't a blind idea which class we belong to in the first place. We "demand" a referendum on the European reform treaty - but actually put the issue around number 16 on our priority list. Another HMG-sponsored effort shows 26.4% of Runnymede's population drinking "hazardously" while north Norfolk has only 3.3.% in the danger zone. Meanwhile, one of the medical team that drew up Britain's "safe alcohol limits" confesses that "we really don't have any data whatsoever" so it's "impossible to say what's safe and what isn't".

Maybe the latest British Media Society survey has some clues: 45% of all regional TV news watchers "clinically terrified" about crime reporting in their areas, 51% of GMTV watchers "humiliated or seriously let down", 67% of Daily Mail readers "profoundly depressed" before picking up their paper - and 88% after they've read it. Or maybe not, since there's no such report. But what there is, as our sad old world turns on another gorgeous autumn day, is a simple reluctance to engage brain, to connect one dark corner of the canvas with another as we lurch from one suicidal single issue to another. No wonder our kids are unhappy. I would be if I had us and all our damned surveys to put up with.

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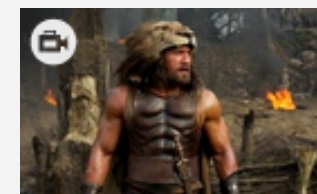
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Guardian picks

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36 comments. Showing conversations, sorted



RogerINtheUSA

22 October 2007 6:02am

26.4% of Runnymede's population drinking "hazardously"

celebrating the Magnum Carta with double-sized bottles of wine....



BriscoRant

22 October 2007 8:24am

In the old days, when I wanted to express my views, I'd bash the ear of Bob down the pub. If he wanted to sound off, he could bash mine. Known him for years. Between us we had a good whinge, and we put the world to rights.

But due to society breakdown and longer work, Bob and I haven't got time now.

But no matter: Bob's been replaced! Not just by anyone, but by professionally trained folk. The survey-takers.

They're really well trained.

If you tell Bob your gripes, it goes nowhere, nothing changes. But these professionals, they listen, they put it in numbers, they say those numbers on TV. They make you feel, your whining really counts.

Also, they save you heaps of time, as they found a clever way to help you grumble quickly. You never see them themselves, so to speak, but here's how they do it. They ask a few other people to express their opinion. Then they go on TV and tell you what these folk said. You watch it, and you find - you agree! So now, to have a grumble, you just listen a bit, then agree. Those professionals, even if they don't speak to you, they already took your view into account. All that time you wasted, thinking about stuff, trying to figure out why stuff was wrong - then find words to

explain it.

I miss Bob - there was something nice about the times down the pub. Bob used to do it for free - well, he was my pal - but now he's got to work evenings too. But that's the way of the world. Professionalization. So much better, than having to have friends.



themurf

22 October 2007 8:59am

Indeed.

Whining about the country "going to the dogs" is the most insufferable over indulgence.

What the local pub bore is actually saying is "look at me! I know it all! I predicted this!" That's why such sentiments get great traction in the Daily Mail. But if you read the comments below such articles on that site, you'll realise the intellectual store of the average Daily Mail reader is not that high. No wonder they're so scared.

The "hell in a handcart" bunkum is a last-ditch attempt by the ageing powerless to control the agenda. A buffoonish whine about the current state of the world is guaranteed to the nodding donkeys rocking in agreement.

You can pull most of the strands of Daily Mail thinking together here. Look at the annual rush to proclaim that exam results are getting easier. Seen in the context of this article, it's yet another unsubtle attempt by a few old duffers to claim the limelight as it inevitably drifts away from them. What better way to hog the agenda than by attempting to smear the next generation as worthless imbeciles?!

Yes, it's human selfishness in all its glory. Unfortunately far too much power is vested in the older generation - birthrates are falling, they're more likely to vote and vote Conservative - which stultifies progress.



Hotbed

22 October 2007 10:04am

All very well said.

How about a survey asking the British whether we'd prefer to be a bunch of wide-eyed, can-do optimists?

Reckon most people would say no. Whinging about stuff's part of the national character, we revel in it.



avagold

22 October 2007 10:07am

Many fair points made about surveys and our reluctance to engage brain before despairing.

However, as the parent of a child who has done all his SATs and is now working towards his GCSEs, I honestly believe that Mr Preston's view about childhood and tests is simply wrong.

