

A Guide to the Perplexed

A Review of Gloria Greenfield's Documentary Film "Civilization in the Danger Zone"



by Geoffrey Clarfield

If you are married with kids, during the COVID lockdown you may have, like many other millions of American parents, discovered that your local school boards are teaching your children an ideology that is at odds with your most cherished beliefs and practices.

This new curriculum teaches that all white people are bad, that all black people are good, that "indigenous" tribes in the developing world are more noble and wise than city dwellers, that "gender" is a "construct" with no basis in biology, that capitalism is evil, and that representative democracy in the USA and its allies is a sham designed to reward "capitalists" and beggar the working classes.

Each one of these teachings has emerged from the protests of some self-defined group who have demanded their previously ignored “rights.” And so, there is an ever-expanding group of activists, often violent, who demand their self-defined rights, one of which is to take over the present and future destinies of your children.

What most parents do not understand is that these issues are bundled. They may be incoherent and contradictory in their content, but that does not matter, for they are all designed to “bring down the system.”

And what is this system? Well, it includes the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Constitution of the United States, representative government as we know it, the free market, the state schools that once taught these things, the centrality of the family, patriotism, meritocracy, freedom and clarity of speech, and the rule of law.

Most young parents do not realize that there is direct line from theology to political philosophy, to science, to political ideology, and to educational policies and practices at the municipal, state, and, especially, federal level.

There is a painless and stimulating way to better understand this concerted onslaught against Western civilization. Documentary filmmaker Gloria Z. Greenfield has provided us with a 65-minute documentary, [Civilization in the Danger Zone](#), that fits the bill.

In her documentary, she asks public intellectuals like Victor Davis Hanson and a number of like-minded men and women just how it is that, within one generation, liberal education has disappeared from our schools to be replaced by various forms of new-fangled Marxism and other fundamentally anti-democratic ideologies like “trans-humanism,” which, as a British wit might put it, is anything but humane.

Greenfield has done so from her own American Jewish

perspective, which under normal circumstances in a color-blind and ethnically blind America, would go unremarked, as the Constitution is so heavily influenced by the Hebrew Bible.

These are the thinkers that she has brought together in her wonderful film, leaving the viewer wanting more. They serve as our contemporary "Guide to the Perplexed."

In addition to Professor Victor Davis Hanson of the Hoover Institution, these gifted scholars and cultural critics include but are not limited to Kenneth L. Marcus (Louis D. Brandeis Center for Human Rights Under Law), President Larry P. Arnn (Hillsdale College), John Hinderaker (Center of the American Experiment), Heather Mac Donald (Manhattan Institute), Professor Moshe Koppel (Kohelet Policy Forum), Professor Emerita Ruth Wisse (Harvard University), Eric Cohen (Tikvah Fund), Rod Dreher (*The American Conservative*), and Peter Wood (National Association of Scholars).

The film is organized in discrete but related sections. They are the challenging open; the fundamental family; the power of faith; the need for national identity; the legitimacy of national pride; the indoctrination of today's youth; the "hollowed out" university curricula; the manipulation of language and the rise of wokeism's doublespeak; a rising totalitarian tide aided and abetted by foreign powers; and, finally, the need for clarity during a time of declining intellectual diversity.

Without simply reproducing the script of the documentary, let me summarize and then comment upon the main points that one can take away from this lively and engaging film. Others may make different observations.

The thesis of the film is introduced quickly: we are living in a time of aggressive "identity theft." This means that, in the United States, national historic memory and the values of the Constitution are under siege. Not only are the values of this

document under siege, but so is its history and the practices, customs, and lifestyles that are and have been a function of this exceptional charter for living.

These are being attacked and replaced by something foreign and worthless.

The theft is justified by an attack on the so-called "past sins" of the Judeo-Christian countries, which are mostly the democracies of the Anglosphere. As a result, young people today are taught that the history of the West is largely one of injustice and oppression.

The sober and tragic understanding of the "Rise of the West" is disregarded, namely the narrative that almost all pre-industrial, non-democratic regimes have been secretive oligarchies of the wealthy, which have only been challenged and ameliorated by citizen-based democracies with Biblically inspired values, such as those that drove so many non-slave-holding Americans to fight for the abolition of slavery during the Civil War.

