



HISTORY & POLICY

Thinking of rewriting history?

- Bad History will expose your misuse of the past

Wednesday, 14 October, 2009

A new Bad History series will be launched tomorrow to dismantle the historical myths that abound in contemporary debate and expose the spinning of history for political and PR purposes. Bursting the bubble of vacuous historical claims made by politicians, Royals and commentators alike, the inaugural series, written by members of the [History & Policy](#) Network, is launched in this week's [Times Higher Education](#) magazine. Bad History is written by professional historians and will become a regular feature on the History & Policy website: www.historyandpolicy.org.

Pat Thane, Professor of Contemporary British History at the University of London and History & Policy co-founder said:

"As our Bad History examples show, there is widespread abuse and misuse of history in public life, ranging from the silly to the downright dangerous. Bad history can create real problems by distorting understanding of contemporary issues when politicians and others use history as a rhetorical tool to conjure up past golden ages, appeal to founding fathers or simply to rewrite it for political ends.

"Since the MMR scandal, we are all more aware of the risks to public health and happiness if scientific research is not accurately and honestly reported. A lot of effort has gone into improving the communication of science with some success. In launching Bad History with *Times Higher Education*, historians are arguing for their own research to be accurately represented and highlighting the consequences when public figures get it wrong."

Matthew Reisz, the author of the *Times Higher Education* feature said:

"We are delighted to support an initiative, which demonstrates so clearly just how much academic historians can teach our politicians."

In the first seven Bad History articles:

- Philip Cowley (University of Nottingham) dismantles the myth that MPs were 'more independent' in the past.

- Pat Thane (University of London) and Tanya Evans (Macquarie University) contest the idea that cohabitation is symptomatic of 'Breakdown Britain'.
- Glen O'Hara (Oxford Brookes University) points out that George Osborne's proposed 'star chamber' was tried and failed under both Harold Wilson and Margaret Thatcher.
- Selina Todd (University of Manchester) dismantles the myth that grammar schools created a hey-day of social mobility.
- Gervase Phillips (Manchester Metropolitan University) questions the Bush administration's use of history to legitimise the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Niall MacKenzie (University of Cambridge) explodes the myth that laissez-faire policies led to economic success in 1980s Britain.
- John Langton (St Johns College, Oxford) demolishes Prince Charles' portrayal of Henry VIII as an early-modern eco-warrior.

Notes for Editors

1. 'Bad History' is a new feature produced by History & Policy, launched in *Times Higher Education* Magazine, see 'Past Mistakes' by Matthew Reisz, to be published in *Times Higher Education* magazine on Thursday 15 October 2009.
2. Bad History was inspired by Ben Goldacre's ['Bad Science'](#) column in the *Guardian*, and aims to highlight and correct the misuse and abuse of history in the public sphere.
3. History & Policy is an independent initiative working for better public policy through an understanding of history. The initiative was founded by historians at the Universities of Cambridge and London and is based in the Centre for Contemporary British History, at the Institute of Historical Research, University of London.
4. History & Policy's current work is funded with charitable grants from [Arcadia](#) and [The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation](#).
5. For further information, to request an interview with a historian, or to contribute to Bad History, please contact Ruth Evans: ruth.evans@sas.ac.uk, Tel: 020 7862 8781.