

# Democracy's Next Step: Overcoming Rankism

## Power and Dignity

Only yesterday, our forebears moved out of Africa with little but the furs on their backs. They multiplied and spread out across the Earth. One tribe became many.

At every step of the way, we sought out nature's power and turned it to our purposes. We tamed fire, domesticated plants and animals, and built cities. By the time we began bumping up against one another, we no longer recognized that we were one family. We looked strange, sounded stranger, and inspired fear in each other. So, under penalty of absorption by "foreigners" and consequent loss of identity, we designed ever more powerful weapons with which to protect ourselves and then turned them on branches of our estranged family. Within a mere 5000 generations we had accumulated enough power to jeopardize life on Earth.

Although we have often misused our powers, many of our misadventures can be chalked up to "youthful experimentation." How else to learn that certain actions backfire except by seeing what happens and tallying up the consequences? Moreover, on many occasions we *have* used power wisely. A species that can go from caves to the moon in some tens of millennia comes along once an eternity.

With good parenting and a little luck, adolescence ends without serious mishap. But all too often its inherent recklessness lands the young in trouble before they complete the dicey transition to adulthood. The powers that humans now command have risen to the level that, as a species, we must bring our adolescence to a close and assume adult responsibilities or face the prospect of an ignominious and traumatic "return to go." We can no longer risk the fallout—pun intended—of uses of power that may go disastrously awry. It has become ever more important that we learn to predict *in advance* the consequences of a

proposed use of power, and that we institutionalize safeguards to minimize the damage if we miscalculate.

When it comes to using the vast powers at our command, protecting the dignity of others can no longer be ignored without subsequently imperiling ourselves. It is now mandatory to conduct an environmental impact study before undertaking a project that will alter the physical environment. The consequences of disfiguring human dignity are as grave as those of despoiling the Earth, yet we do not yet see fit to conduct “dignity impact studies” before using power in ways that may impinge upon human dignity.

There are two sides to our long love affair with power. Students of natural history are quick to point out that exploiting those with less power is merely the “survival of the fittest” in reverse. Picking on the weak is a rule of nature, and in this we are not unlike other species. What is less often noticed is that it is also human nature for the weak to organize against oppression and domination. Our species has repeatedly shown itself capable of imposing limits on the authority of self-appointed strongmen. Examples include the birth of parliaments limiting the powers of sovereigns, colonials expelling their imperialist masters, and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the spread of democracy globally and the defeat or collapse of the dictatorships that challenged it.

We have also seen the rise of organized labor and of mass movements such as those for civil and women’s rights in response to discrimination and exploitation. So, while it must be admitted that we have predatory tendencies, it appears we are also clever enough to figure out how to organize a countervailing power that shields the weak from the strong.

We took one step out of the Dark Ages when we refused to accept the idea that authorities could make up the “facts” to suit themselves. We ceased to countenance hearsay, superstition, and dogma and substituted knowledge, evidence, and reason. These pillars of modern epistemology are not the whole story, but their use does empower the individual relative to the powers that be, ecclesiastical or political.

Now we must bring our other foot out of the past. Today's challenge is distinguishing between "rightful" and "wrongful" uses of power—the crux of many political issues, local and global.

## **Rank—Seat of Power**

Humans manage their affairs, from governance to business to education, by assigning particular powers to the various ranks in organizations and institutions. It is our rank within any particular hierarchy that determines how much power we wield. This is true at the interpersonal, societal, and international level. Abuses of power can usually be treated as abuses of rank because power is vested in rank.

In order to confront the abuse of power effectively, we need a name for it. Lacking that, we are in a position similar to that of women before the term "sexism" was coined. Writing in 1963, Betty Friedan<sup>1</sup> characterized the plight of women as "The Problem That Has No Name." By 1968, the problem had been given a name and it was "sexism." That simple word provided a clear target and a rallying cry for protesting and overcoming abuses of power linked to gender.

