

CHRIS'LL DEAL WITH IT

episode notes




EP 48 - Suburban Savages

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We're facing a crisis of civility in our civilization. From my perspective in the suburbs of New York City, I'm struck by the carelessness with which some suburbanites treat others. Suburbs are meant to provide more space, quiet, and ideally a community of neighbors you can actually get to know. On this episode, I'll attempt to unpack my feelings towards these Suburban Savages and some of the root causes that permit them to thrive.

My intent with this episode is not to cancel people. While I'm certainly about to call out particular behaviors, I want to express why I consistently feel that many in our community have blinders on towards the well-being of their neighbors.

Let's take our first type of Savage:

The Shopping Cart Abandoners

We've all seen it: Our fellow shopper unloads their cart, shuts their trunk, and just . . . Drives off. Perhaps the savage is aware enough to prop the cart's front wheels on a curb. Yet the cart return, often a short walk away, is left one cart emptier.

While certainly an example of extreme laziness, these savages display a lack of care towards others. The degree of savagery increases in awful weather. Consider these impacts:

- The cart collectors: Often making minimum wage, scouring the parking lot for wayward carts. Their jobs are rarely as straight forward as they should be: Gathering carts at the cart returns and pushing them back to the storefront. Instead, they have to weave through the entire lot, plucking individual abandoned carts. While the increase in risk of getting hit by parking lot traffic is minimal, it's not zero. Especially in miserable weather with less visibility for both them and drivers.
- Vehicle damage: The typical metal shopping cart weights 40-60 pounds. (18-27 kg) Winds can catch abandoned carts, sending them careening into other vehicles. Dings, dents, and scratches are completely avoidable nuisances.
- Consider the store owner: While I'm not weeping for corporate overlords, many stores are owned by local community members or franchisees. They pay wages to the cart collectors, who are spending more time outside than they normally should. They also face increased cart damage, which cost hundreds of dollars a piece.

The Elevated Jerks

There's basic etiquette we should follow involving elevators. And all of them share one requirement: Paying attention to your surroundings. All too often, people will board an elevator, press a button, and their head goes straight back to their phone. The result is doors not held, space not made, and minor delays for their fellow humans.

While the least offensive of the savages I'm profiling today, I include it to introduce one of the major influences on the significant uptick in suburban savagery: The cell phone. These glowing, addictive, digital pacifiers have created surges in inattentiveness, decreased social connection, and an epidemic of self-centeredness.

The Distracted Drivers

At their worst, cell phones have created a drastic epidemic of savagery on our roads. At nearly every red light you'll see someone staring into a phone. You'll see them texting while piloting their metal missile down the interstate. I've seen drivers facetimeing and watching movies while *actively* driving. These savages do this in parking lots, bad weather, through pedestrian crossings, and even through school safety zones.

What frustrates me even more is how many of these savages are driving vehicles that have Bluetooth and other hands-free technology embedded into their systems. Throw on some music, a podcast, or an audiobook. Use Siri or Alexa to dial your friend over the speakers. But keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road.

For me this is the worst of the savages, since this wanton neglect for safety has the highest human cost. I'll save the audience the run-down of statistics, as my argument is easily provable. **Driving a vehicle is a privilege, not a right.** While I feel there should be significantly higher penalties for the act, there also needs to be greater detection and accountability. When people reliably feel that they'll never get caught, the path to savagery becomes easier to follow.

I'm hopeful that the incredible advances in cameras, image detection, and automated violation processing will result in crackdowns. But in the meantime, be hyper-vigilant for the savages among you. And do what you can to avoid falling victim to this savagery yourself!

The Political Polluters

It's election season here in the United States. Which means nearly every intersection, red light, and for my fellow New Jersians I'll add jughandles, are swathed in plastic yard signs advertising local and state candidates. In 2024, this will reach epidemic levels with the presidential election as well.

They're visual eyesores, often featuring questionable graphic design choices. The mashup of them adding to the visual and mental clutter in our lives. All for the most minimal of impacts on the voting public.

All this political signaling bleeds into our neighborhoods, as lawn signs can become dividing lines.

If good fences make good neighbors, what happens if we paint them red or blue?

More importantly is the environmental cost. Corrugated plastic, plastic bag style, and coated cardboard... most of them end up in landfills. There are those out there who will recycle what they can, or re-use them for later elections, but they're in the minority. I'm a firm believer that this environmental cost far outweighs any practical benefits.

This is the sort of visual noise that distracts us from finding the true signals within our lives. Your name on a sign isn't going to sway me to vote for you: It's your stance on issues, your knowledge & ability to handle the job, and the sense of integrity you carry. Focus your efforts on better ways to display that info, rather than shout a mere name from every street corner.

Avoiding the descent into savagery

I believe there are common threads to these examples: Distraction, egocentrism, and a lack of care for their fellow humans! I think many of us forget why we create communities in the first place. These cornerstones of civilization evolve from an understanding that humanity is a stronger species when we work together.

Technological advancement, social services, shared infrastructure, arts & entertainment: These are all products of our experiments in co-habitation. **They require civility.**

Take the example of the concert: Some people decide to stand up to get a better view of the band. The people behind them then have to stand to see, and so on & so forth until the crowd is standing for the entire show. These are coordination traps, a mass bending & breaking of rules just to function.

The decisions we make on a personal level should at least consider their impacts on our community & fellow human. Permitting our landscaper to start leaf blowing at 8am, letting our dog bark it's head off in the backyard for hours at a time, screwing with your muffler to make it pop louder as you tear through a residential neighborhood, these are all examples of behaviors that detract from the quality of our neighbor's lives.

And these are all just the symptoms of the disease. And like an illness we should heed the warnings and take direct action, before these symptoms worsen and our society falls apart.

Making positive change in the world starts with our own intentions. Then we can extend our awareness to our neighbors, community, nation, and the world at large.

 **Episode 48 Quote:**

Today's quote comes from Czech statesman and communist dissident Václav Havel:

“A better system will not automatically ensure a better life. In fact, the opposite is true: only by creating a better life can a better system be developed.”