

# BUILDING SOCIAL CAPITAL WITH *Classic Cinema Conversations*

MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON (1939), NO WAY OUT (1950), & 12 ANGRY MEN (1957)

## Professor Haidt likens today's world to the ruins of the *Tower of Babel*

Professor Jonathan Haidt describes us as "people wandering amid the ruins, unable to communicate, condemned to mutual incomprehension. [The tower is a] metaphor for what is happening not only between red and blue, but within the left, and within the right, as well as within universities, companies, professional associations, museums, and even families."

*The Atlantic*, April, 2022  
"After Babel: How social media dissolved the mortar of society and made America stupid"



## Rebuilding Our Society's Social Capital With the Art of Great Classic Movies

Golden  
Age  
Five Star  
Films



*Regaining greater unity  
and civic friendship amid the  
ruins of Babel: Golden age five  
star films are the building  
blocks*

In this conversation we will draw from Professor Jonathan Haidt's Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) as he explains it in *The Righteous Mind*. We discover elements of MFT in these classics to help us move from polarization to solidarity in our civil society.

CIVIC LESSONS DRAMATIZED IN  
*MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON (1939), NO WAY OUT (1950),*  
*& 12 ANGRY MEN (1957)*

*We are inspired to reflect on Civil Society and how to live in it together*

*The Elements of  
Moral Foundations Theory*

- Care/Harm
- Fairness/Cheating
- Loyalty/Betrayal
- Liberty/Oppression
- Authority/Subversion
- Sanctity/Degradation

*“The more you emphasize common goals or interests, shared fate, and common humanity, the more [people] will see one another as fellow human beings, treat one another well, and come to appreciate one another’s contribution to humanity.”*

*-Lukianoff and Haidt in *The Coddling of the American Mind**

***Moral Foundations Theory in Mr. Smith  
confirms our innate intuition that order must prevail over chaos  
Authority vs. Subversion***

❖ *Mr Smith Goes to Washington* is an ideal film classic for the revival of “Civics 101”



***“The Chair recognizes  
Senator Smith”***



***“If authority is in part about protecting order and fending off chaos, then everyone has a stake in supporting the existing order and in holding people accountable for fulfilling the obligations of their station” -Jonathan Haidt***

## Examining the "Sanctity" and "Loyalty" Foundations in Mr. Smith

### Clarissa helps Jeff to apply his high ideals-the "Sanctity" Foundation in love of country

- ◆ This idea is depicted when Saunders confronts Jeff with the question:
  - ◆ "What are you going to tell those kids?"



Our political landscape appears so bleak that ordinary people are tempted to *just give up*. How does Saunders help Jeff and inspire him to persevere in pursuit of the common good?



### Senator Paine's Moral Dilemma: Loyalty vs Betrayal

- ◆ Senator Paine is only able to make the right moral choice when he realizes how he has betrayed his best friend-Jeff's father.



"I guess this is just another lost cause, Mr. Paine."

Reflect on how Jeff's words impact the conscience of Senator Paine.

## Moral Foundations Theory: Highlighting Our Innate Sense of *Care vs. Harm*

- ❖ *No Way Out* introduces the theme of universal human dignity through the presentation of characters forced to confront racism.
- ❖ Edie - raised in a racist environment, becomes deeply disturbed at the violence, injury, and harm she witnesses in the race riot.



How does the film *No Way Out* help us grow in *understanding our common humanity as a civic virtue* that we must practice more than ever in order to combat *ideology* on the one side and *indifference* on the other?

## The Sanctity Foundation *No Way Out*

"I've got to live too."

With these words, Dr. Brooks affirms the timeless standard of virtue and love of the good so long ago expressed in Sophocles' *Antigone*

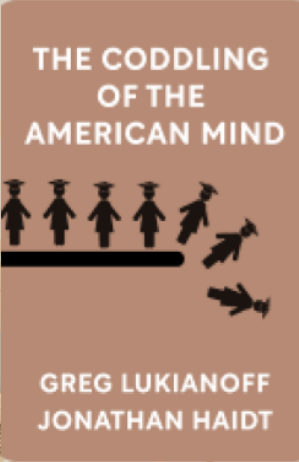


*I can't kill a man just because he hates me*

*"Moral communities are fragile things, hard to build and easy to destroy....if you don't value moral capital, then you wont foster values, virtues, norms, practices identities, institutions, and technologies that increase it."*

-Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, Chapter 12

**3 UNTRUTHS DESCRIBED IN  
"THE CODDLING OF THE AMERICAN MIND"**



1. **Untruth of "Us Versus Them"** - *life is a battle between good people and evil people*

2. **Untruth of "Fragility"** - *we are victims in an uncontrollable environment*

3. **Untruth of "Emotional Reasoning"** - *always trust your feelings*

**Classic films refute the toxic untruths experienced by Gen Z**



1. **Ethos of Community & Solidarity** - stronger than *us vs. them*:  
Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

2. **We have free will & moral choice** - we are not mere victims of fatalistic forces:  
Joseph Mankiewicz's *No Way Out*

3. **Our heads & hearts can work together to understand justice & the common good**,  
Sidney Lumet's *12 Angry Men*



## OVERTURNING THE 3 UNTRUTHS

BY DRAWING "A LARGER CIRCLE"  
AROUND OUR CIVIL COMMUNITY

Lukianoff and Haidt give this advice...

*"...the more you emphasize common goals or interests, shared fate, and common humanity, the more [people] will see one another as fellow human beings, treat one another well, and come to appreciate one another's contribution to humanity."*

-Chapter 13, The Coddling of the American Mind

Can you see any of these untruths present in the characters or situations of *12 Angry Men*?



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