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The Littering Ape

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This text was transcribed by Freedom Club, an anti-industrial student group at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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A number of anthropologically inclined individuals have in recent years gained fame and fortune by authoring books of the "Naked Ape" genre. These writers, by explaining human behavior in terms of territorial imperative, dominance rankings, and other instincts originating before the dawn of Paleolithic times, have succeeded in attaching an aura of romance to our most mundane actions. Nowadays, when a man makes love to his wife, he is no longer just a man making love to his wife; he is a muscular, aggressive cavemen enacting a savage rite inherited from the misty past. When a junior executive bosses a subordinate, he is proving his virility by reinforcing his position in the dominance hierarchy; and when he attends a business conference, he can envision himself and his associates as a pack of skin-clad Neanderthals [...] on their muscular haunches about a campfire, planning a hunt.

However, one aspect of human instinctual behavior, of particular importance in these pollution-conscious times, seems to have been overlooked. Despite extensive propaganda campaigns and the ubiquitous presence of very convenient waste receptacles, the authorities still have not succeeded in inducing people to stop littering. The reason is that they have not

grasped the psychological and anthropological roots of the problem. Why *do* people litter?

Animals subject to the territorial imperative must have means of making out the bounds of their territories. With most animals, this is accomplished through deposition of excreta—which is why we see dogs going from one tree to another, leaving a calling card at each. Many wild animals do the same thing. As they have a keen sense of smell, they can readily recognize the signatures of other animals and so avoid trespassing. But man, depending basically on sight rather than on sense of smell, has had to find visual means of leaving his signature. We used to carve our initials on tress; but trees are scarce in our cities now, and we aren't allowed to carve them up any more. So what do we do? We strew cigarette packages and gum wrappers. It's our way of saying "Kilroy was here."

The instinctual origins of the problem being clear, the solution becomes obvious. People refuse to deposit their litter on the trash receptacles because the receptacles *conceal* their litter. It is therefore an imperative condition of social progress that we erect posts (analogous to the "scent posts" of animals) provided with spikes or hooks on which litter can be impaled in such a manner as to be conspicuously displayed. When decorated to capacity, these posts can be carted off to the city dump, and the litter problem will be fully solved.