A similar dynamic has played out with other identity groups seeking redress of their grievances. Those discriminated against on the basis of their race unified against "racism." Likewise, the elderly targeted "ageism." By analogy, the abuse of rank or power is "rankism."<sup>2</sup> Rankism is abuse of the power inherent in rank. It typically takes the form of abusive or discriminatory behavior

---

<sup>1</sup> In her seminal work *The Feminine Mystique* (Norton, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> The coinage "rankism" is related to the colloquialisms "pulling rank" and "ranking on" someone, both of which give recognition to the signal importance of rank in human interactions. As an etymological aside, it is worth noting that, as a adjective, "rank" means foul, fetid, or smelly, and the verb "to rankle" means to cause resentment or bitterness. The etymological relationship between "rank" and "rankle," in these senses, and "rank" in the sense of position in a hierarchy is tenuous at best, but given its meaning, it's perhaps no bad thing that the word rankism picks up, by association, the malodor of its sound-alikes.

toward those with less power (lower rank). In some circumstances, the abuse may rise to the level of exploitation or oppression. Rankism is equally the illegitimate use of rank and the use of rank illegitimately obtained or held.

Everyday examples of rankism include a boss harassing an employee, a customer demeaning a waiter, a teacher humiliating a student, a parent shaming a child. Those with higher rank and more power in a particular setting can maintain an environment that is hostile and demeaning to people with lower rank and less power in that setting, much as most everywhere whites used to be at liberty to mistreat blacks. As with the familiar “isms,” naming rankism and putting it in the spotlight, is half the battle.

The authority of rank is so commonly misused that some jump to the conclusion that rank itself is the problem and that the solution is simply to do away with it. Such egalitarianism willfully ignores the fact that people are inherently unequal in skills, talent, beauty, strength, health, wealth—most any measurable trait—and that differences of rank in a particular context may merely reflect this. Political and social models that abjure such distinctions are either naïvely utopian or demagogic. As René de Chateaubriand noted, “Equality and despotism have secret connections.”

The trouble is not with rank per se, but with the abuse of rank. When it is earned and used properly, rank remains an indispensable organizational tool for fostering group cooperation. We admire and love authorities—parents, teachers, bosses, even political leaders—who use the power of their rank in an exemplary way. Accepting their leadership incurs no loss of dignity. In contrast, those who abuse their rank by demeaning, exploiting, or oppressing those they outrank, betray a sacred trust and sow seeds of indignity that ripen into resistance and may even leave us thirsting for vengeance.

Given the grave consequences of confusing rank and rankism, it can't be said often enough that power differentials exist, and that inveighing against them, or the differences in rank that mirror them, is futile. Proposing to do away with differences in rank makes about as much sense as doing away with differences

in race or gender. Without ranks, complex organizations slip into a state of disorganization, if not anarchy.

But when the high-ranking abuse their authority, those of lower rank experience discrimination and injustice not different in their material and psychological effects from the discrimination and injustice we now disallow when their victims belong to the familiar identity groups.

Rankism occurs when rank-holders use the power of their position to secure unwarranted advantages or benefits for themselves. It typically takes the form of self-aggrandizement and exploitation of subordinates. Rankism is indigenous to any and all bureaucracies. It is the opposite of service. Good leaders eschew rankism; bad ones indulge in it. It can be found in governments, businesses, families, workplaces, schools and universities, as well as religious, nonprofit, and healthcare organizations. It distorts personal relationships, taxes productivity, undermines public trust, stokes ethnic hatred and incites revenge. At the societal level, rankism afflicts none more inescapably than those lacking the protections of social rank—the working poor.<sup>3</sup> What primarily marks people for mistreatment and exploitation is low rank and the powerlessness it signifies.

Recent examples of rankism in the headlines include political and corporate corruption, sexual abuse by members of the clergy, school hazing and bullying, and the abuse of elders in nursing homes. Photos of the humiliation of Iraqi prisoners by their American guards exposed the arrogant face of rankism to the world.

People acquiesce in rankism because they fear the consequences of resisting: demerit, demotion, ridicule and ostracism. The muffled complaints,

---

<sup>3</sup> Three recent books chronicle this situation. In *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, Barbara Ehrenreich makes a compelling case that the working poor are in effect unacknowledged benefactors whose labor subsidizes the more advantaged. In *Wealth and Democracy: A Political History of the American Rich*, Kevin Phillips explores how the rich and politically powerful create and perpetuate privilege at the expense of the middle and lower classes. In *The Working Poor*, David Shipler describes the economic black hole into which the poor can fall with scant hope of ever extricating themselves.

occasional whistle-blowing, and sporadic outbursts we do hear echo those of blacks and women who resisted in solitary protest before popular movements made it impossible to ignore their demands.