There is HUGE pressure on children to perform well in their SATs - every school is desperate for good SAT results at every age, because it plays a massive role in how parents decide where to send their kids and in how much funding they get. Who wants to send their kids to a 'failing' school?

So the teachers ladle on the pressure to do well. My son, a reasonably bright kid who's no genius, was under immense pressure to do his very best for every test he sat. Because his results (and those of several of his pals) were in that crucial area where a bad day could drag the average down, but a good day would drag the averages up.

Now he's under even more pressure to do well in his GCSEs, just as the government is planning to bow to the hypocrites in the press by making exams harder than ever. Why is this hypocrisy? Because good results prove the exams are getting easier, so let's make them harder; yet we're constantly being told our kids are dumber and getting dumber, so let's make the exams harder and we can prove it!

So let's rail against the survey madness by all means, but I, and many tens of thousand of parents like me, have seen close up what kids think of all the testing they undergo.



BuffHoon

22 October 2007 10:22am

The thrust of the article seems to be that ignorance is bliss, a theme explored in books like Brave New World and Fahrenheit 451. We would all be much happier if we simply believed everything our leaders told us, and never gave a thought to anything beyond our immediate physical needs and mindless pleasure. It's probably true.



Junkketeer

22 October 2007 10:49am

While they may once have had some minor value, all polls and surveys are hardly worth the keyboard strokes that go into their creation, publishing or subsequent discussion.

For a start there are so many. And second they all contradict each other.

Last week my little website got 3 separate surveys on 'green' supermarkets. In one Tesco was top. In the next it was bottom.

I asked for methodology and got little the wiser. So I ignore them all, save on my blog where I made roughly this point.

So, in addition to the vast armies employed to create and analyse this dross, I can add myself as one more who profited slightly for their pointless existence.



emptydesk

22 October 2007 11:10am

Excellent piece Peter. It drives me up the wall when these surveys form the basis of the main news items on 'Today'. And then a PR-trained spokesperson from the offending government department is wheeled in to the dock to face a grilling from Humphreys QC. And that is exactly what this nonsense really is all about. It perpetuates a comfortable lifestyle for people in research bodies and think tanks who have occupied the wilderness of our sink-estate manufacturing industry, and who are paid a lot of money to tell us stuff we don't need to know.



argeebargee

22 October 2007 11:47am

Actually Peter there is pass and fail at the KS2. The Secondary school intake is streamed according to these results. Whereas at age 7 the teachers generally know what the kids are like based on experience rather than tests and they stay with those teachers at that school, at 11 they don't. They go to another school and teachers they don't know make decisions about them based on reports and on KS2 SAT results. Quite simply the better your grade particularly in maths, the better your stream at secondary school. Ok they can move between streams but there is inertia

in this. It's not as fluid as some people think. Streaming only works if you're in the right stream. Too high and you struggle too low and you find it too easy. I agree with the rest of your article but this is real stuff. I may hate this as I hated the 11+ idea. But it is real and grades matter however stupid that may be.



Curlylocks

22 October 2007 11:49am

A good piece barring one significant error: to say that it is only the school that is tested during SATs, and not the children, IS SIMPLY NOT TRUE.

When I was 11, I sat my KS2. I did well, and, as such, got put into a top tier at my new secondary, based upon my SATs results.

The same happened at KS3, when I was 14. I did pretty well, and got put in the top tiers again - ON THE STRENGTH OF MY SATs.

At both Key Stages (KS), I had friends who dropped a grade because they were ill on the days of one the papers. They lost a grade and weren't put into the top tiers. Despite being probably cleverer than me!

I went to 11-14 state school, then a 14-18. The first is ranked as Outstanding by Ofsted (due its brilliant SAT results), while the second school has been complaining for around a decade, that the standards of the intake from the first school have been falling. This is simply because the first school isn't judged on GCSEs as well, only SATs, and so is extremely effective in cranking out excellent results in English, Science and Maths (the SAT subjects), while neglecting languages, history, geography, RE, technology.

Abandon SATs, base grades on teacher assessment, and simply have a very vigorous OFSTED to insure standards are actually high, and not just being inflated by hot-housing borderline students.



Hotbed

22 October 2007 11:54am

CurlyLocks - given that you came out of this system, and you seem to have an impressive grasp of argument and written English, why do you think the system works so badly?

I sat GCSEs and A-Levels, which produced some breathtakingly random and unfair



zavaell

22 October 2007 12:17pm

The bottom line is that Labour lacks intellectual heft: the fact that it is doing nothing about global warming is evidence of that.



