



**How to improve the democratic system in this
country**

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William Blake, an English poet, held strong political views in a time of changing political climate as well as immense social change. I believe we are, yet again, in such an age. His remarkable work 'Songs of Innocence and Experience' presented two contrasting sides to human nature: innocence and experience. Blake believed innocence was the 'natural' state of mankind: regrettably being lost in his industrial age. He saw experience as potentially dangerous if left unchecked by innocence. Experience was about progress and change (a tiger or 'tyger' bounding through a forest) but sometimes at the expense of people's souls creating what Blake called 'mind forg'd manacles'.

William Blake and Winston Churchill seem to be 'strange bed fellows' and yet I believe Blake captured what is missing from our political system now – a fusion of the previously mentioned innocence and experience. In other words, a deeper involvement of young people in the political process: it's time to bring in the lambs to tame the tigers.

Blake believed that children did not possess the clouded perception of life that came from being an adult. Adults were cynical. Children did not yet possess this often self-interested, fearful take on the so-called reality of society. Evidently, this is the reason he believed that 'children could read his work as well as, or better than, adults'. Blake was a sagacious man; he saw idealistic children changing in to self-serving adults and this was mirrored by the beauty of agricultural England morphing in to an industrial landscape where fear and profit trampled on the natural rhythms of human life. Blake believed we had to re-capture our innocent 'window on the world' and I agree with him: this is what we need in 2017. We need to find a way to tap in to the idealism and hope of young people. This is the only way we can fight the exhausting negativity of modern politics. From Brexit to Trump, this political age has become a nightmare beyond Blake's frightening image in 'The Garden of Love'.

So how do we achieve this?

Fusing innocence and experience is a challenge. We must achieve a balance because, without such a balance, idealism would not be tempered by realism or realism would never allow the changes we need to our stagnant political system. We desperately need the fresh minds of a younger generation to reinvigorate the political process.

In order to achieve this, educating children in politics would be vital. Due to the fact that the voting age is set fairly high many younger people are not concerned with the motivation to engage in politics or understand current political happenings. As a result of this isolation, entrusting children with a vote straight away would be nonsensical and possibly destructive. This is why education in politics would be necessary to encourage young people to have the confidence to vote. Education is essential if we are to have a more inclusive democratic system, but this will be difficult to achieve as adults and children differ so much - much like Blake's works of 'Infant Sorrow' and 'Infant Joy' do.

Sadly most of the younger generation are not educated enough in matters of politics. Before lowering the voting age, politics must be taught so that students are able to make informed decisions. By doing this, the younger generation will be equipped to contribute to the democratic process. Even though some adults do not think that those under the age of eighteen should vote, education has the potential to assist them to make young people as well informed as many adults. As many interviews with people distributed all across England concerning Brexit show, some people were poorly informed when they cast their vote. The newly introduced youth would not be poorly informed due to their education in politics and so instead of inexperienced voters

being a liability, they would be 'au courant' in their decision making. Furthermore, the education of the younger generation would 'future-proof' our political system.

In addition to educating young people on the matters of politics, utilizing the technological world is essential. As technical natives social media as a way to involve youth has never been so pertinent. It is clear that social media has a huge impact on our political system. Using this platform further in the realm of politics would not only get young people involved, it would get people that already have the right to vote more involved. Statistics show that approximately sixty six per cent of people voted in England in 2015. This means that thirty four per cent of the electoral voter population did not vote. By engaging that percentage through an application used by many, the number of voters would increase. Moreover, the introduction of social media would encourage all those eligible to vote to at least become more involved in the election process.

The involvement of youth would not be in vain as many desire the right to vote. This is shown by organisations such as Youth Parliament. Youth Parliament is an organisation that is dedicated to young people becoming involved in the political process. A person aged eleven to eighteen is elected by youths in their area to become a voice for the younger generation of that region. This allows children to be heard in the political system as well as become educated in Parliament and all it entails. Currently, there are six hundred youth representatives across the UK suggesting that it is an organisation with a drive behind all of its services.

