

## A HERO FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

**Jacqueline Haessly,**

*Peacemaking Associates, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA*

**Keywords:** hero, integrity, honor, justice, peace, greatness of soul, strength, courage, personal responsibility, community responsibility, common good, caring, goodness, solidarity, gods, warrior

### Contents

1. Exploring Perspectives about Heroes
    - 1.1 Reviewing the Literature
    - 1.2 Exploring Models of Hero
    - 1.3 Identifying Examples of Heroes
  2. Exploring the Hero in Ancient Cultures
    - 2.1 Exploring Heroes of Ancient Egypt
    - 2.2. Exploring Heroes of Ancient India
    - 2.3 Exploring Heroes in Ancient Peru
  3. Exploring Heroes during the Time of the African Slave Trade
    - 3.1 Developing a Slave Trade among African, European, and Colonial Americans
    - 3.2 Resisting Slavery
      - 3.2.1. Highlighting the African Resistance
      - 3.2.2 Highlighting the Slave Resistance
      - 3.2.3 Highlighting the Abolitionist Resistance
    - 3.3 Generating Cultural Change
      - 3.3.1 Acknowledging Governmental Support
      - 3.3.2 Transforming a Culture
  4. Exploring Heroes in a Time of Global Turbulence
    - 4.1 Becoming Aware and Involved
      - 4.1.1 Engaging in Quiet Acts of Resistance
      - 4.1.2 Engaging in Nonviolent Civil Disobedience
      - 4.1.3 Living the Vision
    - 4.2 Connecting across a Century
    - 4.3 Reflecting on Connections
  5. Drawing Conclusions
- Acknowledgements  
Glossary  
Bibliography  
Biographical Sketch

### Summary

The Warrior Hero has come down to us as an example of the perfect hero, one willing to lay down one's life for an ideal. Can an examination of the hero as evidenced in various civilizations and historical periods suggest a working model of a hero better suited to meet the needs of people in the Twenty-first Century? Can we move beyond a concept of the hero as warrior to embrace a concept of a hero as someone 'with greatness of

soul'. What does history across the millennia tell us about heroes who exhibit this quality? To find out, qualities of heroes are examined from the perspectives of three distinct historical periods: heroes of Egypt, India, and Peru in the ancient world between 2500 BCE and 300 BCE; heroes who emerged in response to the African slave trade between 1450 CE and 1850 CE; and heroes who emerged in the midst of violence and wars during the last sixty years of the Twentieth Century. Qualities of peoples from all time periods -- those somewhat unknown from ancient histories; those like King Ja Ja, Frederick Douglas, Sojourner Truth, and Anne Marie Jahouvey from the time of the African Slave Trade; and individuals like Rosa Parks, Nelson Mandela, and Aung San Suu Kyi, and even entire groups of villagers like the people of Le Chambon, France and Neve Shalom/Wahet Al Salem on the Israeli/Palestinian border in the late Twentieth Century have something important to say to us today about our understanding of heroes who act 'with greatness of soul'. This article examines these qualities, and proposes a new way for viewing the hero for the Twenty-first Century and beyond.

### **1. Exploring Perspectives about Heroes**

If we as a people are to survive with our humanity intact into the 21st century, perhaps it is time to reexamine our concept of hero. The Warrior Hero, immortalized in much of the world's literature, has come down to us as the prime example of the perfect hero, one willing to lay down one's life for a Pharaoh, a Caesar, a Lord, a King, or a President. A careful reading of the literature suggests that there are other models of hero, many far more in keeping with the needs and demands of the Twenty-first Century, a century that follows closely upon one that has already seen more atrocity in warfare and violations of human rights during the past one hundred years than in all previous centuries combined.

Can an examination of models of the hero from selected literature, as evidenced in various civilizations and time-periods in history, suggest a creative working model of a hero for our future? What does history across the millennia tell us about heroes? Who do the records suggest were the heroes of a given historical period? Why were they heroes? Who said they were heroes? Who validated their role as hero? What qualities described their character? What criteria determines a hero? And who established this criteria? Were heroes honored in their own time, and if so, how? How were they honored and rewarded, and how would we know? How did the designation of hero reflect the culture or the society represented? What factors affected changes in perception of the hero? How does the description and experience of hero differ across cultural, generational, and disciplinary perspectives? These are the questions addressed in this exploration of heroes across the generations of time.

