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All Rise: The Age of Dignity

Be part of the movement to secure not just liberty and justice, but dignity for all.

By: [Katie Gilbert](#)

Maybe you've never heard of rankism, but you know what it is. If you've ever witnessed bullying, hazing, snubbing, belittling or any other abuse of power in which a person uses his authority to obtain undue advantages over another, you've seen rankism in action.

Though you may want to relegate this -ism to a pile of other unwanted -isms, realize that this is the -ism that will effectively wipe out all others. While sexism, racism and ageism are all their own -isms, each is also an example of rankism.

Robert Fuller defined the word in his book *Somebodies and Nobodies: Overcoming the Abuse of Rank*. Now he has taken a step further by outlining a solution to rankism in his recently published work *All Rise: Somebodies, Nobodies, and the Politics of Dignity*. By giving a name to this pervasive yet slippery form of injustice, Fuller hopes to turn rankism into a concrete concept that can be widely recognized, talked about, and finally, abolished.

How could such a broadly defined, deeply rooted pattern as power misuse ever be driven from society? Fuller stresses that the solution does not lie in abolishing rank—but rather in stopping rank abuse. His proposed remedy is the adoption of a dignitarian society, one where "rank holders are held accountable, rankism is prohibited and dignity is broadly protected."

"This is not love mush," Fuller says. The idea of a dignitarian society didn't spring from dead-ended moralizing, he clarifies, but from a need to address an issue that has been hampering society. For example, by tackling problems that breed employee disloyalty, companies would run more efficiently and our society would follow suit. "We've got to choose to grant dignity for everybody or else it's going to be a big mess," says Fuller. "And the countries that do are going to beat us out in the

marketplace."

In response to those who contend that rankism is human nature and write off such a society as unrealistically utopian, Fuller points to the success of the women's and civil rights movements as examples of rising above so-called ingrained conceptions.

"I agree that abusing power is human nature; we're predators. But humans are smart enough to figure out more elevated forms of cooperation than predation," Fuller explains. "Rankism is a type of human nature we can transcend. It's an aspect of our nature that can evolve over time—like attitudes toward race and gender have evolved over the century."

Listen closely and you'll hear whisperings of the dignitarian movement all around you—in the proposed flattening of needless hierarchies, in the conscious recognition of underlings, in the installment of leaders who have rightfully earned their positions and don't misuse them. Fuller won't be satisfied, however, until the volume rises to a decibel impossible to ignore. You won't see this movement parading outside your window. Instead, Fuller says it's rising from the ground up and manifesting itself in relationships, playgrounds and boardrooms.

"The dignitarian movement is not yet a million-man march," he says. "But it's happening in a million different organizations: in your local church, your school, your HMO."

Fuller thus describes the course of the dignitarian movement: "We start by standing up quietly. Then we stand together. Then we march for justice." This first step doesn't require signing petitions or joining a picket line. "The best place to stand up for dignity," he says, "is right where you are."

For more information about the dignity movement, visit www.breakingranks.com.

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