

# The Historical Role of Wisdom: Time to Invite “The Wise Women and Men” Back into American Society. The Insights of the Elders

By [Richard Gale](#) and [Dr. Gary Null](#)

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*In the current epoch, America stands on the precipice of a profound socio-cultural collapse, driven by divisive zealotry, ideological polarization, and a departure from the meritocratic values that once propelled the nation forward.*

*The true architects of societal wisdom—the elders who historically guided younger generations through life’s complexities—have been marginalized. In their place, ideologues wield influence, lacking the sagacity essential for balanced governance and cultural cohesion. This shift represents a broader loss of wisdom in American culture, supplanted by biases and prejudice.*

**Throughout history, the longevity of elders was synonymous with wisdom.**

**These venerable figures served as pillars of knowledge, shaping the moral and intellectual fabric of communities.**

Education was a collective endeavor, deeply rooted in family, tribe, and community. Today, however, a significant portion of society, particularly the younger generations, has severed ties with this historical legacy. The socio-psychological implications of this shift are alarming. Driven by primal instincts and disconnected from those embodying true wisdom, the youth now navigate life with lowered standards of knowledge, evident in the degraded state of our esteemed educational and social institutions.

The erosion of America’s social foundation and cultural fabric, driven by divisive policies and tribal polarization has not occurred in isolation.

Throughout history, many great minds have emphasized the importance of wisdom—both civic and spiritual—and critical thinking for a productive and sustainable society. At the same time they have warned against the dangers posed by conceited bureaucrats and administrators who promote rigid lawful dogmas over genuine knowledge and wisdom. Therefore, today more than ever before, there is an urgent demand to restore the wisdom of our elders as central figures to critique the self-destructive trajectory that has been underway for over four decades and to propose a path forward.

Throughout history, philosophers and deep thinkers have recognized the pivotal cultural role of elders by emphasizing their unique capacity to embody wisdom and guide younger generations towards a healthy and cohesive societal structure. Aristotle notably emphasized the importance of elders in the context of governance and education. He viewed elders as repositories of *phronesis* or “practical wisdom”, gained through a lifetime of experiences and moral deliberation.

Such practical wisdom is essential for making sound judgments and decisions that contribute to communal well-being by transmitting to younger generations the legacy of ethical values and civic virtues. Similarly Plato in his *The Republic*, and Stoics such as Seneca and Epictetus after him, envisioned a loose hierarchical society where elders, owing to their accumulated knowledge and wisdom, occupied positions of respect and authority.

**Plato’s ideal city-state placed great emphasis on the intergenerational transmission of knowledge** with elders serving as mentors and guardians of moral and intellectual development. By imparting their insights into justice, moral etiquette, and the human condition, elders were crucial for shaping society’s ethical framework and fostering a harmonious community life. For the Stoics, aging was not simply the final life episode of physical decline but an opportunity for spiritual and philosophical growth. For example, Seneca regarded elders as exemplars of resilience and moral fortitude, whose stewardship was indispensable for navigating the complexities of human existence with equanimity and integrity. Unlike our own times, wisdom was not solely a repository of knowledge to be forgotten in dusty libraries or buried on the Internet, but a lived, embodied understanding of life’s knottiness, which was imparted through close, personal mentorship.

**Today, many young people have distanced themselves from this historical inheritance and the wisdom embodied by their elders.**

Acting more on primal biological instincts, a faux sense of individuality, and immediate gratification, they lack the critical thinking skills and depth of understanding that comes from long-term experience and reflection. This disconnect reflects a broader cultural shift away from valuing accumulated wisdom and have replaced it with superficial valorization of novelty and youthful folly. The result is a generation ill-equipped to navigate the sophisticated challenges and prone to pontifical manipulation and shallow thinking. The disconnection from spiritual and ethical values from their parental generations’ blind embrace of radical secular materialism has further compounded this crisis. They have left, including many Boomer parents, a vacuum where a sense of purpose and moral clarity should otherwise reside.

John Dewey, a prominent philosopher and educational reformer, **viewed wisdom as a dynamic process of practical and reflective intelligence that integrates knowledge with ethics and social purpose.** Like the Stoics, Dewey regarded wisdom not simply as a collection of facts but the skill of inquiring and reflecting deliberately in the context of

cultivating a more expansive principled awareness. He would likely have profound concerns about the degradation of American education in the 21st century, especially regarding the decline in academic standards, the lack of critical thought, student-driven curricula, and the censorship or rewriting of classic literature based on inflexible doctrines.

