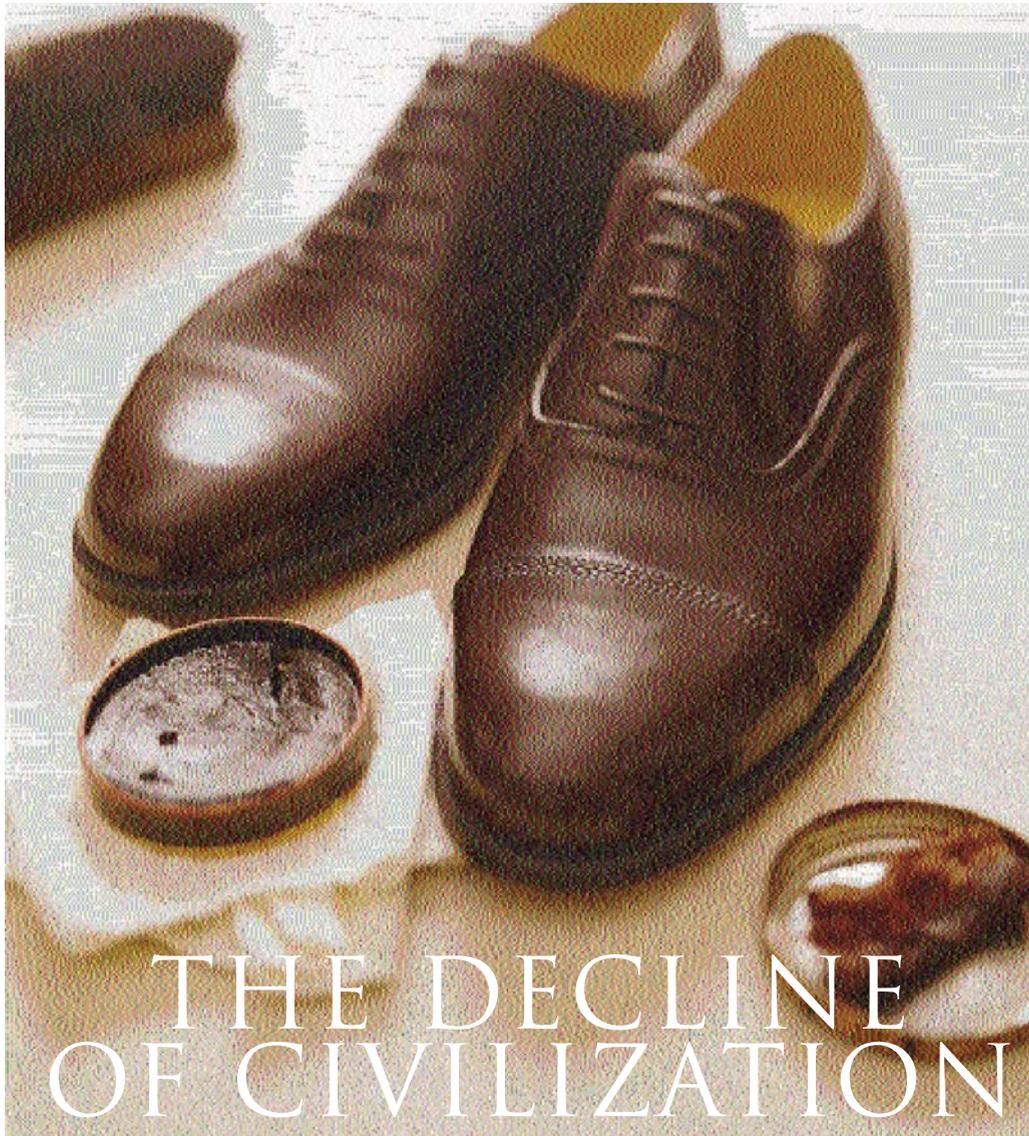


## Practical Matters



# THE DECLINE OF CIVILIZATION

A THIN LAYER OF SHOE POLISH IS ALL THAT STANDS BETWEEN US AND THE NEANDERTHALS

Will you just look at those!” she chortled. “What?” I replied in my groggy pre-caffeinated daze. Her finger pointed to my feet, “Those shoes: They’re pathetic. Clean them up . . .”

