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# Elmo and the End of Civilization as We Know It

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Joel Stein, columnist for *The Los Angeles Times*, thinks he has found the culprit behind our civilizational decline — Elmo. That's right, Elmo of Sesame Street fame. "Yes, I know that children love Elmo," Stein admits, adding: "But children are idiots."

Single-handedly, Elmo may not be totally responsible for the decline of a great civilization — but I think Stein is on to something here.

In [his column](#), published August 15, Stein quotes Sesame Street parodists Vernon Chatman and John Lee:

*"Elmo doesn't grow. People show him something and he laughs. He doesn't learn a lesson," says Lee. "It's the exact opposite of what old 'Sesame Street' used to do. Elmo has been learning the same lesson his whole life, which is that Elmo likes Elmo." Chatman, who refers to Elmo as the Jar Jar Binks of "Sesame Street," worries that Elmo teaches kids to care only about themselves.*

*"Elmo is just a baby-voiced, self-obsessed character who is only concerned with Elmo," says Lee. "He just passively observes things: 'Elmo is looking at a sandwich. Elmo is eating a sandwich. . . ."*

*"Whereas Count Von Count markets math and Oscar markets the acceptability of negative emotions, Elmo, brilliantly, just markets Elmo, leading him to be the show's cash cow, or whatever misshapen animal he's supposed to be.*

Now, I have never been a fan of Sesame Street (too hyperactive, too loud, too politically correct, etc.) but until today I had never considered one of its characters to be symbolic of civilizational decline and social pathologies.

But then, a character who tells children to focus primarily on themselves just may be the great symbol for the narcissism and self-worship of our therapeutic age. Maybe it is Elmo's fault after all. I'm convinced.

In reality, I haven't thought of Sesame Street for some time, but on the span of a few short hours I see this article and then hear Dr. Russell Moore make cultural observations based on another Sesame Street character, [Abby Cadabby](#). Dr. Moore, always at the ready with keen cultural observations, was kindly guest hosting *The Albert Mohler Program* as I am silenced by a fierce case of laryngitis. You just never know what you can learn when you are forced to shut up and listen for a change.



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