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In Western society there is a constant emphasis on the here and now. It is a reasonable claim that this originates from our capitalist system. While highly effective economically, it promulgates the spirit of self-interest: just as people try to make the decisions that benefit them the most personally in business transactions, they also often make self-interested decisions socially and politically, benefitting themselves, but perhaps even harming others. It is this self-interested view that causes many of the problems that the globe faces today, from a polluted and warming environment to an out-of-control budget deficit.

Many Native American tribes had a different view, however. They lost much of their land to white settlers often because they simply had no concept of land ownership. While our pioneer ancestors believed that land wasn't being put to good use if it was not rapped of its resources, the Native Americans felt it was something to be used, but not harmed. This long-sighted approach of preserving what we have, so as to not rob future generations of what they might have or shunt one generation's problems on to another, has wisdom that should be applied much more generously by voters and lawmakers.

By viewing the earth as something borrowed from future generations, decisions are made with more foresight and less selfishness. It promotes a principle that many Americans have no concept of: sustainability. One need only ask oneself "Can we sustain this massive amount of government spending?" or "Can we sustain this reliance on fossil fuels?" to know that current behavior is racking up debts for future generations to pay. However, there is often little political will to think of the future. After all, who wants to take short-run cuts for long run gains when here and now one must experience a perceived sense of being worse off?

While the past few decades have experienced an upwelling of respect for others on a global scale, now is the time to launch a second wave of a respect movement. This would be a movement of temporal respect, a respect for generations past and generations future by generations present. Society today needs to learn from the past in order to protect the future, to make sacrifices so that the earth may be inherited in the pristine condition it came in.

Society as we know it today will be brief. Pollution, spending, and other practices cannot continue at their current rate forever. The question is, will this generation solve its own problems, or leave the next to pick up the pieces? Will today's citizens be responsible? Will they have respect for the earth they borrowed from their children? Can static thinking be exchanged for forward-thinking? Are the people of today capable of choosing what is right over what is easy? Only time will tell. In the mean time, it is up to individuals to stand up for preserving the future, take responsibility for their actions, and, ultimately, perpetuate the earth and the human race.