Obviously, my brilliant performance the night before was already forgotten. She clearly reveled in the joy of demeaning my manhood, pointing out that no matter what else about me was dazzling, my shoes were not.

As I inspected my heavily worn loafers, it occurred to me that she had a point: those tassels weren’t shaking for anyone. Reluctantly, I trod over to the hall closet and got out that damn shoe shine kit. I hated it, but I applied the paste anyway, determined to discover a better way.

**PUT YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD** Like it or not, the unavoidable fact is that 80 percent of the population

judges you by the shoes you wear. So before you step out shoddily shod, here are some simple things you should do about once a month to keep your shoes looking new and extend their street life.

**1-PROTECT** Consider water and stains to be your shoe’s major enemies so weatherproof your leather before wandering outside. Before old man winter’s deluge of salt and water has a chance to start its inevitable destructive course, apply a water protector to the shoe sole. Among the many products that will prevent water from being absorbed into leather, Kiwi recommends their Protect-All Repellent, Camp Dry and Wet Pruf protector to help your shoes peacefully co-exist with nature as well as some unsavory man-made elements too.

The shoe industry has recently developed an innova-

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tion to extend your shoes' life (and satisfy any foot fetish). For added protection, visit your local shoe repair shop (aka the cobbler) and ask for a sole guard, a thin rubber coating applied directly to the leather sole of your shoe. Not your father's rubbers, these come in colors, both light and dark, to match your existing sole and are so thin they won't change the look or feel of your shoe.

**2 - CLEAN** Before you apply wax, you must first clean the shoes, otherwise you will seal the dirt particles into the grain of the leather. Use a leather cleaner to remove surface dirt. Don't be squeamish. Remove the laces, grab a rag and some solvent and rub out scuffs, mud, food and built up wax from your shoes.

**3 - CONDITION** Conditioning keeps shoe material soft and supple. Lanolin or products such as Kiwi Leather Lotion are state-of-the-art.

**4 - DRY** By letting your shoes dry properly, you can minimize the inevitable effects of nasty weather, water and also avoid mold growth. Allow wet shoes to dry at room temperature because direct exposure to prolonged heat will cause the leather to get brittle and crack.

By all means, try not to wear the same shoes every day; give them a chance to air out between wearings. Facilitate the drying process by using cedar shoe trees to absorb the moisture, salt and acid left by perspiring feet, minimizing any offensive odors from building up and that way you won't have to hold your breath waiting for your shoes to dry. Cedar's natural wicking action will also smooth out the lining and insoles to help hold the shoe's shape.

**5 - POLISH** No matter how gentrified, virtually every professional can benefit from a little added polish.

Paste is preferred because the heavy wax formulation has staying power and provides the deepest shine. Kiwi's Parade Gloss black has

the highest wax formulation but requires a great deal of elbow grease to apply and buff to a shine. The payoff for this extra effort is that paste wax gives you the opportunity to rejuvenate that hard earned shine whenever the urge strikes by simply buffing without having to get out more polish. The downside: paste comes in only a few colors.

Liquids are the easiest to apply. For instant gratification, you simply sponge on using the convenient applicator, let dry and you're done. However, this is actually a fleeting triumph since liquids don't stand the test of time and they contain alcohol which dries the leather.

Cream polishes offer the best of both worlds. Urad is the *crème de la crème* of cream polishes. Not only does this wax contain a color stain it also has a leather conditioner plus an acrylic finish. Once applied there is no buffing or polishing required, but this comes at a price. The street value is around \$8 for 100 grams of the stuff. Urad is hard to find but can be ordered from Richard Wojtkowski at the Footwear Craftsmans' Network, 800-788-2141.

However insecure you may really be, you'll exude confidence when supported by a good foundation—your footwear. In the quest for comfort and an improved stature you can go one step further by adding new insoles (try Dr. Scholl's). Your feet will thank you.

If all of this sounds like, shall we say, a less than a thrilling experience, consider getting a professional shine. Expect to pay around four bucks for a shine that will put the spark back in your step. Depending on how "well heeled" you are, a tip can range from \$2-\$10. If all else fails, throw away your old shoes and stroll down to your favorite men's store for those chunky new Italian lace-ups. What's money for anyway?

*Hans Gschliesser likes to write at home wearing boxer shorts and chunky Italian lace-ups.*