Our contemporary education system increasingly prioritizes administrative conformity and ideological alignment over intellectual rigor. The standards of knowledge in our most esteemed institutions have been greatly lowered with a focus on bureaucratic expansion and billion dollar endowments rather than genuine learning. Some elementary schools are even proposing the elimination of essential subjects like math, which reflects the troubling trend towards the collective dumbing down of society. History, once a means of understanding complex narratives and lessons, is being re-envisioned into textbooks that fit privileged racial and gender narratives thereby losing their objectivity and educational value. Dewey would vehemently oppose today's perverse woke and pseudo-patriotic censorship disguised as historical revisionism. Because he treasured intellectual freedom, education should expose students to a wide diversity of ideas, perspectives, and cultural heritages. Literature should foster empathy and understanding about multiple worldviews in order to grapple with the difficult ethical issues that our unbridled postmodern technocracy has stirred up. But such values are being shredded by the new generation of militant crusaders who intend to brainwash younger generations with woke prejudices and regressive draconian diversity, equity and inclusion or DEI policies.

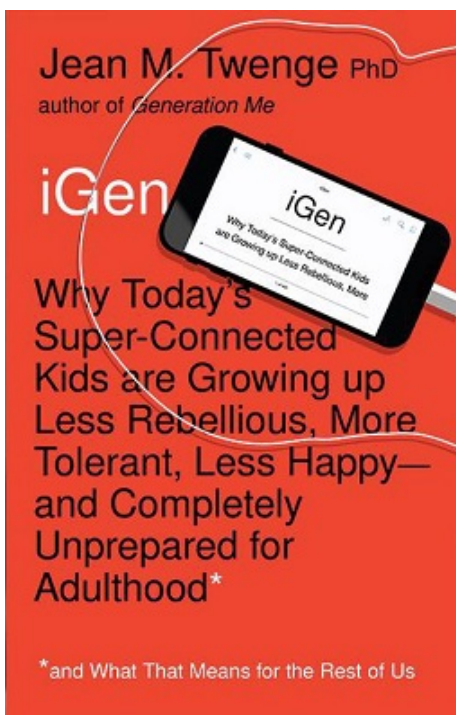
Dewey was a staunch advocate for progressive education that emphasized active learning and the integration of knowledge with practical experience. He believed that education should prepare individuals to be active and informed citizens capable of participating in a democratic society. Dewey, as well as Jean Jacques Rousseau before him, would undoubtedly be deeply troubled by the intellectual decline among students today and their inability to engage in meaningful civic dialogue with others. Voltaire, for example, championed the cause of reason, free thought, and civil liberties. His work targeted the dogmas and oppressive structures of his time, advocating for a society where intellectual freedom and rational debate could flourish. Voltaire's famous dictum, "Écrasez l'infâme" ("Crush the infamous"), encapsulated his disdain for tyranny and superstition, or collective self-deception; it underscores his belief in the power of reason and critical inquiry to uplift humanity and prevent societal stagnation or collapse. The deficiency in reason and wisdom now manifests in noticeably destructive ways, from poor decision-making to increased susceptibility to manipulation by tyrannical corporate oligarchs who easily buy their way into the nation's policy making.

Not only education but also the ideals of young adults has been on a steady gradual decline for over half a century.

The youth movements of the 1960s and early 1970s left a legacy of constructive accomplishments that continue to resonate today. These movements, often driven by a passionate commitment to social justice, anti-war efforts and civil rights, significantly advanced the causes of equality, freedom, and human dignity. The Civil Rights Movement, spearheaded by young activists, dismantled institutionalized racism and paved the way for landmark legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Similarly, the anti-Vietnam War protests not only hastened the end of U.S. involvement in the war but also fostered a broader skepticism of governmental authority and militarism, laying the groundwork for a more informed and critical citizenry.

Comparing the moral values of the Baby Boomer generation with today's younger generations reveals a complex interplay of ideals and behaviors.

The Boomers, born in the aftermath of World War II, grew up in a period of relative stability and economic prosperity, which imbued them with a sense of optimistic idealism and a belief in collective action for a higher moral ground. Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development highlights this era's emphasis on generativity and caring for the community as essential components of identity formation. According to Erikson, the Boomers' formative years were marked by a sense of purpose and direction, with societal structures encouraging them to contribute positively to the community and work towards a greater good. This generativity, which Erikson understood as a universal human desire, was the antidote to developmental stagnation and is crucial for young adults to develop their sense of responsibility and commitment to social causes.