The introduction to this article provides an examination and analysis of both historical and contemporary philosophical, cultural, and classical literature to aid in identifying various qualities of heroes, their characteristics, and their place in society. Next, these qualities of hero are examined from the perspectives of three distinct time-periods in human history. First to be examined are the heroes who emerged from the cultures and civilizations of three vastly separate geographical areas of the ancient world: the Egyptians of North Africa, the Harappans and Aryans of India, and the Pre-Inkas of Peru between 5000 BCE and 300 BCE. Next, attention is turned to the heroes who

emerged in response to the rise of the African slave trade, which touched the lives of peoples on four continents in the four hundred year period between 1450 CE and 1850 CE. Finally, attention is turned to the heroes who emerged in the midst of conflicts, violence, wars, the repression of peoples, and the exploitation of resources that took place on every continent during the last sixty years of the 20th century. Each of these three historical periods provides rich insight into the qualities that make up a person of heroic character. The collection of observations, reflections, and stories forms a collage that reveals the hero with greatness of soul across five thousand years of human history. In conclusion, this contribution identifies new ways of defining the hero, highlights significant heroic qualities helpful for living with others in the Twenty-First Century and beyond, and promotes a new way of both seeing and celebrating the heroes among us.

Research, drawn from books in the fields of art, literature, cultural anthropology, religion, and philosophy as well history, provide background for this work. The heroes identified in this work once walked the earth, breathed its air, labored in its fields, lived and loved and, like all of us, experienced the range of human emotions of pain and sadness as well as exuberant joy. Each reveals important qualities of a hero for the Twenty-first Century.

### **1.1 Reviewing the Literature**

A study of the literature readily calls forth multiple images or models of hero. First among these is the hero as warrior. Joseph Campbell suggests that the warrior was the first hero in human form, beginning only when villages and cities expanded, demanding a clearing of the forest and protection from expanding migrations or enemy conquests. Today, it is common for dictionaries and encyclopedias to begin their description of 'hero' with a reference to Homer, equating the hero to the warrior, as in a 'man (sic) of courage' in battle. A 'hero' is described as one called to watch over; protect; show strength and courage in battle; be admired for courage, nobility, or exploits; and any person admired for qualities of achievements and regarded as an ideal or model. True heroism has been compared to the kind of selfless act that only occurs within the military setting. This understanding of hero eliminates the athlete or those who excel in sports for personal fame, glory, and financial remuneration. Such a definition of a hero follows an oral and written tradition begun more than two millennia ago.

Nothing seems to have changed much since the time of Plato, who hoped that the hero of intellectual pursuits might replace the poetic concept of the Warrior Hero that dominated ancient Greek Culture.

There is yet another perspective. Whatever value Homer's warrior hero once held for a people emerging from the caves and forests to create a village or a civilization, the time is long past to place that image aside. Image makers delude soldiers into thinking that there is something glamorous and glorious about the hero as warrior, the virile male par excellence, and in the process encourage youth into sacrificing themselves for the good of God and country. The warrior image may have stimulated both imagination and imitation among young men who sought the glory that comes with the performance of

heroic deeds, but it has no place in a world that arms its warriors with atom bombs and nuclear weapons.

Ron Dorfman writes eloquently that it is time to do away with heroes because, he believes, the heroic ideal as warrior depends upon a social, moral, or ideological premise that thrives best in an atmosphere of ignorance, domination, and even cruelty, which has no place in a free and democratic society. Still, even a cursory glance at the textbooks that pass on the history of a people to its young would lead one to believe that the hero as Warrior is the most important form of hero worth knowing.

The editors of the Great Ideas Today series of the Encyclopedia Britannica initiated a dialogue in the early 1970's on the topic of hero as warrior, and invited contributors to propose alternative models of the hero. The Vietnam War was raging, Watergate, the Pentagon Papers, and MyLai had stung the consciousness of people in the United States and elsewhere; there were national and international assassinations of presidents and presidential candidates, and of political, religious, and civil rights leaders; there was chaos in the land and our leaders suddenly had feet of clay. In such a state, the staff of the Encyclopedia Britannica embraced this dialogue because there were questions as to whether the heroic ideal was either evident or viable, given the historical situation.