The Youth Parliament's reason for existence is to engage young people in the political process and the evidence from the high level of involvement of young people in the YP suggests that many young people are willing and ready to play a role in this country's political landscape. How can we trust young people with so many critical roles in society and deny them the right to vote. Youths of this age are allowed to give full consent to medical treatment and are also allowed to enter a civil partnership or get married. The time and thought that must be taken over these subjects is immensely important, so surely the responsibility of entering a possibly lifelong commitment is equal to that of casting one of 38,386,900 votes in a Parliamentary election? As well as this, sixteen and seventeen year olds can serve in the armed forces and pay income tax and National Insurance. Can you see the incongruity of all this? The contribution of their income to the economy of England is most definitely requiring more responsibility than being involved in elections. Lowering the age of voters will not cause the integrity of Parliament to disintegrate; it will allow reinvigorate a stale political process.

I will return to Blake if I may and also draw in his fellow Romantic poets (quite often a topic at the dinner table when your Dad wrote his dissertation on The Romantics!). Blake believed in a perfect fusion of innocence and experience, Shelley believed in idealism over cynicism and materialism and Keats believed in the beauty of youth and the spectre of authority. To suggest that chronological age qualifies a person to vote with understanding and a measure of altruism is just silly. The opposite is often true as the world grinds down the spirit of some people and they forget that we are all in this society together.

Rewarding young people with the right to vote in electoral events would create a hugely positive impact for England. A testimony to this is a country situated on the very same island: Scotland. Scotland lowered its voting age to sixteen. Starting in May 2016, all sixteen and seventeen year olds have been allowed to vote in all Scottish elections. This is making Youth Parliament's proposition a reality and giving many more youths the responsibility they crave. Demonstrating that this was a substantially beneficial idea is that seventy five per cent of all sixteen and seventeen year olds voted compared to seventy one per cent of all adults. When given an opportunity that they valued, a high percentage of all teenagers chose to vote and this exceeded the percentage of all adults that voted. Those that had had the right to vote due to their older age did not utilize it like those that had to campaign for it. If this were to happen in England, not only would the number of electoral voters increase but we would progress forward as a united country.

In my view the birth of modern politics occurred somewhere between 1850 and 1928. Only twelve years after the latter, Winston Churchill would be elected Prime Minister and would come to critique the system of

democracy. Churchill was one of the most influential Prime Ministers to date, making speeches that carried a nation and possessing resilience through war and extremely hard times. His image has been immortalised through his iconic peace gesture and through his general outlook on life as it was, however Churchill was only human. After Churchill became Prime Minister in 1951, he restored England's fighting spirit but when his term was up, Churchill and the Conservative Party lost by a landslide to Clement Atlee and the Labour Party. Churchill had lost the favour of the public. This is most likely why he spoke the quote criticising democracy; if he had been of dictatorship or part of a monarchy he would not have lost power over the country he fought for. However Churchill was not, he was a Prime Minister and no matter what good or bad he imposed on the country, the favour of the public determined his fate. I believe that the powerlessness Churchill had over this decision is how many young people feel when they watch the agonising process of voting take place. Those that do not accept a job that can make one feel powerless at points should not have to feel this way. The generation that are unarguably the future should have a hand in the decision making that affects it.

Blake and Churchill – perhaps now you can see why I have thrown them into this 'Nutri-bullet' of this essay? Sometimes people see our country as conservative with a small 'c' but I believe our history shows we are the most revolutionary country in history. Taking a risk is in the very nature of British people; introducing democracy instead of monarchy, industrialising before any other nation and defeating tyranny in a war where our spirit and not our resources won through. Today, England's political system must be altered yet again, embracing the young as a way of fighting this cynical age.

Some say youth is wasted on the young. I say it's time to reunite innocence with experience before we waste our future.

Bibliography

In regards to the research I have gathered for this essay, I would like to mention the following websites and works:

William Blake's 'Songs of Innocence and Experience'

BBC current political news articles

Wikipedia – information on the Industrial Revolution

Youth Parliament's website – www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk

BBC information on Winston Churchill and a variety of other Prime Ministers

UK political information website – for voting statistics

A brief overview of political leaders' social media presence

Information on Romantic poets – Percy Shelley and John Keats