

Last Night's TV: America's Poor Kids



10-year-old Kaylie Jezza Neumann/BBC

Andrew Billen

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This was the dark side of the American dream, as we met three of the 16 million American children living in poverty

America's Poor Kids

BBC Two

★★★★☆

The American dream hung over the documentary **America's Poor Kids** like a thunder cloud. It is one thing to fail, another to do so in a country predicated on success. The director Jezza Neumann painted a picture of America in its worst depression since the Thirties using the finest of brushes, children whose parents had fallen, with shocking speed, into poverty.

One was Barbara, Kaylie's mother. Nine months before she had been a factory worker renting a decent-sized house. Now she flitted with her family, but minus its dog, from motel to motel room. At 10, Kaylie might just have been young enough to see poverty as an adventure, as the Railway Children did. But this was America, and Kaylie knew her family's

new rank. “I think we are kind of a poor family,” she said. The clue must have been her mother sending her out along the railway line looking for discarded drink cans to reclaim at five cents a time.

With, we were told, 16 million children now living poor in America, and a half a million more declared homeless since 2007, it was difficult to know how to take Kaylie’s suggestion that her mother had “made a wrong turn”. Yet without the enduring myth that calamities are self-induced errors, Kaylie would not have ended the film asserting that she herself would find a “perfect job”: “People can’t stop you believing in your dreams.” I want Neumann to return in 20 years and find how Kaylie is doing, and how she votes.

Derek

Channel 4



Neumann’s film was sad but restrained. Ricky Gervais’s unfathomably bad care-home comedy **Derek**, which reached the end of, sadly, only its first season, last night abandoned all restraint in its keenness to make us cry. There was Coldplay’s *Fix You*, a funeral, a discussion of prayer and the canonisation of kind but dim Derek as a secular saint (“Derek took the only short cut that works and that is kindness”). His old dad turned up and, with a little wavering, Derek forgave him for walking out on him as a baby. All of what remains of Gervais’s satirical genius is poured into Karl Pilkington’s Dougie, who gave a neat speech on the point of Comic Relief being to cheer us up that we have Tesco Metros on our doorsteps, but, whatever his height, Dougie is a pint-sized vessel.

Anna & Katy

Channel 4



Against expectations, a new sketch show, **Anna & Katy**, hit me on the funny bone. I am not sure how gifted Anna Crilly and Katy Wix are as performers, but as writers (aided by a posse of blokes) they have a sense of heightened absurdity clearly born of watching far too much TV. Kuntworts, a clinical yet hate-filled German translation of Countdown, was beyond silly yet each time the nautically-capped host ended a round with a loud “Halt” I laughed out loud. After Derek and the documentary, I had not thought that possible.



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FRANK LYNCH

10 hours ago

What have the critics got against DEREK? It is the best television I've seen for ages.

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Jill

12 hours ago

It was heart-warming that the kids wanted to do well at school in order to rise above their grinding poverty.

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