

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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I Miss Manners

Civility is gradually disappearing from our culture. I lament its passing. Simply put, I miss manners.

Even when our mother was a single parent and before she married our stepfather, my brother and I were expected to conduct ourselves properly. That is to say we were to be "perfect little gentlemen." I wasn't quite sure what that phrase meant at first, but I knew had had to do with behaving in a way that was counter to a little boy's rambunctious approach to living life!

This all fell under the heading of "Good Manners." Some of those expected behaviors we learned early on were 1) Don't interrupt adults when they are talking. 2) Speak clearly and distinctly. 3) When in the company of adults keep your voice down. 4) Address those older than you by saying, "Ma'am," and "Sir." 5) Tuck in your shirt. 6) Wash your hands before eating or preparing food. 7) Polish your shoes. 8) Stand up when a lady enters the room. 9) Do not wear a hat in the house (or generally indoors anywhere). 10) Seat ladies first at the dinner table. 11) When walking outside with a hat on and you encounter a lady, slightly raise your hat while nodding with a greeting. The list can go on and no doubt many of you could add many more examples.

I'd like to focus on this matter of men wearing hats. True, we do not wear the hats of a hundred years ago when it was quite fashionable to be seen in public with a smart looking hat as you walked about your town. Women almost always wore a hat when venturing outside. These customs eventually petered out to the point that today hats are worn by women more for formal events, and men hardly wear them at all. The exception for men is the ubiquitous baseball cap. And the vast majority of golfers wear a cap of some sort. More and more women seem to be wearing baseball caps, too.

I was curious about men and the practice of wearing a hat. Why, for instance, are men expected to remove their hats when entering a home or other building? Why do men remove their hats when speaking to a woman? Why does a woman not remove her hat in like manner when speaking to a man?

You're probably thinking that since I've retired I have too much time on my hands to be delving into such seemingly silly subjects. But, alas! Allow me to share my findings with you.

In the days of chivalry with knights and damsels, such manners were forged into societies. We still have the remnants of these practices today. For instance, when two knights would greet each other, they would lift the right hand to raise the face shield of their helmet to make eye contact, and perhaps a smile of recognition. The right hand is also the hand used by most warriors in combat. So raising

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weaponless right hand was a sign that the gesture was a friendly one. This greeting was carried over into "tipping the hat," and in the military it became the salute.

"When a gentleman '**dots**' his hat to leave or '**doffs**' his hat to a lady, his actions are being described by two British colloquialisms that come from contractions of the phrases 'do on' meaning 'to do', and the Middle English 'doffen', which became 'don off' meaning 'to do off'! Hats are **tipped**, (or doffed) slightly lifting the hat off your forehead, when meeting a lady (remove your hat if you stop to talk), or to 'say' to anyone, male or female – *thank you, excuse me, hello, goodbye, you're welcome or how do you do.*" (Hat Etiquette, by Andy Gilchrist, <http://www.askandyaboutclothes.com/clothing/style-tips/hat-etiquette/>).

Tipping, or doffing your hat is a sign of politeness, a courtesy extended to others as a matter of respect. Today when two men make eye contact and do not personally know each other, it is common for both to make a slight nod of the head in the direction of the other.

Women, on the other hand, do not engage in the donning and doffing of their hats because their head wear is usually much more complicated. The hat may be held in place by bobby pins, or hat pins, or hair combs. Further complicating the removal of the hat for the gentler sex is the whole business of the woman's hair being disturbed in the removal process. So the woman is allowed to keep her hat in place.

However, with the advent of the baseball cap, more women are finding it convenient to wear such headgear. But if you do so, ladies, remember this: When you are at an athletic event with a ball cap on and the time comes for the playing of the National Anthem, you are expected to remove your ball cap along with the men. Now there's equality for you!

I miss manners primarily because people behavior better in public when they engage in such gestures of respect for others.

Think about it.