## 1.2 Exploring Models of Hero

In searching for a definition of a hero who could meet the needs of today's people and inspire future generations, it seems essential to identify those characteristics of the hero that carry through from earliest civilizations to the present and still carry us into the Twenty-first Century with a vision of a hero best suited for a new millennia. Thomas Carlyle presents an idea of the hero that seems relevant for the Twenty-first Century and beyond. Carlyle suggests that we move beyond the concept of the hero as the warrior or even as a great person and instead proposes that each person develop a sense of responsibility to be themselves people of heroic virtue. Only then, he believes, will the qualities of the genuine hero spread near and far, as we each engage in doing good wherever we live.

With Thomas Carlyle as a link, other references to the hero emerged, not always related to great public deeds, but at times to great private lives. In *Great Ideas Today*, Cicero is cited as describing a hero as one who "conscientiously renders duty and reverence to kin, country, and friends", while Virgil is cited as describing the hero as one who "for the sake of a higher identity . . . comes to accept the identity of the participant in a great world task." Both reveal the qualities of selflessness and integrity essential for the hero. Mollie Hunter suggests that we consider the hero as a person who lives with greatness of soul, and encourages each person to draw on those emotions that will empower them to embrace the hero in the ordinariness of their life, and become in the process an inspiration to others even as we have been inspired by others.

Historically, there have been multiple models of hero, in addition to the model of the hero as warrior. For Thomas Carlyle, these include the hero as God, represented by the gods of ancient history; as Prophet, represented in ancient holy books; as Poet, represented in the stories of our dreams; as Priest, represented by those who pray and

sacrifice on our behalf; as Lettered, represented by those who pass on the wisdom of the ages; and as King, represented by those who provide leadership and protection for our daily needs.

Other models of the hero include the hero as Athlete, represented by the superstars of sports; the Tragic Hero, represented by those who seem to achieve greatness but at great personal expense; the Erotic Lover, represented by those who experience an inordinate love of power or money; the Thinker, represented by those who are ascetic or intellectual; the Comic Hero, represented by those who remind us of our own abnormality; the Rustic, represented by those who participate in the back-to-the-land movements of recent times; the Hero as Leader, represented by those chosen or appointed; as Adventurer, representative of those who provide stories that stimulate the imaginations of our young; as Savior, represented by those who rescue us from the dangers and crises of life; and as a Great Person, represented by those who may or may not act justly while influencing the movements of history.

Heroes have also been described as inspirational: those we admire just because we know we could never immolate them; and challenging: those we admire and wish to emulate. Other qualities used to describe the hero include 'sincere', 'genuine', 'true', and 'noble', and possess the qualities of piety, honor, valor, and loyalty. Heroes have the ability to guide us to act beyond our own self-imposed limits.

The introduction to Great Ideas volume on 'Heroes' affirms the belief that there is a need for heroes and goes on to identify the hero as possessing a quality of human greatness. Other characteristics of the hero include 1) strength or skill of a physical, intellectual, moral, and/or spiritual nature; 2) consistency in all situations, not just on special occasions; 3) persistence in times of struggle; 4) courage of heart and soul; and 5) thoughtfulness in the face of uncertainties of life. Heroes across all times use time and space efficiently, exhibit creativity in all endeavors, possess an inner harmony, recognize a basic interconnectedness with others, and have the ability to transcend the ordinary or the separateness of their lives. Moreover, heroes themselves may experience neglect, or even disdain, while some may experience honor, and some may even affect the transformation of their communities.

### **1.3 Identifying Examples of Heroes**

There are heroes for different occasions and social groups. Tribal or local heroes such as Moses, Huang Ti, Tezcatlipoca, Jean Giono, Betty Williams, Mariread Corrigan, Jose Ramos Horta, and Aung San Suu Kyi meet a human need in a very specialized location. Universal heroes, such as Mohammed, Jesus, Gautama Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi, Jodi Williams, Desmond Tutu, and the Dalia Lama, bring a message of heroism to the entire world. Some, such as Nelson Mandela, transcend both local and international heroism; he acted heroically while imprisoned for his stand against apartheid and also when, released from prison, he joined with others to work on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Sometimes, larger groups of people engage in heroic efforts, such as the citizens of Denmark who wore yellow armbands in solidarity with their Jewish neighbors during

World War II, and the firefighters who risked and lost their lives during the attacks on the World Trade Center in the United States in 2001. Heroic efforts are also exhibited by members of organizations, such as Oz V'Shalom, and Doctors Without Borders; and even by whole communities who take on the role of the hero, such as the villagers of Le Chambon in France and Neve Shalom and Wahet Al Salem in the Middle East.