In contrast, Millennials and Gen Z are frequently characterized by a more self-serving individualism and emotional volatility. The pervasive influence of digital technology and social media has created a culture of immediacy and self-promotion, often at the expense of deeper, communal values. This shift can be partly attributed to the economic instability and uncertainty these younger generations have faced, including the 2008 financial crisis and the current gig economy, which have fostered a survivalist mentality. In her book *iGen*, Jean Twenge scrutinizes these younger generations for their lack of critical thinking skills and immaturity. Twenge argues that the constant exposure to digital media and the pressures of social validation have led to a decline in deep, analytical thinking and an increase in superficial, emotionally driven responses. She highlights how the emphasis on immediate gratification and individual success have overshadowed the development of resilience and critical reasonings.

The parents of Boomers, often referred to as the Great Generation, emphasized hard work, discipline, and sacrifice, values that were almost canonized in rebuilding and sustaining American society and the economy after the war. The national collective consciousness was shaped by shared hardship and the triumph of overcoming adversity. In contrast, contemporary parenting emphasizes self-esteem, individual expression and emotional well-

being, often at the expense of psychic resilience and communal responsibility. This shift reflects broader societal changes including increased affluence and a focus on personal fulfillment over collective duty.

In addition, the spiritual ideals that emerged in the 1960s played a crucial role in fueling the activism of the era. The countercultural movements embraced various spiritual philosophies, from Eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism to the human potential movement, which sought to transcend materialism and connect with deeper existential truths. It gave rise to investigating natural medical therapies outside conventional pharmaceutical-based medicine. Today's holistic medical movement can largely trace its legacy to the 1960s adventurous idealism. These spiritual currents played a role in the anti-war and human rights movements; it provided a moral and ethical framework that emphasized compassion, fellowship and interconnectedness, and a rejection of material excess.

In contrast, today's cultural landscape is marked by a decline in traditional religious affiliation and a rise in atheism and scientific materialism. According to Pew Research Center, there has been a notable increase in the number of Americans identifying as religiously unaffiliated, particularly among younger generations. This shift has led to a more secular worldview, where scientific reasoning and a mechanist regard for empirical evidence are over-valued and spiritual or religious beliefs are tossed in the historical dustbin. While this has fostered a more rational and evidence-based approach to many aspects of life, it has also contributed to a sense of spiritual disconnection, psychological isolation and purposelessness, existential angst and a lack of cohesive moral vision.

We might look at the power of cinema to capture the zeitgeist of its era. Earlier films' predictions of future societal crises is a testament to the visionary capabilities of filmmakers. Several Hollywood films from the mid-20th century have not only entertained but also presciently warned of institutional corruption, societal collapse, and the erosion of ethical values that have come to define the 21st century. Paddy Chayefsky's *Network* (1976), Arthur Hiller's *The Hospital* (1971), Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) and *Barry Lyndon* (1975), Sidney Lumet's *Twelve Angry Men* (1957), and the 1962 adaptation of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* serve as poignant cinematic forewarnings, their narratives increasingly relevant as today's realities unfold.

*Network* is perhaps one of the most striking examples of cinema's prophetic voice. Paddy Chayefsky's dark satire of the television industry encapsulates the media's descent into sensationalism and profit-driven content. The character of Howard Beale, portrayed by Peter Finch, becomes the mouthpiece for public outrage by famously declaring, "I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not going to take this anymore!" This outburst reflects a deep-seated disillusionment with the media's role in society; its a sentiment that resonates powerfully today as trust in mainstream news outlets wanes and infotainment overshadows substantive reporting. Chayefsky foresaw a media landscape where corporate interests eclipse journalistic integrity, a scenario that has materialized in the age of 24-hour news cycles, social media echo chambers and Orwellian newspeak.

Cancel culture, characterized by the public shaming and ostracism of individuals or works deemed offensive or politically incorrect, poses a significant threat to these films. *Network*, with its scathing critique of the media's descent into sensationalism and the psyop of fake propaganda, could easily offend modern sensibilities by exposing the manipulative tactics of CNN, MSNBC, Fox, the New York Times, PBS and the rest of legacy media. Its raw portrayal of public disillusionment is too confrontational in an era where dissenting voices are often

silenced to maintain a veneer of social harmony.

