



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on November 6, 2013

Trashing Our Culture With Trash

A long-growing garbage field much larger than Texas is [creeping toward](#) the United States' west coast, and parts of it will increasingly make landfall for quite a long time.

And one can't help but think that it has come to the right place.

A new book by writer Charlotte Hays entitled *When Did White Trash Become the New Normal?* will be released this week, and, paraphrasing historian Arnold Toynbee, it issues a serious warning: "Society crumbles when it takes cues from the underclass."



The author goes on to [write](#) in a *New York Post* article on the subject:

When Snooki, whose talents include getting sloppy drunk and throwing up on camera, made Barbara Walters' "Ten Most Fascinating People" list a few years back, one could only ask: Was Octomom not available?

Last year, "Here Comes Honey Boo Boo," which features a cornucopia of social ills, was TLC's highest-rated show, attracting more cable viewers than the Republican National Convention, which had the misfortune to share the time slot with the charmers from Georgia. The show's matriarch, June Shannon, has four daughters by four men, one of whose names she can't recall.

It wasn't always like this. Speaking of days most can't recall, Janet Shaw Crouse [writes](#) at *American Thinker*, "The ultimate wedding gift when I got married ... was silver serving ware; now those tarnished treasures can be bought for cheap prices in thrift stores, because nobody wants to spend the time polishing silver bowls, creamers, or pitchers and, for today's generation, the idea of actually serving tea from a silver tea service or setting a table with multiple choices of eating utensils is laughable." Sort of like Little Lord Fauntleroy, Frances Hodgson Burnett's quaint, diminutive [storybook](#) earl-to-be who paraded around Brooklyn dressed like a little English gentleman.

Except that it wasn't just fiction. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, children would sometimes be dressed in fancy suits so that they'd look like little adults — who themselves actually dressed like adults. What do we see today? Perhaps an old fellow with jowl breakdown, crows' feet, gray hair — and an earring and tattoo. Whereas grown-ups were once truly grown up and kids wanted to be grown up, too, we now see adults emulating children.

The Fauntleroy phenomenon wasn't restricted to the wealthy, either. As Hays writes, "Not being White Trash wasn't a matter of money. It was purely behavioral." Thus did the early part of the 1900s see criminals such as Mafiosi don their expensive suits and shun those who weren't up to snuff, considering them bums. The desire to avoid trash status cut across racial lines, too, and it was common in that time period to see black folks in Harlem dressed to the nines. People looked up to the cultured, not down to the crass.



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This brings me to one area where I'd take issue with Hays: It isn't just white trash setting the standard, but also, as Thomas Sowell called them, "black rednecks." And how much daylight lies between the two is debatable. Explaining the origin of his terminology, Sowell said that the "black" speech pattern tendentiously called "Ebonics" is simply poor redneck English; it can be traced back 500 years to England, he pointed out, and even back then such people were known as rednecks and crackers.

However you define it, the tragic reality is that we're taking our lead from society's most degraded elements. Consider how the now-mainstream baggy pants style originated in prison, where inmates' trousers would sag because belts were disallowed. And tattoos — once known as tramp stamps — are now stamps designating membership in the cool pool. Why, I've even seen old ladies and "upper class" young people who seem compelled to get them, though the relatively cultured (and, boy, that is relative nowadays) often try to ensure they're barely visible.

Not surprisingly, our language has come to reflect our appearance. It isn't just that people don't know how to use it anymore, but cursing has become mainstream; I even see so-called conservative journalists casually use words such as a** and dumb**, obediently following the lead of trend-setting liberals. More vulgar terms such as the f-word are still generally presented with asterisks, but give it time.

Of course, for saying this I'll be branded a walking, talking version of silverware. As one reader wrote after I complained of vulgarity, "We're not all Little Lord Fauntleroy's out here." But maybe we should be. As Arnold Toynbee said, it's up to the elites to save civilization. And if I'll be flamed for being a keeper of the flame, or thought arrogant for thinking I am such, all I can say is that it's getting both easier and harder to be elite all the time — but also more necessary.

And what really drives this trashing of our culture? Frankfurt School communist Willi Munzenberg once said that he wanted "to organise the intellectuals and use them to make Western Civilisation stink. [Because] [o]nly then, after they have corrupted all its values and made life impossible, can we impose the dictatorship of the proletariat." But whoever motivated these "intellectuals," the result is obvious: a rejection of authentic intellectualism. As Hays writes in her *Post* piece:

We modern philistines tell ourselves that rejecting the customs and conventions of a stuffy, old elite will release creativity and bring about a renaissance. Nothing could be further from the truth. According to Toynbee, self-expression replaces creativity when disintegrating societies look downward.

Aspiration is replaced by complacency. Shame vanishes. Any criticism becomes "haters gonna hate," or the White Trash motto: "It don't make no difference."

Of course it doesn't seem to, when you're consumed by our characteristic cultural disease: relativism. "Hey, yo, who's to say what's higher or lower culture? Heck, there ain't no higher and lower, dontcha' know? There's only what feels good and what don't."

I wonder how good the collapse of civilization will feel, Cletus.

Comedian Jeff Foxworthy is famous for jokes such as, "If you stare at an orange juice container because it says, 'Concentrate,' you might be a redneck" and "If your parents met at a family reunion, you might be a redneck." But, increasingly, we can say that if you enjoy modern American culture, you might be a redneck.

And that's no laughing matter.



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