Heroic acts performed in every historical period reveal both differences and remarkable similarities. Joseph Campbell remarks on the amazing consistency describing the hero that is found in the sacred writings of every people on every continent. In each setting, the hero brings a single-mindedness to the task, as well as a spirit of passion, integrity, and wisdom.

In all human cultures, heroes help provide for a multiplicity of human needs. Chaim Potok identifies these needs as a social need for connection with others who live with courage; a psychological need for security; a political need for leadership; a moral need for perfection in thought, word, and deed; and an emotional and mental need to comprehend and come to terms with the world around them. Stories help put a face on the heroes who dwell among us, and stories also provide accounts of events that affect people and their lives; stories embellished communicate experiences of real people who exhibited the qualities of strength, cunning, and/or boldness.

The motivation for transcending the ordinariness of our lives, to embrace the hero within us, comes from resources deep within the psyche of the person or community who chooses to act. The capacity to act in a heroic manner lives within each of us. The task of the next three sections is to identify and describe the heroes, the ones who, as Molly Hunter writes, are those with greatness of soul, heroes who sometimes lie hidden in the histories of peoples' lives. How, then, did the people living within these three cultures understand, describe, recognize, and honor their heroes?

## **2. Exploring the Hero in Ancient Cultures**

Every culture has its heroes, those it designates as worthy of special honor: the kings, leaders, warriors, holy ones, and those who acted in a heroic manner when face-to-face with an unexpected challenge. This section focuses on three distinct ancient civilizations on three continents: the Egyptians of North Africa, the Harappas and Aryans of India, and the Pre-Inkas of Peru, South America. The time-period was roughly 2500 BCE to 300 BCE. How, though, does one explore responses to questions about heroes, what can we know about a people and their heroes, when so little seems left of that culture? What messages can we decipher when there is no written body of language, such as in Ancient Peru? When the only written language has not yet found a translator capable of breaking the code, as in Ancient India? When the non-perishable artifacts of that culture were destroyed in rampant lootings such as occurred in Peru in the 15th Century, or through careless efforts of collectors in 19th Century India, or the more recent unauthorized excavations of the Middle East?

The hero as god or as the courageous and victorious warrior returned from battle and portrayed in the stories and artifacts of these ancient civilizations is a familiar one. But, are there other dimensions of hero that can speak to our time? Who were those who had

learned to live with nobility of spirit by being themselves of heroic mind, thereby creating a whole world of heroes. Who, in these ancient civilizations, were the heroes with the greatness of soul? Insight into this question is gleaned from, among others, the works of Henri Frankfort, William A. Irwin, and John A. Wilson for Ancient Egypt; the work of Walter A. Fairservis, Jr. for Ancient India; and the work of A. Hyatt Verrill and Ruth Verrill for Ancient Peru.

## 2.1 Exploring Heroes of Ancient Egypt

One of the essential attributes of ancient Egypt was the concept of *ma'at*. *Ma'at*, which has been described as truth, justice, righteousness, and good order, is the form of government, at times viewed as rigid and centralized, practiced by the Egyptian government. *Ma'at* meant justice expressed not so much in statutes and precedents, but rather expressed in just relations with others in all situations. *Ma'at* described the life of a just person as someone with good moral character, someone who lived in harmony and integrity with others, and someone who lived in harmony with a divine order. Just persons who died were considered heroic and their names recorded in stone. The good works performed by heroes became an integral part of the autobiography of each person's story