By breaking the taboo on rank and revealing the costs of rankism, we can anticipate that the tacit social consensus which now supports rankism will gradually unravel. Like the members of other identity groups, rankism's casualties will find their voice and make themselves heard. An auspicious example is the recently founded Roman Catholic lay organization Voice of the Faithful, whose goal is to hold clerics accountable in their exercise of authority.

### **Rankism—Source of Indignity**

At first glance, it might seem that rankism is one more in the string of “isms”—racism, sexism, ageism—against which various identity groups have rebelled. But there's an important difference.

Unlike race and gender—native traits that are generally fixed—rank is mutable, and in fact it is constantly changing. We can hold high rank in one setting (e.g., at home) and simultaneously be low on the totem pole in another (at work). Likewise, we can feel powerful at one time and powerless the next, as when we move from childhood to young adults, and then from our “prime” into old age, or when we experience the loss of a job, a partner, or our health. As a result, most of us have been both victims *and* perpetrators of rankism, depending on the context. Indeed, this is part of what has kept rankism in the shadows for so long. People are reluctant to take aim at it for fear of losing the privileges they themselves enjoy, or hope to enjoy in the future.

In the four decades since the 1960s, not only racism but numerous other trait-based forms of discrimination have been significantly curtailed. Yet this has had virtually no impact on abuses of power that occur *within* these groups. Blacks insult and exploit other blacks, whites do the same to whites, and women to women, all with confidence that it will pass for business as usual.

The ultimate reason that rankism persists is that the rank difference on which it is predicated signifies a power difference which in turn enables those holding positions of greater power not only to dominate but also to intimidate those they outrank, and so deter them from retaliating. In this way, rankism is self-enforcing.

The fact that rankism is grounded in power implies that color, religion, gender, and sexual orientation are not in themselves the root causes of the imposed second-class citizenship predicated on these traits. These traits are rather pretexts that have been used to construct social stratifications which in turn make discrimination and exploitation safe for the dominating group.

Like other predators, human beings select as prey those they perceive as weak: it's a safer bet, less chance of suffering a retaliatory injury. Distinguishing traits such as color, gender, or sexual orientation only signify weakness if there is a social consensus in place that handicaps those bearing the trait. Anti-Semitism, racial segregation, the feminine mystique, and homophobia are all examples of social agreements that have infringed upon the rights of entire groups of people.

So rankism is not just another ism: it's the source of them all. The diminishing returns that identity-based movements have begun to experience will not be reversed until we understand that it is not race or gender per se that keeps these forms of discrimination alive, but rank as a signifier of power. At this point, the best way to help any particular identity group fight indignity and overcome ongoing discrimination is to overcome the rankism that infects our social institutions and so affects us all.

The situation is analogous to the era in medicine when malignancies peculiar to different organs were seen as disparate diseases. In time they were all recognized to be various forms of one disease—cancer. Attacking the familiar isms, one at a time, is like developing a different chemotherapy for each kind of cancer instead of seeking to preempt a whole class of malignancies by modifying the immune system or the genome.

Regardless of whether it occurs between groups or individuals, rankism is experienced first and foremost as an insult to dignity. For fear of consequences,

we may feign our acquiescence in unequal treatment, even collude in self-abnegation. But, human beings everywhere have an innate sense that dignity is a birthright and are quick to detect insults to it. In the words of Vartan Gregorian, president of the Carnegie Foundation, "Dignity is not negotiable." Insults to dignity set in motion a psychological dynamic that commands our attention and drains our energy. When we must defend our dignity in the workplace, productivity suffers. In schools, students will sacrifice their learning to defend their dignity. Low socioeconomic status, by increasing exposure to the indignities of rankism, is a public health hazard.<sup>4</sup> Recent studies linking social class to mortality and morbidity suggest that to be poor, and therefore vulnerable to chronic rankism, is as harmful to health as smoking three and a half packs of cigarettes a day.

Those subjected to repeated indignities become indignant. Accordingly, rankism has short and long term costs: the immediate toll on the targeted individual or group, and the secondary, corrosive effects on organizations that tolerate it.

To minimize the costs of rankism in our lives and our world, we need models of institutional governance that minimize abuses of power.

