

IN SEARCH OF HEROES: AN AMERICAN JOURNEY

The Heroism Project

HIGH SCHOOL
CURRICULUM

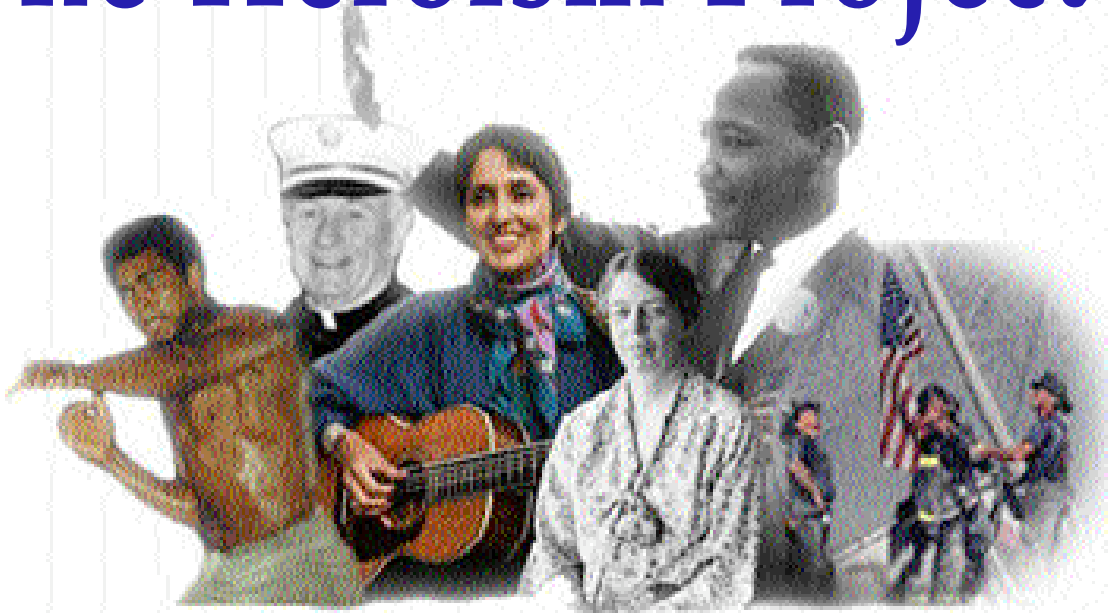


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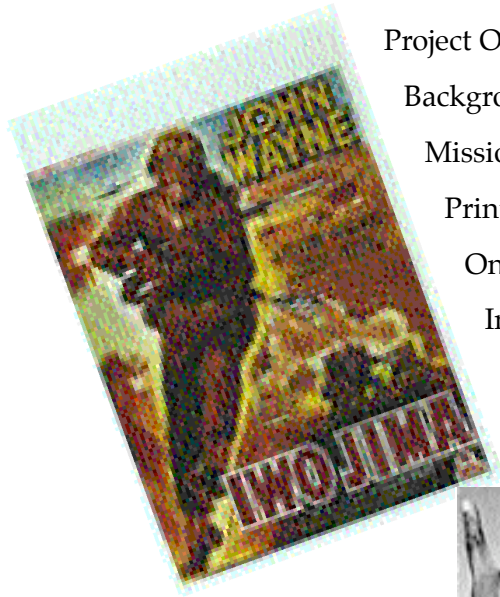
There are nascent stirrings in the neighborhood and in the field, articulated by non-celebrated people who bespeak the dreams of their fellows. It may be catching. Unfortunately, it is not covered on the six o'clock news.

Studs Terkel
My American Century

Sustainability in a hero means, very concretely, providing inspiration that sustains the spirit and the soul. While inconsistency can disqualify a conventional hero, a degree of inconsistency is one of the essential qualifications of a sustainable hero. Models of sustainable heroism are drawn from the record of people doing the right thing some of the time — people practicing heroism at a level that we can actually aspire to match. The fact that those people fell, periodically, off the high ground of heroism but then determinedly climbed back, even if only in order to fall again, is exactly what makes their heroism sustainable. Because it is uneven and broken, this kind of heroism is resilient, credible, possible, reachable. Sustainable heroism comes only in moments and glimpses, but they are moments and glimpses in which the universe lights up.

Patricia Limerick
The Heroism Project

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The Heroism Project

In Search of Heroes: An American Journey

Andrea (Galileo's student): "Unhappy is the land that has no heroes."

Galileo: "No Andrea, unhappy is the land that needs a hero."