The art, literature, work, history, and culture of the people themselves tell us something about the heroes in Ancient Egypt. These included gods, rulers, athletes, and artists, as well as ordinary people. Worship of gods is evident from paintings, sculpture, writings, and burial practices. The Egyptians worshiped many gods, including Ptah, the creator of the Universe; Menes, the unifier of Upper and Lower Egypt; Hathor, the patron of love and joy; and Enki, the protector of earth and water. Ordinary people, the masses of Egyptian citizens, honored Osiris in a special way, blending nature worship with worship of ancient kings whose feats lived on through stories passed on across the generations. Rulers in Ancient Egypt, the Pharaohs and their dynasties, are also immortalized in stone, as well as in sculpture, in paintings and carvings, in song, in their written literature, in the temples they created, and the tombs in which they lay for more than 3000 years. Extant documents reflect a kingship and a society that is just, orderly and optimistic. The king was a god, the earthly interpreter of *ma'at*, and in theory at least, was subject to the dictates of *ma'at*. Moral values taught to the young are the very same as those values of *ma'at* practiced by pharaohs and great leaders. The stories of the heroes as gods, as pharaohs, as warriors, and as great adventurers all reveal persons of integrity who are in harmony with themselves and their universe.

The period of the Middle Kingdom of Ancient Egypt was a time of scrupulous intellectual honesty. A central theme was social responsibility, evident in the sculptures that highlighted acts of care and kindness, and the fulfilling of social obligations. Egyptian people believed that every person, of whatever status, was a person of dignity who deserved respect because each was created by a god who saw to their well-being. Pharaohs urged sons to respect people regardless of wealth or poverty, and to give special honor to people whose work revealed care and integrity.

The physical achievements of Egyptian dynasties reflect their peoples' commitment to honesty, integrity, and care. Perhaps nowhere is this dignity and care so evident as in the

work of their hands. In every aspect of their work, Egyptians exhibited care, often blending creativity and beauty with utilitarian needs, while also serving the purpose of preparing for eternal life. The pyramids and other buildings reveal more than a magnificent structure created with care and deliberateness. They were structures of magnificent beauty created by people who honored themselves and the work of their hands. The art of the Egyptian people covers the tombs, the temples, the pyramids, the palaces, the sculptures, carvings, paintings, and pottery, each filled with pictures of gods, and kings, and warriors, along with ordinary people, such as playing children, servants, a potter, a family, youth playing at games or hunting, dancing girls, ship builders, elders conversing, and marriages.

Each artifact, each temple, and each pyramid is a testament to the spirit and nobility of a people and to the basic integrity of the worker and those for whom they worked, a testament to the hero in each.

-  
-  
-

TO ACCESS ALL THE 25 PAGES OF THIS CHAPTER,  
Visit: <http://www.eolss.net/Eolss-sampleAllChapter.aspx>

### Bibliography

Bennett, Lerone, Jr. (1966). *Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America, 1619-1964*. Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books. [The author presents an historical overview of the African Slave Trade, Resistance to the Slave Trade, and contributions of people of African Heritage to the development of America].

Campbell, Joseph (1968). *The Hero with a Thousand Face*. Ballinger Series XVII, NJ: Princeton University Press. [The author examines the role of the hero in human history from diverse historical and cultural perspectives].

Carlyle, Thomas (1909). *Past and Present*. London: Oxford University Press. [The author examines the warrior hero through an historical lens and poses an alternative model that draws upon a person's inner resources].

Daniel-Rops, Henri, (1959). *The Heroes of God*. Tr. by Laurence G. Blackman, New York: Hawthorn Books. [The author develops biographical information about people of faith who made a difference for good in their world].

Dorfman, Ron (1973). "No More Heroes". *Great Ideas Today*. Chicago, IL: Encyclopedia Britannica. [This author challenges traditional understandings of the warrior as hero, and suggests that it is time to do away with hero worship altogether].

Fairservis, Walter A. Jr. (1971). *The Roots of Ancient India: The Archeology of Early Indian Civilization*. New York: The Macmillian Co. [The author draws upon archeological sources to describe the history and life of the peoples of ancient India].

Frankfort, Henri, William A. Irwin, and John A. Wilson (1946). *Beyond Philosophy: The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [These authors present an overview of the belief systems, life, and times of peoples living in Ancient Egypt].

Great Ideas (1973) "The Introduction to Heroes". *Great Ideas Today*. Chicago, IL: Encyclopedia



Britannica. [The contributors to this volume present a variety of viewpoints about heroes and their place in society].