## **A Dignitarian Society**

Despite some successes at designing models that impose limits on governmental power, many, within government and without, continue to abuse power when they think they can get away with it. The cynicism previously

---

<sup>4</sup> See Dr. Jeffrey Ritterman's article "The Beloved Community: From Civil Rights Dream to Public Health Imperative" in *The Permanente Journal*, Winter 2004, Vol. 8, No. 1, (pp.58–62). Also, the cover story in *The New York Times Magazine* (October 12, 2003) makes the case that the chronic stress experienced by those of low socio-economic status, which it calls "the new ghetto miasma," is a killer haunting America's inner cities. Dr. Nancy Adler, director of the Center for Health and Community at the University of California at San Francisco, is also conducting a research program in this area.

reserved for politicians has spread to envelop the corporate world as well. News of another financial scandal is met with shrugs, as if to say “What did you expect?” And in both business and government, we often act as if finding the right leadership would solve the problem. This is like the self-deception that the heir to the throne will be more benevolent than the absolute monarch now sitting on it: sometimes happens, but making those entrusted with power accountable is a more dependable solution to the recurring problem of tyrannical or corrupt rulers.

In order to effect the overthrow of superstition and dogma, it was not enough for a few leading figures to inveigh against ignorance. A critical number of ordinary people also had to rid themselves of their attachment to unsubstantiated beliefs. Only then was a tipping point reached that marked the end of the Dark Age and the arrival of the period we call the Enlightenment.

So it will be with the Age of Rankism and the Dignitarian Era that will mark its demise. The dismantling of rankism and the adoption of dignitarian governance models for our social institutions that make leaders accountable to those they serve begins with each one of us in our relationships with relatives, friends, co-workers, teachers, and physicians. Most of us are not only victims of rankism; we are also perpetrators. The transgressions we complain about—corporate and governmental corruption; bullying in the workplace, the marketplace, and among nations—differ in scale, but not in kind, from the “little” abuses of power we permit ourselves.

The most significant rift dividing people today is not that of race, gender, age, religion, or even nationality. Rather, it is the gap between the “somebodies” — the relatively powerful and successful — and the “nobodies” — the relatively weak and vulnerable.

Somebodies with higher rank in a particular setting can maintain an environment that is hostile and demeaning to nobodies with lower rank in that setting, much as most everywhere whites used to be at liberty to mistreat blacks. Rankism still enjoys the tacit sanction of society, much as racism and sexism used to.

## Interpersonal Rankism

Interpersonal rankism runs the gamut from disregard to discrimination to exploitation and, as we've seen, where there's rankism, there's indignity. Spouses ridicule their partners, older siblings dominate younger ones, coaches humiliate players, doctors disparage nurses, clerics exploit parishioners—examples can be found within every hierarchy. The dynamic is always the same: People who are relatively powerful and successful—who are “somebodies”—take advantage of and manipulate the relatively weak and vulnerable—the “nobodies.”

Indeed, rank is so often abused that many assume a hostile posture toward all authority. But the fact that the power of rank *can* be abused does not mean it always must or will be. Building a model in which this practice is no longer regarded as business as usual is crucial to establishing a dignitarian society.

In a world devoid of rankism, self-aggrandizement and servility would both be rare. People with high rank would keep their promises to those with less, and everyone would be accorded equal respect, no matter what their status or situation.

Rank would be defined narrowly as signifying a degree of expertise or achievement in some specific area at a given time. Gains and losses of rank would be commonplace, and pride and shame would not attach to either. Shifting from somebody to nobody and back again in different arenas and under varying circumstances would be viewed as a natural process, and we would make such transitions without fear of exposing ourselves to indignity.

In a post-rankist world, somebodies would be seen as temporarily serving society—as leaders, teachers, or public figures. Nobodies would simply be those who weren't playing public roles at the moment. But everyone's contribution would be recognized and appreciated.

The high-ranking would not expect to obtain a permanent hold on their rank because this would in effect discriminate against others in competitions for rank.<sup>5</sup>

Just as in a post-sexist world, wherein masculinity and femininity are understood to be integral to both sexes, so in a post-rankist world, somebodyness and nobodyness would be seen as organic complements coexisting within everyone, which periodically wax and wane, and are both required for a balanced life.

Since this post-rankist model might seem at first like an unattainable ideal, it is eye-opening to notice how rapidly we're moving toward it in some areas. One of the clearest examples in the realm of human relationships lies in the evolution of child rearing practices.

In a rankist world, rank cannot be questioned. Until a relatively short time ago, "because I say so" was reason enough for making a child do anything. On into the mid-twentieth century, a common attitude toward children was that they were "to be seen but not heard."