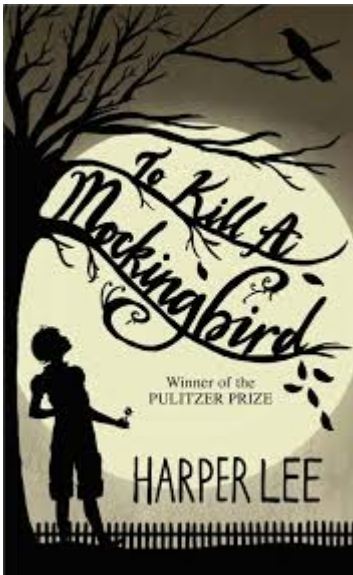
Arthur Hiller's ***The Hospital*** delves into the bureaucratic dysfunction and moral decay within our healthcare system. The movie's theme has only become more pertinent in the face of the pharmaceutical industry's total capture of our federal health agencies. It prefigures the modern healthcare system's failures exacerbated by private favoritism such as Obamacare and the pharmaceutical industry's influence into every aspect of our lives. George C. Scott's portrayal of Dr. Herbert Bock highlights the frustration and helplessness of medical professionals who are devoted to the moral integrity of the Hippocratic Oath while being ensnared in a capitalized establishment that prioritizes cost-saving efficiency and profit over patient care. The film's satirical examination of institutional incompetence and corruption echoes the modern critiques of the world's Anthony Faucis and Bill Gates who have weaponized medicine through global institutions such as the World Health Organization. Phony doctors heading the HHS, CDC, FDA and NIAID masquerade as phony representatives of science. The repressive medical regime, controlled by compromised executives and scientists, administrative bloat and pharmaceutical profiteering undermine compassionate healthcare itself. With its unvarnished look at the healthcare system's bureaucratic inefficiencies and ethical compromises, *The Hospital* today is too critical of an industry that has become synonymous with corporate interests. Following the Covid-19 pandemic as healthcare debates are highly polarized, such a candid portrayal could provoke backlash from those seeking to protect the industry's image and profitability.

Stanley Kubrick's ***Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*** remains a seminal work about the darkly comic absurdities of Cold War-era lunacy and the ever-present threat of nuclear annihilation. The film's portrayal of inept and paranoid leaders making catastrophic decisions in a high-stakes geopolitical game is eerily relevant today with neoconservative warmongers such as Anthony Blinken, Lloyd Austen and Jake Sullivan in the current Biden administration, and Mike Pompeo and John Bolton during the Trump years, who seem determined to launch the West into a third world war. The character of General Buck Turgidson, again played by George C. Scott, embodies the dangerous hubris and bellicosity that can lead to global disaster, a reminder of the ongoing risks posed by nuclear proliferation and international brinkmanship with NATO's game of chicken against Russia's far superior military. If released today, *Dr. Strangelove* and its satirical take on Cold War politics would be deemed too provocative given the current geopolitical climate. The film's dark humor and portrayal of nuclear brinkmanship might be seen as trivializing serious issues, potentially leading to its censorship in a society increasingly wary of anything that might appear to undermine national security concerns and the beating war drums against Russia, China and Iran.

In *Barry Lyndon*, Kubrick shifts his focus to the personal ambition and social climbing of an 18th-century rogue. The titular character's relentless pursuit of wealth and status, often through morally dubious means, mirrors the modern-day narratives of the Wall Street billionaire class and Silicon Valley's dystopian technocrats. The film's depiction of the corrupting influence of power and the superficiality of social success resonates with contemporary critiques of economic inequality and the moral compromises often required for material advancement. Its depiction of superficiality and corruption is an attack on the modern-day equivalents of its protagonist such as the multinational banks and Blackrock, and would prompt calls for the film's suppression by those who benefit from maintaining the status quo.

Sidney Lumet's *Twelve Angry Men* explores the dynamics of justice and the influence of

personal biases within the jury system. The film's examination of how prejudice and preconceived notions can cloud judgment is an accurate portrayal of today's polarized society. The narrative underscores the importance of critical thinking, empathy, and the courage to stand against majority opinion. Today Critical Race Theory and the divisive rhetoric of figures like Robin DiAngelo, Ibram X Kendi, and Nikole Hannah-Jones illustrate how personal biases distort objective judgment and justice and feed a socially driven mob mentality. *Twelve Angry Men* challenges the popular Black-and-White narratives promoted by both sides of the political spectrum. In a society deeply divided by ideological red lines, the film's exploration of justice and empathy might be censored for failing to conform to simplistic moral binaries.