A left-leaning utopian obsession with a "better future," which relies on a demonized past, has been amplified by the sexual revolution, which many have observed has simply given men the opportunity to engage in endless sexual encounters without consequence and without investment in family, children, and community. They have left in their wake a growing number of single, often childless, women who may be materially well off, but who feel cheated by life and cut off from others.

The neo-Marxism behind this project is clear and was called for by Marx himself, who preached "the abolition of the family," the former bedrock of the free-market democracies of the Anglosphere.

Paradoxically, this is not happening in the beleaguered and often maliciously misrepresented democracy of Israel, where the birthrate is high, and family is everything. I spent four

years living and working there and can attest to that fact.

One could produce a separate documentary on why this is the case, but I will spoil that thought experiment by suggesting that Israel still thinks of itself as an exceptional and exemplary society, just like America did, most notably under Democratic President John F. Kennedy, a mere generation ago.

As a teenager, I well remember meeting many Americans who believed this. Most did. At the time, it made many Canadians like myself ask, "What do we stand for?" Sadly, soon enough, Pierre Elliott Trudeau (the father of our present postmodern prime minister) gave us the answer: a Marxist-tinged "multiculturalism," which quickly descended into cultural relativism and the moral anarchy of today, where all citizens are no longer equal under the law. (This is partially thanks to Harvard, where Trudeau studied, but more on that later.) And so, our pundits warn us that the family as a unit of civilization is dying or is under considerable threat in America and the West.

One reason for or correlate of the decline of the family is the decline in faith. Since the 1960s, fewer and fewer Americans go to church or synagogue. Even fewer believe in the one, rather abstract God who links the Constitution to the Enlightenment and to the democratic religious tolerance that emerged so painfully after the Reformation, and which was then brought to the New World.

Speaker after speaker laments this decline of the family and of the religious faith that once defined Americans. I can say with confidence that the same is true of Canadians, and it began in the mid 1960s when I was a teenager.

With the decline in religion comes a decline in gratitude, a denigration of the Sabbath, and a rising persecution of fellow religious citizens that, from this anthropologist's perspective, takes the form of secularized witchcraft

accusations and trials.

Consider how many decent academics and journalists have been hounded from their jobs at American colleges and media outlets for even hinting that they have religious or conservative values! (My colleague, Jordan Peterson, experienced this firsthand at my own alma mater, the University of Toronto. As a minority of one, he fought back successfully but eventually resigned in despair.)

Our pundits conclude that without some sense of traditional religious belief, we will become, or have already become, a society of “atomized individuals.” Will we be saved from a radical secularism by a future “Great Awakening?” It has happened before, but perhaps the world is different now. No one seems sure. They are only sure of the negative social results that come from a loss of faith.

One possible model, suggested by a non-Jewish conservative in the film, may be seen among “modern Orthodox Jewish communities” who have big families and, like the Christian Mennonites and Amish, know how to “say no” to the hyper-sexualized culture of the modern consumer world. Yet, these communities compete and participate in it politically and professionally. However, unlike the Amish and the Mennonites, they are not “other worldly.”

It is hinted that religious communities may reform from a purely voluntaristic basis, reminding us of Alexis de Tocqueville’s observation from more than one hundred and sixty years back that when faced with a crisis, Americans form voluntary associations that are tailor-made to solve particular problems. Will there be a tailor-made, grassroots answer to the spiritual wasteland that is now the West? No one interviewed in this film is certain.

The neo-Marxist beliefs now taught at our colleges and schools suggest that the history of America and the West has been one

of relentless sin and racism, and that, therefore, national pride is "fascism."

As our pundits argue that democracy is not genetically transmitted, we hear that each new generation needs to read the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Federalist Papers. The exceptionalism of the American experience is embodied in the understanding that the Founding Fathers knew how easy and almost "natural" it was for a polity to fall back into tyranny, which is far easier to run than a democracy or a republic, in regimes where the few rule the many without consultation or consent.

If one understands the foundation of a democracy's history, warts and all, then and only then can one be a patriot. The alternatives are African "one-party states," Shariah-based Islamic states such as Iran, or communist tyrannies like China and North Korea. In these regimes, the individual counts for nothing, and there are no real human rights.