Tong

22 October 2007 12:27pm

Article-"67% of Daily Mail readers "profoundly depressed" before picking up their paper - and 88% after they've read it. Or maybe not, since there's no such report." Reading the Daily Mail is a lesser version of self-harm so perhaps it does provide some service to the community. I think a survey would show 50% of daily mail readers were moderately depressed before reading it and 90% profoundly depressed afterwards, leaving the other 10% clinically depressed.



emillee

22 October 2007 12:31pm

At first glance this article seemed to have a point. Then it became clear what the intention was: to try to attack those who dared to have an issue with this government's schooling policies and the majority who want an EU referendum.

There are too many surveys, it is true. But the results of them (fear of crime, insecure children) are not the sign of faulty surveys but of a faulty society.

The media and government are the main drivers for our insecurity, not survey writers. Not a day goes by when we shouldn't worry about something or other. The amount of highly-expensive, threatening government adverts about health and law, never previously considered necessary, are indicative of this as well.

This government loves surveys, until it tells them they probably won't win an election anymore.

HowSoonIsNow



22 October 2007 12:55pm

As usual Preston misses his target. Of course life is difficult and steadily getting worse for many of us. Worrying about how to address real problems to do with health and healthcare, loss of social cohesion, the growth of the malign influence of global corporatism, overcrowding, housing costs, debt, job insecurity and inadequate pensions and the rest are not 'whining' - and that short list ignores Mail staples like crime and terrorism. Certainly, many downmarket papers seek sales boosts with anxiety-inducing headlines but it's chicken and egg; if most people felt comfortable, secure and optimistic those papers wouldn't sell. And what's this in today's Guardian....the oil's about to run out ! Oh no ! Something else to worry about ! Surely the Guardian doesn't scaremonger ?

'Climate change is a devastating challenge we're anxious to deny.'

Er, no. No-one denies climate change - the climate has always changed, will always change, like the tide goes in and out. What increasing numbers of us do not agree with are claims that climate change, as global warming is now called, is man made, preventable or going to cause an apocalypse. But the Guardian pushes this as something to fret about because it believes, in the same way it believes the NHS is not disintegrating as it is gradually privatised, or that state education is still working - in the teeth of contrary evidence.

'..the horrors of Maidstone longevity...increasing mortality via podge... dislocated thinking.'

Dislocated ? Both are legitimate health concerns. Both could be fixed, the one by forcing food manufacturers to help us improve our diets, and in particular finding ways to cut down on the amount of processed and pre-prepared food we eat, and encouraging more active and sociable living by reducing the amount of TV broadcast; the other, by sorting out hospital cleaning and probably reducing the amount of needless antibiotics prescribed.. 'We're invited... to lament a riven land where 89% profess to think we're still judged by our class - but where ... great chunks of us haven't a blind idea which class we belong to in the first place.'

So ? These aren't inconsistent. We many not be confident of the criteria by which classes are defined but we are all damn sure that we are in one, and that others will judge us by it.

'We "demand" a referendum on the European reform treaty - but actually put the issue around number 16 on our priority list.'

Again, this is not inconsistent. Plenty of people are demanding New Labour keep their manifesto promise to hold a referendum on the rehashed EU constitution. That doesn't mean it is necessarily top of the list.

themurf - when I read your tirade against the elderly I wondered if you were going on

about Preston (69). If you don't think the country is 'going to the dogs', fine, but spare those of us who do (probably because we see more clearly than you) your name-calling. If you think you can hear whining, it's probably tinnitus - see your GP.

'The "hell in a handcart" bunkum is a last-ditch attempt by the ageing powerless to control the agenda.'

LOL. How old is 'ageing' ? If the ageing are powerless, why are you so concerned about their influence ? Anyway, I presume you are a mere green youth. At least the old get out and vote.

'A buffoonish whine about the current state of the world is guaranteed to the nodding donkeys rocking in agreement.'

Whereas noisily proclaiming all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds whilst abusing those who disagree counts as rational and clear-sighted ? How much is soma in your part of the world ? 'Look at the annual rush to proclaim that exam results are getting easier.'