Finally, the 1962 film adaptation of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, directed by Robert Mulligan, remains a powerful commentary on racial injustice and moral integrity. Gregory Peck's portrayal of Atticus Finch as a principled lawyer defending an innocent black man accused of rape highlights the enduring struggles against racism and the importance of standing up for what is right even in the face of societal opposition. Now that both the inquisitional Right and Left seek to ban books and stifle free speech, Finch's principles are more relevant than ever. His character stands as a beacon of ethical steadfastness and a reminder of the importance of defending fundamental rights and freedoms. Despite its longstanding status as a classic, critical race activists have targeted the film's perspective and treatment of racial issues, arguing that it centers on a white savior narrative. It is no surprise therefore that in our age of heightened irrational sensitivity towards personal representation and identity politics that *To Kill a Mockingbird* has been a special target for censorship.

These films collectively offer a rich tapestry of insights into the systemic issues that plague America's culture. They highlight the dangers of unchecked institutional power, the moral compromises that erode societal values, and the humanitarian need for individuals to uphold principles of justice, integrity, and critical thought. As we navigate the chaotic waters of the 21st century, the lessons embedded in these cinematic works serve as vital reminders of the past's foresight and the ongoing need to address the fundamental flaws within our institutions.

Yet, in our climate of cancel culture, corporate capture of government, and pervasive virtue signaling, if directed today these films would face censorship and banning. *To Kill A*

*Mockingbird* continues to be one of the most censored books in the United States. Woke liberals decry the banning of multi-gender and sexually explicit books to twelve year olds but simultaneously turn around and ban *Huckleberry Finn*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *Dr. Seuss*. The reasons for this suppression lie in both the Left's and Right's unflinching examination of uncomfortable truths and their unwillingness to engage in civil discourse due to the systemic avarice that pervades all sides of the political aisle.

All of this proves that America has turned its back on the very essence of art. In an enlightened society that prides itself on being liberal and open-minded, art, cinema or otherwise, should not be censored because it embodies constitutional free speech and expression. This principle enshrined in the First Amendment protects the rights of individuals to express their thoughts and emotions. There are two major reasons why art should remain uncensored:

First, art serves as a vital platform for the exploration and expression of diverse perspectives. It acts as a mirror reflecting the intricacies of the human experience, offering insights into different cultures, histories, and social challenges. By allowing unfettered artistic expression, society fosters a vibrant, dynamic cultural landscape where dialogue and understanding can flourish. Censorship, on the other hand, stifles this exchange of ideas and ultimately leads to intellectual stagnation and cultural homogenization.

Second, art has the power to challenge and provoke by encouraging concerted introspection. Truly revolutionary art critiques frozen established standards and forces us to reconsider our beliefs and assumptions. In doing so, art becomes a catalyst for social change and personal growth. The Italian Renaissance, the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and 30s, the Mexican Muralism Movement, the German Bauhaus and the American Beat Generation were each artistic revolutions that inspired radical cultural change by daring and defying the existing norms and by advocating new ways of thinking.

Yet today's contemporary movements such as cancel culture, Black Lives Matter, Critical Race Theory and the DEI movement, while naively well-intentioned in their unrealistic goals to advance genuine social justice and equality, have contrarily become adversaries of artistic expression in their efforts to silence dissenting voices and ban works of art, such as historical statues and literature they find disagreeable. Their folly only further catapults us towards George Orwell's portrayal of a society where language is controlled, history is rewritten, and independent thought is persecuted. Orwell's *1984* clearly echoes current concerns about the US government's systematic indoctrination, which is cheered on by the minions of wokeism and postmodern revisionism who ignorantly erode objective knowledge and deplore wisdom. But neither should the Christian Right be left off the hook for a similar belligerent ignorance.

As a consequence, American history is being rewritten to align with competing dogmas while sacrificing objectivity for partisan narratives. In the past, parents trusted school curriculums and the quality of educators implicitly. The quintessential "little red schoolhouse" and its dedicated teachers were cornerstones of individual knowledge and civic communal harmony. Now this trust has eroded as indoctrinated parents, students and young woke teachers exert undue influence over class curriculums and school boards. The acquiescence of educational bureaucracies to these pressures has widened the chasm between traditional educational values and contemporary practices, leaving parents justifiably outraged. When movements like BLM and DEI advocate for the removal of certain books and artworks from public discourse, they inadvertently adopt the tactics of censorship



that they ostensibly oppose, and they deprive society of the opportunity to engage with challenging concepts and ideas.

