



## Danny Baker & how racism won't go away

The photo Danny Baker tweeted of a chimpanzee leaving hospital in a posh suit with his posh (human) parents, titled "Royal Baby" is so blatantly and nastily offensive, it is no wonder he lost his job at the BBC.

The wonder is Baker himself. Baker is that rarity in broadcasting and particular BBC broadcasting in that he is properly working class: the son of manual labourers, he went to a secondary modern in South East London. He's not the guy from the housing estate who 'escaped' to grammar school and then to Oxford. His route into broadcasting was through pop music journalism. He has stayed true to his roots, as they say.

He is brilliantly intelligent. For speed of thought and intricate use of the English language, very few can match him. He's seriously witty; he's also wide ranging: prog rock, PG Wodehouse, cuisine... as you can tell, I'm basically a fan.

The football team he supports is the one he grew up nearest, namely Millwall, and this is where the problem comes in when he claims ignorance of the racist connotations of his tweet. Millwall are famously aggressive "Nobody likes us and we don't care" and historically have been linked with white supremacist groups. The racism isn't exactly a historical curiosity either. The latest case that came to light was only weeks ago, as their fans were recorded chanting, "I'd rather be a Paki than a Scouse" in a match against

Everton, in a match where there was quite a lot of violence beforehand, among rival supporters. Not all, of course, are racists, but clearly some are. That chant is a slight variation on the monkey chants prevalent in Eastern Europe when a black footballer came into possession of the ball, but it's in the same line.

Baker, who is erudite and intelligent, knows all about this. I'd always thought, though, that he wasn't part of that line. He's since claimed that people have misinterpreted his tweet, that it was about class and privilege, that he can't possibly be seen as so twisted as to find it funny to compare a mixed race baby to chimp, but the defence just doesn't add up. What other point can you be making about linking a chimp and a royal baby than a racist one? And thinking it funny enough to stick it out on Twitter to go viral.

Sometimes, you can hear promotion of racial awareness, "Kick Racism out of football" and everything and wonder if we really still need to hear this message. Haven't we 'got' it by now? Can't we head on to something more sophisticated?

But then, something like this happens, and you think again. And, while this was certainly not the motivation of the majority of Brexit supporters, it feels like the referendum has legitimised this tendency, the chilling snigger about foreigners, the entitlement to slag off immigrants because 'it's only what people were thinking all along'. Danny Baker, et tu Brute?

*May 2019. Thought for the Train is a short column by the Rev Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at [www.surbitonchurch.org.uk](http://www.surbitonchurch.org.uk).*