

White Men's Legs

As the UK experiences the direct consequences of climate change hardly a day passes, even in the middle of winter, without further evidence of one of the negative impacts of global warming. I refer to the ghastly prospect, like some revolting out-take of a Zombie movie, of armies of skinny, pale, male legs.

I shop at Waitrose. A Waitrose loyalty card, apart from being your visa to an oasis of calm, decency and gentility amid a fractured and disturbing world, is the nearest thing to a class-based identity card the UK has. Waitrose stores are politely but unapologetically middle class. Whilst other stores offer a fast lane for those with 10 items or less, the Waitrose equivalent is 10 items or *fewer*. There are standards, you know. Their stores are also the only place where the sight of an old man rummaging in a dustbin prompts envy rather than pity, for it means that some other blighter has got to the coffee grounds generously left out to add that certain something to one's compost heap. Why would you want a pile of rotting vegetation to smell like, well, rotting vegetation when it could be infused with the aroma of Arabica or Jamaican Blue Mountain? Plus, it dramatically impacts the efficiency of the composting process as it turns worms hyperactive, a real win-win, but that's by the by. Suffice it to say I love going to Waitrose. Or I did. For even in a damp February morning, the ghastly sight of old men in shorts blights the whole thing.

What *is* going on? These are otherwise intelligent, mature and competent men. Do they really think they look good with their withered shanks and gnarled knees exposed to the world? Dear God, it is not beyond the realms of possibility that some of them could even be magistrates: Should anyone be allowed to decide the fate of others when they so clearly lack basic judgement? It puts me off my cappuccino (another advantage of that loyalty card) I can tell you.

And at the risk of adding racism to the obvious sexist and ageist bias I've already displayed, I have to confess my revulsion is pretty much reserved to white legs. When I reflect on a full and otherwise happy life, I can count on the fingers of one hand the pairs of white male legs I've thought less than loathsome. A personal trainer at my gym. Legs that would have Michelangelo reaching for a new block of marble. Mind you, they did not turn out like that by accident. Not only does he devote an inordinate amount of time to exercising them, he also spends ages admiring his pins in the full-length mirror from all angles. But as I have said, they are worth looking at. Oh, and there was an Italian chap in Kenya in the early 1980s. Others? Hmm. And whilst on the subject of the gym, I reluctantly accept old men wearing shorts might just be permissible there. But I don't speak to them. Or respond to their matey nods. As I have said before, there are standards.

So I think it is time to take a stand. It seems unlikely we will face a further election soon. We also have a Prime Minister who, I am sorry to say, has recent form on this knee exposure nonsense. But let me be clear: I will vote for whichever party will adopt my policy proposals, which are these:

1. Unlimited and unlicensed wearing of shorts should be restricted to men under the age of 25. (I am prepared to negotiate slightly on the exact cut off (no pun intended) point. I am not, after all, an unreasonable person).
2. Wearing of shorts by men above the age stated in 1. but below 50 will be subject to strict licensing and regular review.
3. Licenses will be available only to those who can meet aesthetic and athletic standards to be agreed by a panel including the Director of the National Gallery and the head of UK Sports.

4. Wearing of shorts in public by men above 50, and those below that age who do not meet the above standards, will be punishable by fine on the first offence and prison sentences thereafter.
5. Wearing shorts above the age of 50 in or near Waitrose will be punishable by death.

Fair, clear and proportionate I am sure you will agree.

I also want to assure you there's no hypocrisy in my attitude. I refuse to wear shorts. Couldn't wait to get out of them and into grown up long pants at primary school and can't imagine why anyone would want to revert to them. In India, and across Commonwealth Africa there have been many times I've been invited to do so. No, I say firmly. I will not impose such a sight on others. We British have caused enough suffering.

There is also a political aspect to this: Sensibly trousered, the British gained and governed an empire. As soon as they thought shorts were an appropriate fashion choice for a bunch of people who claim the right to boss everyone else about, it all fell apart. Look up the surrender of Singapore on Google Images.

I rest my case.