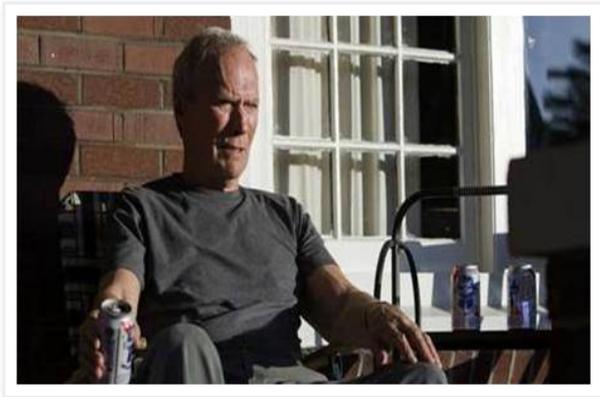


Noahpinion

I need co-bloggers named Anna and Maya

Saturday, March 14, 2015

Americans are better behaved than ever



David Brooks thinks Americans - in particular, less educated, less affluent Americans - are [losing their morality](#). He blames this on the death of collectively enforced social norms:

We now have multiple generations of people caught in recurring feedback loops of economic stress and family breakdown, often leading to something approaching an anarchy of the intimate life...It's not only money and better policy that are missing in these circles; it's norms...In many parts of America there are no minimally agreed upon standards for what it means to be a father. There are no basic codes and rules woven into daily life, which people can absorb unconsciously and follow automatically...These norms weren't destroyed because of people with bad values. They were destroyed by a plague of nonjudgmentalism, which refused to assert that one way of behaving was better than another. People got out of the habit of setting standards or understanding how they were set.

I think David Brooks should look at the statistics on American behavior.

- Crime is [way down and continues to fall](#).
- Teen drug and alcohol abuse is [way down and continues to fall](#).
- Teen pregnancy is [way down and continues to fall](#).
- Domestic violence is [way down and continues to fall](#).
- Child molestation is [way down and continues to fall](#).

In other words, Americans are becoming better and better behaved in almost every way.

So David Brooks is cooking up off-the-cuff sociological theories to explain SOMETHING THAT

ISN'T EVEN HAPPENING. And then he is recommending big changes in American culture and society, based on his off-the-cuff sociological explanation for SOMETHING THAT ISN'T EVEN HAPPENING.

(So of course we also don't need to [invoke poverty](#) to explain the nonexistent "increase in bad behavior"!)

Yes, Americans - especially lower-class Americans - are suffering from family breakdown and social isolation. These seem like problems of loneliness, not of loss of morality. They're obviously not leading to increases in violence or drug abuse.

You see, the problem with being a grumpy old guy scanning the media for negative anecdotes and grumbling about the world going to hell in a handbasket, and how the only solution is to somehow revamp society to bring back old social norms is that *someone might actually listen to what you say*.

Noah Smith Posted at 1:14 AM

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7 comments:



David 7:44 AM

Sigh. I stopped listening to what David Brooks says long ago. This is just one of many, many examples where he just makes stuff up.

[Reply](#)



Russ Abbott 8:19 AM

I enjoy virtually all of your posts -- this one especially.

[Reply](#)



dougsmith 9:12 AM

Excellent, certainly better to focus on data rather than anecdote. One slight quibble: "continues to fall" goes beyond the statistical evidence, I think. Perhaps "has continued to fall". After all, one could think of an economist in the 1970s looking at the data and saying, "continues to rise", which would not have been an accurate representation of the evidence, at least in hindsight. Who knows what the future might bring?

[Reply](#)



Jun Okumura 9:13 AM

Don't rely on anecdotes? Why, what great advice!

[Reply](#)



Dave 10:17 AM

Luckily, I think we're seeing behavior out of most Republican pundits and leaders that will lead them to complete self-destruction without our help.

David didn't get the memo: Dan Quayle's family values focus was just a marketing ploy! Nobody serious took it seriously at the time or since.

[Reply](#)



Alexander Sebastian Schulz 11:22 AM

David Brooks sees that the predominantly white America is fading, which must be bad for him. Facts won't get in the way of his narrative.

[Reply](#)



George Maniere 12:06 PM

Not sure I see that happening but I sure would like to believe you are right.

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