Today's school exams and most of today's degrees are of very limited value compared with thirty years ago. 'Nearly half of all universities are having to put on "remedial classes" in English and maths because of the deteriorating quality of undergraduates.' <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/main.jhtml?xml=/education/2004/07/24/tenedu18.xml>

Sure, today's students work hard and no, they're not intrinsically thicker - they just 'study' too much irrelevant stuff and are allowed to shy away from tricky but important things like physics and modern languages. 'Unfortunately far too much power is vested in the older generation...'

Sort your argument out - earlier in your post the elderly were described as 'aging powerless'. Which is it ?

Anyway, the elderly had a much better education than you managed, and they have so much more experience of the real world so I suppose it's understandable you resent their influence.

You never know, perhaps you'll be older yourself one day. See if you can learn anything along the way. You could start by reading today's Jackie Ashley article 'The way we treat the old is both disgraceful and stupid'.
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/story/0,,2196445,00.html>

robbinghood

22 October 2007 1:28pm



Where's Questionnaire when you need him? He must be an expert on this subject.



padav

22 October 2007 1:52pm

BriscoRant: "But no matter: Bob's been replaced! Not just by anyone, but by professionally trained folk. The survey-takers.

They're really well trained.

If you tell Bob your gripes, it goes nowhere, nothing changes. But these professionals, they listen, they put it in numbers, they say those numbers on TV. They make you feel, your whining really counts."

And what's more, if you happen to live in a target marginal seat and have the correct social profile, i.e. you look and sound like "a floater" guess what..... you really do count because come election time, suddenly the high street has more survey-takers than you can shake a stick at!

And mysteriously the very same issues you mention to the survey taker are being mouthed by the movers and shakers in the big two political parties the very next morning. Now I wonder how they knew just how to attract your attention (and more importantly, your vote) by tapping into your concerns?

Of course if you live (like most of us do) in an ordinary common or garden safe seat where swings in sentiment don't unseat the incumbent MP, you won't even see a survey-taker (because they're all employed in the marginal seats) and even if you did, your fears and aspirations won't be taken up by anyone because no one gives a hoot about your viewpoint.

Nice to feel wanted isn't it?

FPTP = Democratic Post Code Lottery Multi-Member STV - NOW!



maninthemoon

22 October 2007 1:59pm

Dear Peter, stick to the sports pages. I had a friend who had two sayings that he would often repeat. 'Every day's a holiday' and ' Your a long time looking at the lid of your coffin' Readers of too much gloom take note.



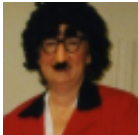
Waltz

22 October 2007 3:19pm

"a riven land where 89% profess to think we're still judged by our class"

I read that in the original report and wondered "judged by whom"? Apparently it was "others", whoever they may be.

I think social class still exerts and still exerts a malign influence, but it's surely a far more nebulous and fluid concept than it used to be. I'm decidedly middleclass, I'd say, but my dad's a farmer (not an aristocratic landowner but a real farmer, with blisters on his rough hands and bits of straw in his hair) and real farmers used to be sort of working class, didn't they. My mum is the daughter of a coal miner, raised in a two-up-two-down terrace, but she went to university and runs a local book club so ... what class is me mam? I expect "others" know.



angrygranny

22 October 2007 3:27pm

CurlyLocks - "Abandon SATs, base grades on teacher assessment, and simply have a very vigorous OFSTED to insure [sic] standards"

I don't think this would be a very good idea. My son's teacher predicted a D for his result in Maths GCSE - he actually got 9 As including Maths, and went on to get an A for his A-level Maths.

My generation grew up in the shadow of the bomb. We were convinced that the Soviet Union was going to drop a nuclear bomb on us and obliterate the UK from the face of the earth. We also (at my school at least) were constantly tested so that we would be ready for the 11 plus, or scholarship as we called it. At secondary school we had end of term exams in every subject. Today's youngsters are so lucky in every way - please enjoy life to the full, you have so many opportunities.



themurf

22 October 2007 3:28pm

Hi Howsoonisnow,

It is your kind of elderly bitterness and spite which I, as a green thirtysomething,

have no option but to laugh at.

Just because you think the country is in irreversible decline doesn't make it so. The country is, by any measure, at its most prosperous. It will become yet more prosperous still as society develops. It has ever been thus.

You can't use Daily Telegraph articles to refute my observation that those claiming that exams are dumbing down are just seething with jealousy at the younger generation. That's like the religious saying God exists because the Bible says he does! In this case, the Bible of OAP angst, the Telegraph, is only soothing the basest of your prejudices.