And so, to come full circle, a true patriot loves his country like he loves his family. But we are in a bind, for without the experience and blessings of family life, patriotism in the West may die.

Perhaps the most assertive part of this documentary is the section on indoctrination. It is pointed out that the far-left Southern Poverty Law Center proudly claims that for more than forty years, thousands of its activists have fanned out across the country, bringing with them the intolerant, one-dimensional, Marxist-inspired critical race theory to classrooms, colleges, and the media.

Parents who are busy raising children and who are still trying to realize the American Dream recently discovered the full nature of this organized onslaught on civilization when, during COVID lockdowns, they had direct access to the warped curriculum of their children through Zoom.

The fact that so many woke teachers believe that they, not parents, should be the sole arbiters of the curriculum—which now includes the pernicious invasion of “gender bending” at the primary school level, allowing the state to encourage sex-change operations in girls and boys without parental consent—demonstrates that the ideological war on the West and the family is moving forward “full steam ahead.”

Recently, on TV, I saw President Biden receive a man at the White House who now believes and behaves as if he is a woman. The president himself encouraged this “transformation.” It was a sad moment.

None of this could have happened if even the slightly naïve civics curriculum from the 1960s were still being taught in Western schools. This curriculum taught that the West is a worthwhile experiment, and that while it has its faults, it is still a noble, ongoing, and righteous rejection of tyranny.

No, the great books of the dead, white males that began with the prophets of the Bible and the Greek philosophers are not only ignored in today’s colleges, but they are also demonized by and removed from the academy. The undergraduate curriculum is now Balkanized, and young people can study any trivial subject that they want in wasteful detail (as long as it does not include Great Books seminars lead by “straight” white males and females).

One interviewee points out that, in former Communist Poland, there is a generation of citizens who have grown up in freedom as members of the EU and who have no memory or understanding of living under tyranny. It took one generation of affluence to forget the past.

Students and professors are now asked to “decolonize” their curriculum and themselves, the assumption being that one must engage in humiliating self-flagellation over endless new inventions of guilty privilege and structural inequality, real

or imagined.

The idea of meritocracy, or of a 2,500-year-old intellectual tradition that must be taught to each new generation, has been tossed out the window. And the idea of joining Western intellectual life, as a voluntary decision that can be made anywhere by anyone who believes in the value of the individual, is remarkably absent.

Solzhenitsyn is no longer even remembered, let alone taught, at most colleges. There is no longer any respect for real history, and no need to study it. Instead, the *New York Times* provides us with “real” American history in its shoddy and poorly researched 1619 Project, which is a travesty of the historical-critical method.

History is now trivialized, and the qualified greatness of founders like Jefferson is completely rejected, because like most American and European landowners in his day and age, he kept slaves. The fact that “free men of color” also kept slaves is conveniently downplayed.

In order for impressionable youth to swallow what is clearly intellectual garbage, language must also be debased. George Orwell’s novel *1984* is no longer taught widely, and so this classic story about the inevitable inversion of language no longer inoculates the youth against demagogues and tyrants like the “Squad.” This foursome represents a growing Marxist, ahistorical trend within the once middle-of-the-road Democratic Party, one that is without criticism from the better-educated party members who should know better. Their silence is deafening.

One has only to read some of the classic books during the 1960s produced by the Marxist Frankfurt School, such as those of Herbert Marcuse, to understand why it is now hip among most young musicians and artists to support “subversive art and music.” You can be sure these musicians are not studying

Mozart and Beethoven.

Listen to hip-hop music, and even “white” country singers like Taylor Swift, to perceive the anti-traditionalist anger that now pervades popular music and culture. Peter Wood, who is interviewed in this film, has written [an entire book](#) about it.

The West fought two totalitarian systems during the twentieth century, and it was refugee German-Jewish scholar Hannah Arendt who, in her book on the origins of totalitarianism, explained that one was based on Hitler and the other on Lenin and Stalin. They were parallel but different moral inversions of the Ten Commandments.

Our parents fought the war against Hitler and won. Then, we thought, we had won the Cold War. But the undefeated Marxist tyranny that once gave Stalin demonically destructive power is at loose amongst us and has penetrated our institutions since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1990. Despite our belief that we won the Cold War, we lost the cold war of ideas. The “march through the institutions” recommended by Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci is over. The Marxists have won, and the rest of us have lost.

