

The Decline and Decadence of Our Manners and Dress

Yesterday I was tapping away on the laptop when through the window I saw a young man walking up the drive toward the house. He was shirtless, wearing jeans and brogans—do they still call work boots by this name?—and I correctly assumed he was one of the crew repaving the driveway of the house across the street.

When I opened the door, he offered me a business card and began telling me the crew could repair my driveway as well. Shirtless, sweaty, and a bit pudgy, the young man thanked me for hearing him out, turned, and walked down the drive. It was then I saw that his jeans had slipped well down his rear end, exposing him in a highly embarrassing way. Another couple of inches, and he might as well have paraded through the neighborhood naked as the day he was born, at least on the backside.

I wanted to call him back to the porch, offer him a drink, invite him to take a seat, and then convey a couple of simple facts. If you're going to roam the neighborhood drumming up business, take 30 seconds to pull up your pants and put on an upper garment, preferably a short sleeve shirt.

I kept my mouth shut. Shame on me. I should have given him at least a gentle hint, for the way we dress often has repercussions for our behavior in society.

Most of us would agree, I think, that American standards of dress have declined in the last 50 years. Here in Front Royal, for example, a trip to the local grocery store or Walmart reveals many shoppers dressed in gym apparel. Others wear jeans, shorts, and t-shirts, often unattractive and ill-fitting because of the owner's weight. Few women wear dresses

or skirts, and a man in a suit and tie is a rarity. Occasionally, there's a shopper wearing flannel pajama bottoms.

Ordinarily, whenever I travel to town to write and read in the coffee shop, shop at the grocery store, visit the bank, or go to church, I wear khakis and a button-down shirt appropriate to the season. Nothing all that fancy, right? Yet in one of the first articles I wrote for *Intellectual Takeout*, "[How Did America Become a Nation of Slobs?](#)" I noted how one of my granddaughters, while watching *Casablanca* with me, questioned why everyone was so dressed up. When I explained that everyone used to dress this way, but not anymore, she responded with "you do."

As I say in the article, if I'm an example of *haute couture*, then ordinary fashion is as dead as Dickens' doornail.

The neglect in our dress is not so much deliberate nowadays as it is simply a part of who we are. We seem unaware of the public image we create in our choice of clothing. With the exceptions of places like church and work, we either dress for comfort or we simply don't care about the way we look.

But I wonder: Does this tendency toward sloppiness have ramifications beyond individual appearance?

In his recent *Intellectual Takeout* post "[The Forgotten Conservatism of No Country for Old Men](#)," Alexander Riley includes a passage from Cormac McCarthy's novel, later made into a movie, where Sheriff Ed Tom Bell reflects on "the ways American culture has gone off the rails:"

It starts when you begin to overlook bad manners. Any time you quit hearin' 'sir' and 'mam' the end is pretty much in sight.. The old people I talk to, if you could of told em that there would be people on the streets of our Texas towns with green hair and bones in their noses speakin a language they couldnt even understand, well, they just flat out wouldnt of believed

you. But what if youd of told em it was their own grandchildren?

I still see people in my town practicing politeness, holding the door open at the public library for that mom with three little ones who is carrying a bag filled with books, saying "Thank you," and treating others with respect. On the other hand, I also hear some young people using the f-bomb without regard for those around them, and I see men sitting in church seemingly oblivious to the pregnant woman standing by the wall behind them looking in vain for an open seat.

Time has changed our dress and our manners, bringing a certain crudity to our culture. Many of us hope for a way out of the decadence into which we have fallen, wanting music, movies, and literature that brighten rather than darken our lives, particularly for our children's sake.

But what if one cause of this decline has to do with our dress and manners? What if we dressed as if we respected ourselves, and showed respect for others through practicing basic etiquette?

Could those small changes lead us to a better place?

—

Dear Readers,

Big Tech is suppressing our reach, refusing to let us advertise and squelching our ability to serve up a steady diet of truth and ideas. Help us fight back by [becoming a member](#) for just \$5 a month and then join the discussion on Parler [@CharlemagneInstitute](#) and Gab [@CharlemagneInstitute](#)!

Image Credit:

Flickr-tk78000u, CC BY 2.0