

Good News: Some Reasons to Celebrate the New Year

Let's jump into 2020 by looking at some good news.

In *The Spectator*, Matt Ridley reports we've just had the best decade in human history. He kicks off his [article](#) with this paragraph:

Let nobody tell you that the second decade of the 21st century has been a bad time. We are living through the greatest improvement in human living standards in history. Extreme poverty has fallen below 10 per cent of the world's population for the first time. It was 60 per cent when I was born. Global inequality has been plunging as Africa and Asia experience faster economic growth than Europe and North America; child mortality has fallen to record low levels; famine virtually went extinct; malaria, polio and heart disease are all in decline.

Ridley then points out the "ecological footprint of human activity is probably shrinking" and proceeds to demonstrate why. He gives us these statistics from his own nation:

As for Britain, our consumption of 'stuff' probably peaked around the turn of the century—an achievement that has gone almost entirely unnoticed. But the evidence is there. In 2011 Chris Goodall, an investor in electric vehicles, published research showing that the UK was now using not just relatively less 'stuff' every year, but absolutely less. Events have since vindicated his thesis. The quantity of all resources consumed per person in Britain (domestic extraction of biomass, metals, minerals and fossil fuels, plus imports minus exports) fell by a third between 2000 and 2017, from 12.5 tonnes to 8.5 tonnes. That's a faster decline than the increase in the number of people, so it means fewer resources

consumed overall.

The rest of his article is equally fascinating. He points out, for example, the impact of mobile phones on consumption. "I use mine," he writes, "instead of a camera, radio, torch, compass, map, calendar, watch, CD player, newspaper and pack of cards." He reports that agricultural land use is falling because of technology, that forests are expanding, particularly in wealthier countries, and that in those same countries wildlife is thriving.

I lack Ridley's expertise with statistics to apply his measurements to the U.S., but I suspect his conclusions would hold up here as well.

Of course, there are other reasons for optimism in 2020. The economy continues to boom. Unemployment is low, stocks have climbed to historic highs, and GDP and personal income [continue to rise](#). Six in 10 Americans may believe that [violent crime](#) is on the uptick these days, but in reality it has fallen sharply in the last 25 years.

Americans continue to be hard workers with big hearts. More than two-thirds of us give money to various [charities](#). Forty-two percent of Americans [volunteer](#) their time and labor to projects ranging from work in the public libraries to fire departments, from building homes for those unable to afford them to reading stories to school children.

But we should be able to use more than tables of statistics to uncover good news. We can look at those in our lives – family, friends, and co-workers – and discover those old-fashioned American virtues of optimism, neighborliness, and a can-do attitude. These are the qualities, still found in abundance in our people, which stand as our insurance policy for whatever the future may bring.

At the end of his article, Matt Ridley offers this thought:

As we enter the third decade of this century, I'll make a prediction: by the end of it, we will see less poverty, less child mortality, less land devoted to agriculture in the world. There will be more tigers, whales, forests and nature reserves. Britons will be richer, and each of us will use fewer resources. The global political future may be uncertain, but the environmental and technological trends are pretty clear—and pointing in the right direction.

I'll lift a glass to that possibility.

—

[Image Credit: Pixabay]