But in recent decades public authorities have dared intervene in family life if they perceive a child to be in danger. Abuse of all sorts that had previously been shielded from scrutiny with a defiant "mind your own business" was exposed. In the name of protecting children, parental rank has been circumscribed, and the proposition that "kids are people, too" has gained wide acceptance.

It is not hard to imagine that a next step would be to find a way to give weight to the interests of the young in electoral politics. Protecting children's dignity is the best way to teach them to respect the dignity of others when they become adults. In a democracy, no group lacking political representation can be deemed to enjoy full citizenship.

---

<sup>5</sup> **Tenure is an inherently rankist privilege to which we should resort only when we can find no other way to protect the independent judgment of those serving the common good.**

Although democracy's mantra of "one person, one vote" clearly needs adjustment when it comes to the young, arguments for denying them a role in political matters—which obviously affect them profoundly—sound much like the paternalistic rationales for denying women and ethnic minorities political participation.

## **Dignity Works**

A quiet anti-authoritarian revolution is spreading in the workplace as it becomes clear that management that does not respect the dignity of workers is counterproductive. A model workplace would be one in which the dysfunctionality of rankism is understood. In such an environment, rank would be awarded ongoingly, on a task-by-task basis. Faced with changing missions, companies and organizations would reassign ranks to facilitate cooperation toward each new goal. Management would show no favoritism to those temporarily serving in positions of high rank and would take care not to abridge the rights and privileges of those in positions of lower rank. Firms would pride themselves as being places where everyone experienced equal dignity, had equal opportunity, and was compensated fairly.

A non-rankist work environment is good for the bottom line because as rank abuse is identified and reduced, individual energy is engaged and mobilized. Overcoming discrimination and injustice pays dividends in the form of greater loyalty, increased productivity, and fewer days of sick leave. Companies that give their workers a voice in management and a stake in earnings reap significant benefits.

Without rankism, employee co-owners with a share of the equity would be the rule, not the exception, and the income and equity gaps that separate the highest and lowest paid would narrow. The negative motivations we are accustomed to such as fear of demotion or job loss, would be dwarfed by the positive motivation that comes from being a recognized part of a poised, flexible

team of responsible professionals. Eliminating “recognition deficiencies” in the workplace will be as healthy for profitability as eliminating nutritional deficiencies was for the productivity of day laborers.

A system of management in which power is abused is vulnerable to competition from firms unburdened by the inefficiencies inherent in rankism. In time, the latter demonstrate their superiority by out-producing the former. Young upstart companies that have put older inflexible ones out of business are now legion. Invariably, the reason can be traced to calcification of rank. Whether of a state or a firm, rank abuse is self-limiting and, ultimately, self-defeating.

Organizations in which rank is used in ways that protect everyone’s dignity incubate a superior power. Accordingly, there is no more important task of leadership than the detection and eradication of rankism. Great leaders know this instinctively and actively seek to instill non-rankist behavior patterns by exemplifying it their own relationships with subordinates. As Jim Collins<sup>6</sup> has shown, the founder-leaders of great companies neither indulge in abuses of power themselves, nor tolerate it among the ranks. They create an atmosphere of unimpeachable dignity from top to bottom throughout the firm. Like great military leaders, they lead by example.

## **Dignitarian Schools**

There’s a reason that educational reforms, whether progressive or conservative, invariably disappoint, but like the proverbial fish in the bowl, we’re too close to see it. The reason so many of the young continue to withhold their hearts and minds from learning is that there’s poison in the bowl—not enough to kill all the fish, but enough to stunt the growth of the majority of them.

What’s sapping their will to learn is the rankism that pervades educational institutions from kindergarten through graduate school. Finding and maintaining

---

<sup>6</sup> Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don’t* (HarperCollins, 2003).

one's position in a hierarchy takes priority over all else. Protecting one's dignity from insult and injury saps attention and energy that could otherwise go towards acquiring knowledge and skills. A large percentage of students are forced to assume the passive-aggressive posture of the prisoner or slave. They harden their hearts and close their minds, and for many the game is lost by the age of six.

Students in rankist schools are like blacks in racist schools: they will sacrifice learning in defense of their pride. As with colonials straining under imperial rule, they will forfeit their chances for advancement in the pursuit of respect. Disallowing racism in the schools relieves blacks of the special burden of protecting their dignity vis-à-vis whites. But left in place are a host of humiliating practices that demean white and black students alike. If we understand martyrdom as the choice to sacrifice one's own development in defense of one's dignity, then the high failure rate of our schools must be interpreted as a kind of martyrdom. As the epigraph shows, William James understood this a century ago.

