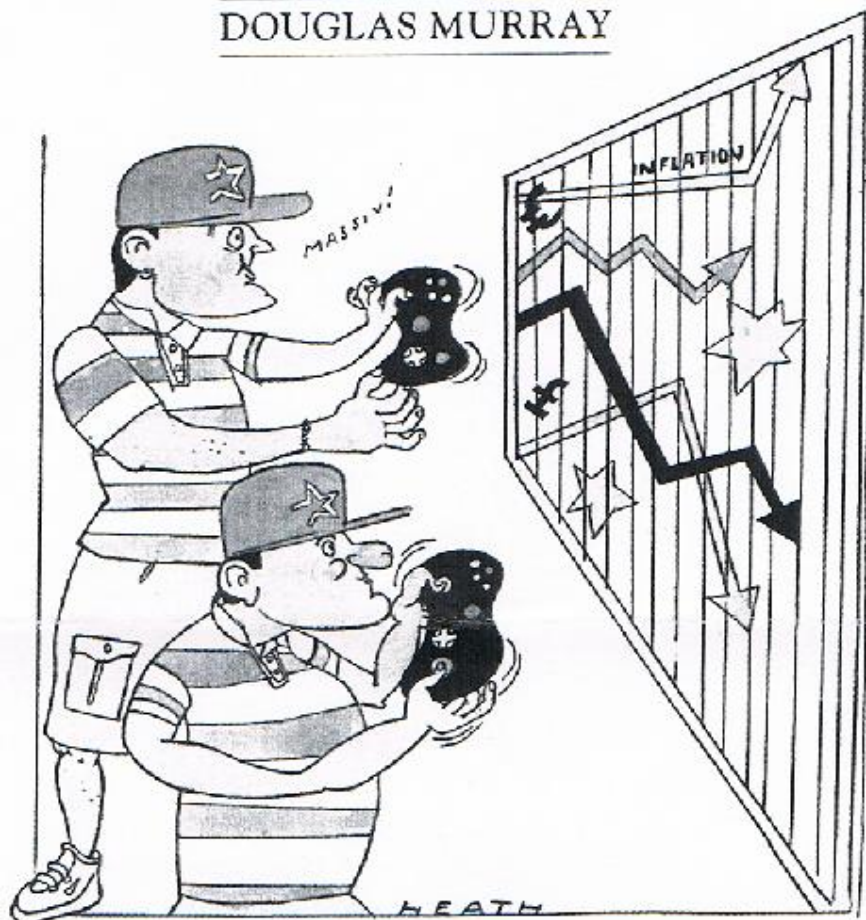


DOUGLAS MURRAY



Justin Bieber should have their computer hard-drive examined by the police. Everywhere we are forced to witness the horrible display of kiddie-aping adults. Attitudes once thought necessary partly in order to flatter the young have become the cultural norm, and no one now knows the way back.

Section C – pars. 4-5

[4]And who would dare lead the way? Even if your tastes are not pubescent, you must pretend they are. A surprising number of balding editors and other adults still attend things like Glastonbury, hoping the pilgrimage will wash away the cardinal sin of age. Each year the BBC sends between two and three hundred of its employees to the festival.

[5]Cultural figures, being the beneficiaries of this homage, only reinforce the tastes. Elton John praises Lady Gaga, who attacks Madonna, who flashes a tit and round it all goes again. It is now very difficult for any young person in Britain to work out what is expected of them as a grown-up or what grown-up tastes might even look like.

Section D – pars. 6-7

[6]Take 'gadgets', the Wii, Xbox and other toys. Meant to distract children, they are now unashamedly marketed at 'grown-ups'. Men's lifestyle magazines are full of them and few people seem to want to point out that adults playing children's games is sinister as well as sad. While trying to buy a new mobile phone recently, I was asked

CHILDREN'S HOUR

Is there any way to stop the infantilisation of Britain?

Section A – par. 1

[1]As the world turns to London it may still imagine us a serious, taciturn people. If so, the world is in for a shock. For Britain has become a land all but denuded of grown-ups. We are in the grip of a full-scale, double-dip regression.

Section B – pars. 2-3

[2]We were not surprised that our Prime Minister should be addicted to a video game called Fruit Ninja. His predecessor, then in his late fifties, claimed to enjoy listening to teenage pop bands and had a wife who held 'slumber parties' for other women in their forties. Stand in any British high

street and you'll see the people to whom these politicians hope to appeal. Most middle-aged British men and women dress as if auditioning for a prequel to *High School Musical*. Their tastes are indistinguishable from those of adolescents. How did this age-race to the bottom occur?

[3]For years our political and media classes have portrayed the tastes of the young as not equally important, but more important, than any other. Our newspapers seem disgusted at the idea of grown-up readers, doing all they can to shake them off. They run endless stories and photos of teenage idols, although it's plain that any adult professing an interest in

by the man in the shop which games I wanted on the device. I am 32. While in the bank the other day, a bank employee asked me what my hobbies were. I didn't know. Is having dinner with friends or spending time with family a 'hobby'? Is reading a 'hobby'? Or music? Children have hobbies. Adults have interests. Or they used to.

[7]It is now not at all strange for an adult to tell you their favourite author is J.K. - Rowling or Philip Pullman. Have they attempted books not written for children? Or do they find the thought and language of children's literature more approximate to their emotional needs? The idea that there is a wealth of art and thought which might better reward the attentions of adults is a value judgment – one which, like all other value judgments, nobody seems willing to make.

Section E – pars. 8-9

[8]And of course a number of peculiarly British phobias are mixed up in all this. What was once thought high art is now considered snob art. What public figure would dare say that they like to read Stendhal in their spare hours? Or confess to having no interest in the latest processed pap offered by *X Factor*? They would be instantly condemned as elitist, out of touch, and 'anti-

the next generation' when in fact everyone is in thrall to them.

[9]On *Desert Island Discs*, most castaways now know only the repetitions of pop music – with at best the insertion of a single hit 'tune' from a composer. Few give any impression of having engaged with music which develops or thinks as it expresses. The pre-school - technique and ideas of Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin have shot from laughing stock to our national idea of what art is. Just a few decades ago, our national idea of an artist was Benjamin Britten, T.S. Eliot and John Piper. The recent Jubilee concert was run by Gary Barlow. No wonder the Queen, one of the only adults left in the country, spent her brief time at the concert wearing ear-plugs.

Section F – par. 10

[10]Perhaps this outbreak of mass childishness is the fault of our biological choices. Half of British women who now give birth are over 30, and 64 per cent of new fathers in 2010 were into their fourth decade. If the production of the next generation is one of the sharpest jolts into adulthood, then people today have half a decade more than their parents, and a decade more than their grandparents, in which to postpone it. Or

perhaps – taking it from the other end – with life-expectancy constantly on the rise, people have decided they have a larger proportion of years in which to be young.

Section G – par. 11

[11]But I think it is to do with something else. We no longer know any better because nobody wants to tell anybody any better. None of us wants to be thought preachy. Nobody wants to cause our sullen, lumpen teenager of a populace to lash out, crying, 'Who are you to tell me?'

Section H – pars. 12-13

[12]There are only two ways out. The first priority is to get better role models. The Olympic opening and closing ceremonies will be a fine test. The Athens Olympic closing ceremony included readings from George Seferis and a recording of Maria Callas. Will London 2012 showcase similar? Or will we have more Russell Brand?

[13]You often hear calls in politics to skip a generation. Now may be the time. We must skip backwards a generation, pumping more septuagenarians and octogenarians into our public life. These may be the only people left with the confidence to tell people to dress like adults, behave like adults and talk to the rest of us like adults.