Gregg, Richard B. (1966). *The Power of NonViolence*. New York: Schocken Books. [The author of this work examines the philosophy and history of the movement for nonviolent social change, and present an abundance of examples drawn from historical experiences].

Hunter, Mollie (1983). "A Need for Heroes". *Horn Book Magazine*. Boston, MA: Vol. 59, April. [This author presents a thoughtful analysis supporting her position on the need for heroes in our lives].

McAllister, Pam (1988). *You Can't Kill the Spirit*. New Society Publishers, Santa Cruz, CA. [This author presents stories of people who faced threats to their life as they challenged unjust systems and practices in their societies].

McManners, John, "The Expansion of Christianity". *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*. Ed. John McManners, Oxford University Pres, NY, 1990. [A section of this volume identifies the positions of Churches and the role of Christians during the period of the African Slave Trade].

Meyrowitz, Joshua (1984). "Where Have All the Heroes Gone?" *Psychology Today*. July. [The author questions the role of hero worship in society, and invites readers to examine their own understanding about heroes].

Miller, William Robert (1966). *Nonviolence: A Christian Interpretation*. New York: Schocken Books. [This author examines the philosophy and practice of nonviolence from a Christian perspective].

Peavey, Fran (1986). *Heart Politics*. Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers. [This author reflects on the response of people worldwide to her journey to countries around the world carrying a sign, American willing to listen].

Potok, Chaim (1973). "Heroes for an Ordinary Way". *Great Ideas Today*. Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. New York: Praeger Publisher. [This author develops the idea that heroes as ordinary citizens share an important place in our hero worship].

Spears, John R. (1978). *The American Slave Trade: An Account of Its Origins, Growth and Suppression*. Williamstown, MA: Corner House Publications. [This author analyzes the origins and expansion of the African Slave Trade in America, and the work of the abolitionists to end it].

Verrill, A. Hyatt and Ruth Verrill (1967). *America's Ancient Civilizations*. New York: Capricorn Books. [These authors present historical and archeological background on the peoples and culture of ancient Peru].

Wiesel, Elie (1971). *Town Beyond the Wall*. Bard Books, Avon. [This author uses the novel as a way to describe the horrors of life for Jewish people faced with deportation and life in concentration camps during World War II].

Wilson, John A. (1951). *The Culture of Ancient Egypt*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [This author presents an analysis of the culture of the peoples of Ancient Egypt drawing upon historical and archeological findings].

### **Biographical Sketch**

**Jacqueline Haessly**, Ph. D., a peace education specialist, is founder and president of Peacemaking Associates, and serves as adjunct professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Cardinal Stritch University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She is the author of *Peacemaking: Family Activities for Justice and Peace* (Paulist Press, 1980); *Learning to Live Together* (Resource Publications, 1989); and *Weaving a Culture of Peace* (in press, 2002). She has also contributed essays to a number of scholarly works: "Imaging Peace: A Pedagogical Challenge for Peace Educators" in *Holistic Education Review* (December 1997); "From Violence to Wholeness: Families Confront Challenges and Embrace Possibilities" in *Mothering Teens* (Gynergy Press, 1997); "Mothering Sons with Special Needs: One Peacemaker's Challenge" in *Mothers and Sons* (Rutledge, 2001); "Spirituality and Peacemaking" with Judith Myers Walls in *Families as Educators for Global Citizenship* (2001); "Values for the Global Marketplace" in *When the Canary Stops Singing: Women's Perspectives for Transforming Business* (Barrett-Koehler, 1993); "Soul Work: A Corporate Challenge" in *Rediscovering the Soul of Business* (New Leaders Press,

1995); and "Journey Toward Inclusion" in *Working Together: Promoting Synergy by Honoring Diversity* (New Leaders Press, 1997). She also produced, directed, and edited *Peacemaking for Families*, a four-part video based on the Catholic Bishop's Peace Pastoral (Peace Talks Publications, 1983). Jacqueline and her husband, Daniel Di Domizio, co-facilitate workshops and retreats on the theme of Spirituality and Social Justice, and share in the love, tears, joy and laughter of busy family life with children and grandchildren.