Bertolt



Brecht,
Galileo



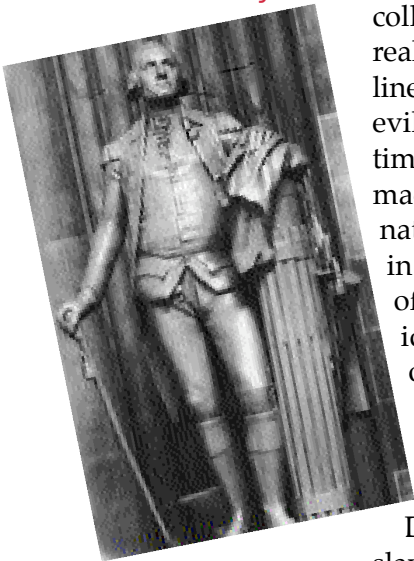
Overview

Americans today seem to be at once hungry for heroes and skeptical about the prospect of finding anyone who can withstand the intense scrutiny and cynicism of our times. Opinions about what makes someone heroic are as different as the myriad values in today's complex society. **The Heroism Project** explores the subject of heroism across the cultures and generations of the twentieth century American landscape. Designed to reach people of diverse ages and backgrounds, the project is comprised of a nationally broadcast television documentary, an interactive multimedia Web site, a comprehensive curriculum and a companion book.

Twentieth century America experienced staggering growth and change unprecedented in human history. Industry and technology have reached inexorably into every field of human endeavor. Mass media and global communication networks have contributed to a proliferation of information about everything and everybody. As a result, private lives for public individuals have virtually ceased to exist. A president's intimate behavior provides fodder for stand-up comics on late night talk shows. The character of one of our country's founding fathers is called into question as a result of DNA testing. Are we ready to accept less than perfect heroes? Are we destroying the incentive for anyone to risk a place in the limelight? If so, what will motivate people to act courageously or engage in public service?

In the history of the world, there will never again be any man, never so great, whom his fellow men will take for a God.

Thomas Carlyle
On Heroes, Hero Worship
and the Heroic in
History



Background

While the word frequents our headlines and valiant characters populate current films and fiction, true heroes—in both the everyday and the mythic, larger-than-life sense of the word—seem to have disappeared from the contemporary scene. Many Americans look abroad, inspired by the activism and enduring commitment of people such as Vaclav Havel, Nelson Mandela and Mother Teresa. Closer to home, those who wear the media mantle of "hero" are more likely to be successful athletes and celebrities than people who have applied their talent and energy to the good of their community.

In principle at least, heroes represent the finest qualities of our collective character. A thousand years ago they inhabited the realms of mythology, monarchy, war and religion. Fairly clear lines were drawn between leaders and followers, good and evil. These distinctions have become far more obscure in recent times. The manifest destiny that drove Americans West and made heroes of the frontiersmen led to the decimation of tribal nations. The unifying conviction of "fighting the good fight" in World Wars I and II was replaced by the divisive debacle of the war in Vietnam. Millions of baby boomers lost the idealized leaders of their generation through assassination or disillusionment. The void has remained unfilled for so long that many Americans scarcely notice it anymore.

Talk of heroes elicits a shrug of indifference as often as a sigh of nostalgia.

Do we still need heroes? Is there a place for the "dragon slayer" in a society where media plays such a powerful role in deriding the famous and celebrating the infamous? Where one misguided youth can break the hearts of an entire community? Where generals sit in darkened rooms and direct missiles and planes at computer-generated targets? Where a basketball player is admired and recognized by more people than the leader of the free world? Where athletes, entertainers and entrepreneurs accumulate staggering fortunes—and fuel the ambitions of our youth for acquisition over altruism?

The following curriculum guide engages students in addressing these provocative questions and invites them to realize the heroic qualities within themselves.

Mission Statement

THE HEROISM PROJECT is dedicated to creating educational media and outreach programs that strengthen the fabric of our society by fostering the values of integrity, courage, generosity, tolerance, wisdom and compassion.

EDUCATIONAL GOALS

1. To inspire each student to apply the accumulated knowledge of heroism to their own lives by recognizing, claiming, and acting upon the hero within.
2. To develop a student-centered curriculum with activities, assignments, and projects that will help students reflect, discuss, and expand on their definitions of heroism.
3. To guide students through levels of reasoning, decision-making and action.
4. To provide students with multicultural and gender-balanced experiences, so they see themselves mirrored in stories of heroes past and present, as well as learn about heroes who are different from them.
5. To address issues related to character, ethics, risk, values clarification and decision making.