A simple illustration is that of critical race theory, which has permeated law schools across the country, creating in its wake a generation of activist judges and lawyers who no longer uphold the Constitution and equality before the law. In Canada, it is even worse.

Affirmative action is part of this movement, and it is a complete inversion of the struggle for racial equality under the late Dr. King. Atomization has succeeded, and surveys suggest that “Gen Z” is a lonely generation of alienated youth, as seven out of ten of these youngsters report.

Civilizational decline never happens by itself. Rome did not just fall because of corruption and cowardice; it was also pushed by Barbarians. Today we know from the research of

sleuths such as Peter Schweizer that during the last forty years, both Republican and Democratic elites outsourced U.S. manufacturing to China, enriching themselves and impoverishing millions of American workers, while China has literally invaded the campus and our media in both open and nefarious ways.

Even Hollywood now self-censors because it is dependent on Chinese funding and markets for its films. We learn that the Chinese government has a whole department dedicated to the long-term world domination of the Chinese State. Protests about Tibet, the persecution of Falun Gong, or good news from Taiwan is often self-censored here in the West before the Chinese Communist Party even complains. The CCP has even opened branches of its police in Canadian cities, apparently without the knowledge or blessing of the authorities. (Backroom deals, anyone?)

The film ends with the idea that America has gone from a culture of gratitude to a culture of grievance. The viewer will instantly think of “intersectionality” as the successful tactic of ungrateful youth who have never had it materially better, but who are miserable because they are out of touch with their own human nature.

Traditional political philosophers have always believed, like the Rabbis of the Talmud, that mankind possesses two inclinations, the one that strives for goodness and the evil one, which gives in to our baser animal instincts. Western civilization and American exceptionalism were, until recently, successful ways of dealing with what Freud once called “civilization and its discontents,” creating a culture that suppressed the latter and encouraged the former. That is no longer the case, and the pundits in this film leave us with hope, perhaps inspiration, but no clear way forward.

In a similar vein, Christian theologians and believers have always believed that man is born in sin and must use his life

to redeem himself in the eyes of God and his fellow men and women.

This has been a central pillar of the rise of democracy, for the common understanding is that, given temptation, leaders may often be out for themselves and not for the people they represent.

With the decline in American Christianity, the fundamental Christian humility that follows from an awareness of the world's evil has retreated from public discourse. This has allowed politicians such as former President Obama, Hillary Clinton, and AOC to take on a dangerous omniscience that any believing Christian would see as immodest. These men and women are now the "American Idols" of the political Left.

I am probably Canada's only conservative anthropologist. I turned my back on politically correct academia in the early '90s and used my research and management skills in the field of rural development in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia for more than twenty years. There, I learned many techniques that the Left has used for so-called "community development."

When used without subversive intent, they are marvelous tools to help the individual and the group work out a local social contract within the larger one, or, as is the case in many developing countries, to work out a local one where a national one does not actually exist.

Paradoxically, young North American suburbanites and urbanites are now in a similar "state of nature." National institutions can no longer be trusted, and "citizens" (as the French would say) must therefore use the methods designed for poor people in the developing world to take back the future for their children at the local level. Appreciative inquiry is just one of these many "tools." It is worth investigating, as most conservatives do not know what it is.

Hillsdale College teaches great books to undergraduates, and

like a medieval monastery, it has put together charter schools designed to give young people an “old-fashioned” curriculum that affirms faith, family, philosophy, science, and respect for the Constitution. As leftists like to say, “this project could be rolled out nationally.” Why not, say I?

If you, dear reader, have made it this far in this very old-fashioned essay, do not think that you now can walk away saying, “I read the article; I need not see the film.”

The men and women interviewed in the film have done much thinking, reading, writing, and teaching during the last few decades. I still prefer their words to mine, and I have only written this piece in the hope that once you see and hear them speak, you will agree with me. I wish you all Godspeed.

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[*Civilization in the Danger Zone*](#) is currently on the film festival circuit, and it should be available on video streaming platforms in several months. Check out civilizationinthedangerzone.com to keep up to date on screenings, or visit docemetproductions.com/shop to order a DVD.