Ridding schools of rankism is harder than ridding them of racism, because determinations of rank are a legitimate tool in guiding students toward a vocation suited to their abilities. But the tool is misused when tests, instead of serving a constructive, diagnostic function, are used to stigmatize those who rank low and exalt those who rank high. The rankings become self-fulfilling prophecies, and soon a debilitating gap is created between students destined for success and those marked for failure.

For the most part, schools mirror society's values, not the other way round. Until we create a non-rankist society, educational reforms will make little headway against the intransigence of human dignity. The best educational policy of the day was of no avail to African-Americans and women when it was implemented in a racist or sexist context. Likewise, otherwise salutary remedies are doomed to fail so long as they are introduced into a system permeated by rankism.

The right to partake of quality education will be to the 21<sup>st</sup> century what the right to political participation was to the 20<sup>th</sup>. The indignities of schooling still prevent many from learning the basics, and keep most from even attempting to develop model-building skills. Educating model-builders will require a transformation in education analogous to the political transformation from aristocracy to democracy—that is, a shift from privilege for the few to a lifelong right for the many.

The basic tenet of a dignitarian society is that we are all equal in dignity. The goal of a dignitarian society is to structure our personal relations and our social institutions so that rank is not abused and human dignity is universally protected.

It's hard to imagine a dignitarian society that provides health care to some, but not to others, or where wealth is a precondition for getting a quality education. Without these basics, any meritocracy is a mirage. Likewise, it's impossible to imagine a dignitarian society in which one must command a fortune to run for office. If we continue to tolerate rankism in civic affairs, it will corrode democracy as did its long sorry accommodation of racism.

A dignitarian society means universal healthcare, equal access to quality education (including adult education and retraining), an equitable tax structure, affordable housing, and compensation compatible with living in dignity.

The road to social justice does not pass by way of equality; it goes by way of dignity. Putting rankism on notice is a strategy for effecting political realignment. The idea, the goal of overcoming rankism and ending the dignity gap reframes democratic politics. A dignitarian society is democracy's next step.

.....

A rank-based strategy aimed at equalizing dignity stands in sharp contrast to the class-based Marxist strategy aimed at equalizing wealth. In practice,

communism merely created a new elite, which arrogated wealth to itself. A rank-based strategy anticipates rather the redistribution of recognition and respect in the wake of a dispelled somebody mystique.

Rather than ask what justice would look like, it asks why people accede to injustice, why they acquiesce in indignity. It sees dignity as a halfway house to justice, and identifies the principal impediment to equal dignity as rankism. Put another way, it sees a world of equal dignity as a steppingstone to the more just, fair, and decent societies that political philosophers have long envisioned. Taking a page from the identity-based movements, it suggests that the way to build a just society is to organize a dignitarian movement against rankism.

The identity-based movements persuaded oppressed groups to stop acquiescing in their own humiliation. Once blacks and women found their voices and focused attention on race and gender-based oppression, it was only a matter of time until racists and sexists found themselves on the defensive. The methods that secured a measure of justice for trait-based identity groups can also work for victims of rankism. What has been missing is a clear target and a rallying cry.

The word rankism explicitly ties the designated abuse to its excuse — rank — and names the source of the problem. The accusation “rankist” will give pause to those who may be tempted to make illegitimate use of the power attached to their rank. Of course, an allegation is not evidence of guilt, but once voiced, it does invite scrutiny. It’s much easier to make common cause with other victims of abuse when you have a simple name for your common injury.

The fundamental human truth with which non-rankist governance structures must conform is that *dignity is not negotiable*. Rank and dignity are independent in principle, and must be disconnected in practice.

As a dignitarian movement gathers momentum, the right to dignity will take its place in the pantheon of human rights.

The notion of rankism is the bridge that links two revolutions of the twentieth century—civil rights and human rights. The civil rights movement offers the methods and energy of identity politics to the moral campaign for human

rights. Combined to form a dignitarian movement against rankism, the political movement for civil rights and the moral campaign for human rights complete and fortify each other. A dignitarian movement provides a non-violent democratic approach to the daunting and inescapable challenge of the twenty-first century—global economic justice.