Peel away the public veneer and the hysterical rants of Right and Left alike and we discover Friedrich Nietzsche's *Letzter Mensch* or "the last man": a passive, complacent individual who seeks comfort, security and conformity over excellence and critical engagement. The "last man" in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is a pathetic creature. Over the decades we witness such postmodern golems endlessly occupying the White House, the halls of Congress, and across the mainstream media networks and talk shows. Nietzsche's disdain for this bureaucratic and sheepish mediocrity and his call for the cultivation of individual greatness resonate with our need to resist ideological homogenization and instead promote critical, independent thinking.

The "last man" is characterized by a desire for comfort, security, and to avoid existential risks. These people exemplify a life immersed in pleasure and satisfaction in mundane superficialities. They are content with a life devoid of deeper meaning. They represent the ultimate outcome of a society that values artificial equality and self-indulgence over excellence and authentic empathy. In brief, the *Letzter Mensch* is spiritually empty and the ultimate product of America's current trajectory towards an unfulfilling and rotting existence.

The dangers of a collective mindset controlled by a powerful elite, as warned by philosopher Hannah Arendt, are evident today. This elite manipulates societal structures and narratives to serve their interests, operating with impunity and undermining democratic values and accountability. The resulting control poses significant dangers to individual freedoms and threaten the very foundations of a democratic society.

When a society, culture, or nation faces the suppression or eradication of wisdom—both civic and spiritual—its foundational integrity is profoundly undermined. Civic wisdom encompasses the collective knowledge and principles guiding political and social institutions, fostering an environment where justice, equity and democratic values prevail. Spiritual wisdom, on the other hand, nurtures the moral and ethical dimensions of a community by providing a deeper sense of purpose and interconnectedness among individuals. The absence of these forms of wisdom, that has been embodied by wise elders for millennia, precipitates a series of detrimental consequences that ripple through the fabric of society.

The suppression of civic wisdom erodes the pillars of democracy and good governance. When suppressed, a culture of ignorance and apathy takes root. Without civic wisdom, the rise of an authoritarian regime exploits the uninformed masses. The absence of civic wisdom also results in a lack of accountability and transparency in government that fosters corruption and injustice.

The eradication of spiritual wisdom disrupts a nation's moral compass. Spiritual wisdom, whether religious or philosophical, which may or may not be informed by science, instills values such as compassion, integrity, and respect for life. When spiritual wisdom is marginalized, an ethical relativism symbolized by either "being woke" or "being godly" prevails. Wokeism is simply an inversion of fundamentalist Christianity and repressive religious dogmas and vice versa. Both utterly lack any semblance of wisdom. The shared sense of purpose and belonging that spiritual wisdom provides is replaced by existential nihilism and self-cherishing individualism. Our nation's "spiritual blackout", in the words of

Cornel West, exacerbates social problems including crime, substance abuse, and mental health issues.

**Our nation as a whole increasingly suffers in its international standing. Nations that suppress wisdom more often than not engage in policies that isolate them from the global community.**

We simply need to look at the rise of the BRICS bloc, which has upwards to fifty new national applications, and how the US's and its Western allies' adversarial avarice towards the international "other" is contributing to their own economic stagnation and diplomatic conflicts. Internally, Western nations will experience rising social unrest and division as marginalized groups seek to reclaim their voices and rights. Three decades of unwise and foolish American leadership based upon dismal domestic and foreign decision-making continues to exacerbate poverty, mental health, inequality, and environmental degradation.

The United States must face the chant of the funeral march. It is unmoored from its historical foundations that was once integral to the republic's and constitution's inception. The collective mindset, exploited by a wealthy elite, faces no accountability and perpetuates a cycle of disenfranchisement and cultural fragmentation.

To restore America's social foundation and cultural fabric, **it is imperative to reintegrate civic and spiritual wisdom into public life by honoring the insights of the elders.** Spiritual teachings from diverse traditions emphasize compassion, justice, and the interconnectedness of all life, offering a counterbalance to the materialism and individualism that dominate contemporary culture. Embracing these values will help foster a society that prioritizes the common good and the well-being of all its members. By embracing the lessons of the past and rejecting the divisive ideologies of the present, we can rebuild a society grounded in knowledge and higher truths that embrace both the best of science and the true beauty of the human spirit.

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***Richard Gale** is the Executive Producer of the Progressive Radio Network and a former Senior Research Analyst in the biotechnology and genomic industries.*

***Dr. Gary Null** is host of the nation's longest running public radio program on alternative and nutritional health and a multi-award-winning documentary film director, including his recent Last Call to Tomorrow.*

*They are regular contributors to Global Research.*

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