Twitter Thread by Dr Mike Ward



Dr Mike Ward
@Schroedinger99

1/

It's funny how your brain draws connections between things. @JonnElledge tweeted thus: https://t.co/4d14S0uPwD as my head was still pondering Ryan's question on Dr Who: "Rosa Parks? Wasn't she the first woman to drive a bus?"

> this is fascinating https://t.co/U0rttHp5Gz
>
> — Jonn still hates Halloween (@JonnElledge) October 22, 2018

2/
I was born in the same year that Dr Who was set this week. I, like @DAaronovitch (see https://t.co/nvMTzda99i) grew up in a household with more than its fair share of Paul Robeson, Ian Campbell Folk Group, and Pete Seeger gramophone records; and a wireless set.

3/
We got our first (single channel) black and white TV set in time for the first episode of Dr Who. My formative years were spend hearing radio reports of and seeing grainy pictures of US cops beating crowds of black people over their heads and setting dogs on them;

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and (later) British troops blowing huge craters in Irish back roads and the locals arriving hours (or even minutes) later with their tractors and diggers to fill them in again and make the roads passable once more for local people and IRA weapons deliveries.

5/
Thus, partly because of my age, partly because of my upbringing, I'm always taken aback when (often younger) people around me (on here or IRL) aren't familiar with stuff like the Montgomery Bus Boycott (& its context) or the cratering of border roads in Ireland (& its context)

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But, of course, why should they be?

7/
The back story to Ryan's confusion is that he and Yaz were at primary school together and the classes were named after historical figures. Their class was "Rosa Parks". Yaz (a bit of a Hermione Granger) knew exactly who she was.

8/
Ryan, growing up in a far less racist society than 1955 USA (though - as is acknowledged in the story - a society still not without a degree of racism) had not paid attention when told about Parks or ever realized his debt to people like her.

9/
I thought this a credible, and touching, and hilarious, and cleverly crafted moment in the unfolding (and generally - given we are talking Dr Who - slightly less credible) story.

10/
My wife who indulges, but doesn't share, my love for Dr Who complains not that the Dr is a woman, and still less that her companions are not white, but about "the way they speak". (Germans, I should explain, grow up speaking their local dialects but also learn Hochdeutsch.)

11/
Me: "But they're from Huddersfield."
K: "She's not from Huddersfield. She's from Gallifrey. Anyway, she's a Dr so she must have been to university! She ought to be able to speak properly!"

12/
And thus to recent contributions on here in debates about migration - from academics such as @David_Goodhart, @Erikkaufman, and @robfordmancs.
In descending order:

13/
DG is (IMHO) a rather nasty piece of work (see eg https://t.co/aO00Fz9vCJ);

EK sails close to the wind at times (see eg https://t.co/De1jav7pXm & thread;

RF is more on the side of the angels.

All 3, try (usefully) to explain UK attitudes towards foreigners and migrants;

14/
and (less usefully) act (thinking here mainly of DG and EK) as apologists for what might loosely be called "nativist" attitudes. But when they talk about our attitudes towards “in-groups” and “out-groups” in the context of immigration, they often have a point.

15/
It gets bit more difficult, however, when we start trying to think about the policy implications of the points they outline.

16/
As I hope the digression above illustrate, in-groups and out-groups are more complicated than you might suppose - something you realize when you hear someone of South Asian heritage talking in a broad Bradford accent about the influx of Polish people.

17/
I have my own in-groups and out-groups. If forced to pick a seat next to someone on a bus I'd probably choose the person reading a book to the person reading a copy of the Sun.

18/
And if there were 2 people reading books, I'd chose the one reading a Rob Ford book over the one reading a Goodhart book.

19/
But here's the thing: I wouldn't advocate segregating seating on busses in accordance with my mindset. Dr Who - especially where Yaz can't decide between sitting in the "white" or "black" sections - illustrates the absurdities that result from the codification of prejudice.

20/
Those who would shape our immigration laws to accord with the "legitimate" priorities of those who voted Brexit are never going to please the people they seek to please and are going to end up creating legal absurdities that make Dr Who plots seem as sensible as a dictionary.

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