I have a lot of time for older people who do not capitulate to facile cynicism to make a point. Mr Preston, like Hugo Young before him, is the High Priest of forward-looking positivism. Worldly and optimistic. That's true wisdom.

Your brand of rancid nostalgia just stinks in comparison. Like your foolish Man Made Climate change denial which preceded your response to me, it all goes to show that your advanced years have not added one iota to your judgement.



emillee

22 October 2007 3:52pm

themurf - if anyone on here is coming across as rancid it is most certainly you. I'm appalled by your unnecessarily abusive posts against the elderly who we should be bloody grateful towards and who instead today being treated in the most appalling ways in hospital, lying in their own excrement and not being fed.

Your posts just prove you don't have the wherewithal to engage in the issue and so descend into mindless and unpleasant name-calling. Far from howsoonisnow coming across as "seething with jealousy" it is you that is clearly seething with something rather unpleasant, namely an affliction of intolerance that is common amongst the nulab ilk. Well sorry Mr self-satisfied but the truth is plain: Britain under nulab has got worse for most, particularly children and the elderly.

To think that the kids at school today have it better than ever is one of the most absurd things I've ever read. And you don't even need to read all the surveys that tell us that to know it.

ianrthorpe

22 October 2007 5:07pm

■ Perhaps if the government would stop manufacturing scares to convince us everything we enjoy is bad for us, the country would be a happier place.

http://greenteeth.blog.co.uk/2007/10/18/the_pissed_pensioners_of_harrogate~3156619



themurf

22 October 2007 5:13pm

Emillee, your own child-hating cynicism about shoolkids is easily batted away by looking at current University attendance.

No other generation in the history of mankind has had such available access to Higher Education.

And at least this generation is less seared by the ludicrous Grammar School system than those schooled before them.

Add to that record exam results and there are plenty of reasons to be cheerful, methinks.



emillee

22 October 2007 5:23pm

themurf: more brilliant debating tactics from the Ministry of Truth. Criticising nulabour's policies is "Child-hating cynicism", is it?! Amazing mind you have there. Keep taking the pills mate, or preferably, do everyone a favour and get your doctor to up the prescription.



LLMJ

22 October 2007 6:00pm

The Magna Carta was almost certainly written, and signed, whilst inebriated. All of Europe was on the sauce in the Middle-ages. It's because the water wasn't clean enough to drink and so they made beer, and wine. Nice.

So the government have "no data whatsoever" to support the 'safe' drinking limits eh? It's funny, I read somewhere about the 'evidence' for global warming being sketchy at best, missing at worst and nearly never peer-reviewed.

This article is on the one hand saying that we shouldn't believe everything we read and that we shouldn't worry so much and that the government doesn't know as much as it claims, and on the other hand citing 'global warming' as something that we *should* worry about - even though the evidence is every bit at questionable.

We should all do some research and then decide what to worry about. It's OK to worry about paedophiles in the bushes, or poisonous gases, or nuclear winter, or AIDS, or looming recession or nothing at all. Just check your data, and decide for yourself.

Oh, and ignore the government... they lie...



CarefulReader

22 October 2007 6:40pm

I don't know. In ex-Yugoslavia (and the other countries with Austro-Hungarian based school systems) we have ~8 tests per subject per year, and it doesn't seem to be a big problem.

(What really gets children stressed in Slovenia now is that since the entrance exams for secondary schools and universities were abolished, the school grades determine which secondary school or university you get to go to. So the getting-into-the-next-stage-of-education stress that lasted a few weeks back in my time now lasts 12 years.)

Maybe what you need in UK is more tests, so that children wouldn't be that afraid of them. Familiarity breeds familiarity and all that.



biba100mejico

22 October 2007 6:46pm

..."...We're invited (Saturday's Guardian, page one) to lament a riven land where 89% profess to think we're still judged by our class - but where (page 35)..."...

This writer is still in the paper age!

Whera the links dude????

fastgameplayer



22 October 2007 7:26pm

What is so wrong with paper dude?

It costs about 80p a day..loads instantly..never crashes and the batteries never go flat. If you wish to bring rain or fire try them on your laptop first.



fastgameplayer

22 October 2007 7:28pm

Also if you write on the stuff it does not take 30mins for something to appear.



