

The Curse of the iPhone

Young people have never been famous for their political acumen. Recall the [Children's Crusade of 1212](#) when thousands of unarmed youngsters attempted to march to the Holy Land to convert Muslims with persuasion and divine inspiration. Nevertheless, the current generation exhibits a level of political naivete that would certify the children of the 1212 disaster as rocket scientists.

Youthful foolishness is the default option of human nature, but there are mechanisms to overcome it. Of particular importance is encountering wiser adults who can tell you, for example, that a recent severe hurricane does not prove the world is ending due to people driving cars, or that claims of rape should not automatically be believed. This is what adults do: confront and educate young people, cure their foolishness, and otherwise impart wisdom. But this obligation requires human interaction, and if youngsters avoid this, then it is no wonder they arrive on campus with all the sophistication of a 10-year-old.

Today's campuses are awash in student demands for safe spaces, speech codes, trigger warnings, and protection against microaggressions. A rumor that Charles Murray might soon give a lecture is sufficient to send the snowflakes off to [a safe space](#) to hear soft music and play with puppies to calm anxieties. Many willingly accept bold-faced lies about, for example, police killing thousands of unarmed blacks. Outrageous doomsday scenarios about "climate change" are taken as gospel truth even though barely anyone grasps the underlying science. Ditto for beliefs about rape culture, hate crimes, systemic racism, homophobia, and other alleged evils which are beyond questioning. Ideas such as defunding the police and socialism are no-brainers and nobody dares to differ.

Why does such nonsense flourish? Particularly since college students are, at least supposedly, smarter—or at least better educated—than average, and they voluntarily attend institutions committed to intellectual give and take? Obviously something has gone wrong in the path between kindergarten and freshman orientation. But what? Future analysis will no doubt offer copious explanations, but for the moment, I offer one possibility based on firsthand observations.

A major culprit disrupting the transmission of wisdom across generations is the cellphone. Thanks to these devices, young people may be physically present with adults but may nonetheless be incommunicado. We've all witnessed this disengagement, but we seldom recognized its importance—the breakdown of adult influence, a process akin to mothers unable to pass on colostrum and maternal antibodies to their newborns.

This disruption became clear to me recently when I was in a Chinese restaurant and in walked what appeared to be a family of six. All sat passively wired to their cellphones. Nobody talked over the course of the entire meal save for the father occasionally barking at a hapless waiter. It was an entire “family meal,” *sans* any human interaction. A few weeks later I encountered a comparable situation at a family event—a teenage nephew of mine sat zombie-like through almost the entire three-hour event, lost in his cellphone while the adults around him talked of this and that. I suppose he might have been listening to an audio version of [*A Critique of Pure Reason*](#), but for some reason I rather doubt it. More likely, he was consumed by rap music or a game. The surrounding conversation may not have been intellectual caviar, but surely he could have gained something from listening to his family members.

Having arrived at this realization, I soon applied it to good use at a dinner party of mine attended by a few heavy

cellphone users. As host I banned all electronic devices, and everybody was required to engage in adult conversation. Hard to say whether I've discovered the cure for chronic teenage airhead disorder, but we fared better than a convocation of zombies.

Unfortunately many adults are happy to permit children and adolescents to zone out as one might dispense [Brave New World](#)'s soma. It often begins when toddlers are given electronic devices to keep them quiet. Teachers, including university professors, may similarly tolerate this disengagement given the tranquility it brings. It's a short-term win-win as kids escape the challenges of navigating adulthood and adults secure peace and quiet. No upsetting disputes about the evils of the white patriarchy. iPhones and the like are just electronic versions of Ritalin.

Much has been said about curing today's youth of their insanity, but perhaps the best solution is [cell-phone jammers](#). Laws would have to be changed, but for [under \\$600](#) a family could install one to ensure that when a cis-gendered but "in transition" muddle-brained junior arrives home for spring break, Mom and Pop could inquire about his Postmodern Gender Studies major without worrying he might escape to his iPhone. Junior would also know that a reckoning awaits him over dinner, and he better start preparing a response. Welcome to talking with adults.

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