Urism

22 October 2007 11:01pm

Can I help you here? I feel what you're really trying to say isF..k 'em! Do what you like and bloody well enjoy it.



spaceman

23 October 2007 1:56am

People who say that things are not in fact very bad for us in this country actually mean "things are not bad for me in this country". They simply have insufficient knowledge and experience of the severe problems that so many face.

The surveys ask significant samples of people to be able to be confident in their accuracy. They say it as it really is, not how a fortunate minority naively believe it is. The most naive and ignorant minority in this country is of course the labour government as they live in their luxurious tax payer funded fortresses.



KittenKong

23 October 2007 7:49am

HowSoonisNow "life is difficult and steadily getting worse for many of us. "

How utterly utterly wonderful that you've taken a Smith's song as your user name. That's going to keep me laughing all day.

Some dusty old Roman (Horace I think but possibly not), back when the Republic had crumbled and the imperial family were scuttling into position, said (v.roughly translated) "The age of our parents, inferior to that of our grandparents, has brought forth ourselves yet more corrupt and destined to have children more worthless still."

He's been echoed down the years by every social commentator of note. The world's been going to hell in a handcart for over 2000 years. Strange then that we're richer, healthier, living longer and with more leisure time than at any other time in human history.

"Piffle" is what I say to the doom merchants. Lighten up. "Earnestness", as someone else who I can't quite remember might have said, "is just idiocy grown up and gone to college."

Can't really complain though. Everyone always has to moan. It's quite entertaining really. One of my politics lecturers at college once read us an interesting news report/ parliamentary sketch which was a blistering diatribe on the standard of modern Parliamentary debate decrying that fact that there were no longer any big beasts in the chamber and scorning the lightweight nature of the speakers. We were asked if we could identify the speakers being savaged. We couldn't. He then revealed it was from 1861 (or thereabouts) and the "lightweights" in question were Gladstone and Disraeli.

He then read a similar report from the 1840's referring to Peel.

Plus ca change etc.



GerryM

23 October 2007 8:14am

themurf: "...exam results are getting easier." Well old chap if anything was needed to point to the fact that we are passing people in GCSE English who would have failed in days gone by it's that phrase. The "results" are getting easier? I think you will find that a secondary school educated OAP would have the education to assert that the "exams" are getting easier.

As it happens if you are taught to pass an exam even if the exam is easier than in previous years it is as difficult to take as the harder exams. No, it is the marking that's easier and saying so does not imply that the latest generation of children are imbeciles, although in your particular case I am prepared to make an exception.

As for SATs children, in days gone by, were tested every Christmas and Summer on every subject and the streaming adjusted accordingly. The difference is that it was

left to the teachers to deal with the problems of the children in their care, now the SATs are pored over by undereducated "Greens" in the department of Education and "failure" results in schools being "failing" and teachers held up to opprobrium. Nothing to do with the kids or their parents you understand.

Why are Greens such unpleasant people?



moebius

23 October 2007 8:50am

I agree with Kittenkong.

In every generation there have always been those that cry that are society is in terminal decline.

We can choose not to buy into this bullshit that is sold to us on a daily basis.

We can choose to step off the conveyor belt that is modern life.

If everyone learnt to buy less crap, worked part-time and pursued their personal interests then this country would be a much happier place.

Read the idler. It is a manifesto of how to enjoy life. I'm voting for Idle Party.



GerryM

23 October 2007 9:26am

On the point Mr. Preston made about doom and gloom, it's down to the people. Most people are fearful and gloomy. Some are fearful, gloomy, arrogant and aggressive - we call them the Greens. In my own experience most things have improved in my lifetime, but as governments, and Nulab in particular, have taken to telling the people that they will solve a problem. Then hose the problem with the people's money and when discovering that they have failed to solve it simply tell lies it makes the people sceptical of good news propogated by the government. Incidentally, themurf may be interested in this as it's a green issue. If you draw a graph of the percentage of children getting A's in their GCSE and A-Level results over the last thousand years you get the hockeystick graph widely used as evidence that GW is MM. Are we to take it that A's in exams are the real cause of global warming?

Take the statistics that crime has dropped. Has it? I don't know, but I do know that my car was broken into a few weeks ago and I didn't report it to the police because I know that they won't solve it, or indeed do anything to solve it. The only way of

getting any attention from the police is if there is a murder, armed robbery or any offences related to offending ethnic minorities. It is little wonder therefore that crime statistics have dropped since the police are widely seen as the paramilitary wing of the Guardian and reporting mundane robberies, burglaries or assaults is a waste of time.

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