You will return these articles to the teacher. Do NOT write on them!

READ THE FOLLOWING CAREFULLY BEFORE YOU BEGIN THE ARTICLES!!!

You will use this packet of articles (as well as one article about a female "hero" and a male "hero") as a basis for the **HEROES JOURNAL ENTRY**.

Furthermore, one of the most popular topics for the *Beowulf* paper involves discussing the concept of "heroism" and whether Beowulf, the character, measures up to the Anglo-Saxon definition, a modern definition, and, ultimately, your personal definition. This packet of articles helps tremendously in reviewing the concepts out there in our world today regarding a "MODERN HERO." So, again, read the articles carefully.

At a minimum for this **two-sided** journal entry, you must read and comment on the following articles:

a. the article on the reverse side of this sheet  Levy's "What Makes a Hero?"
b. the article from *Psychology Today* entitled "How to Be Great!"
c. at least ONE other article from this packet  (or another cool article about a hero which you find on your own!)
d. the articles about the two individual heroes (a male and a female)

It is expected that in your HEROES journal entry (explained in the yellow homework packet), you discuss a bit about your feelings on the **required** articles listed above as well as your own personal feelings about "What is a hero?" and "Who are the "heroes" in your life?"

**NOTE:** You might even take Professor Chiodo's suggestion (as mentioned in Dale Dauten's article on the reverse side) and turn what you have written into a letter to actually send to your personal "hero" (or someone you admire most if the word "hero" sounds too weird/daunting/powerful/trendy.)

:) :) What better gift to give that special person during your senior year?????? :) :)

Let's begin
Learning the power and the point of communication

"There is a need for someone against which our characters can measure themselves. Without a ruler, you won't make the crooked straight."

— Seneca

Seems like everyone who talks to Beverly Chiodo ends up crying. I heard about Chiodo from a neighbor, over coffee and a box of Kleenex, and I couldn't wait to get on the phone to her.

Chiodo (her name is Italian, and pronounced SH-y-dee) is a professor of communications at Southwest Texas State, and she requires her students to name and write about a hero in their lives. The effect is that the class ends up thinking about and discussing what it takes to be admirable, a question that just isn't asked in our society. "What does it take to get rich?" is asked. Popularity? Sexy? Successful? Yes. Admirable? No.

And then Chiodo takes what each student has written, turns it into a letter and sends it to the hero. Often those letters are a surprise — "I've always admired my grandfather but I never knew how to tell him" — and many of them end up being framed. Admiration is a deeply emotional experience. The heroes are moved to tears at the unexpected realization that someone has noticed and cared, and then write back, whereupon the students rush to their professor, insisting on reading aloud the response but can't get through it without breaking down. The students experience rapport on a new level — liquid communication.

‘Foundation to accomplishment’

So does all this Kleenex belong in a college course? Oh, yes. While many students now learn PowerPoint, most learn neither the power nor the point of communication. When I spoke to Chiodo, she said, "Character is the foundation to accomplishment — if you have diligence and determination, you'll succeed." She told me of a student who said: "I had an ROTC instructor who told me, 'Paul, you're an honest man.' Ever since then, I find that I am incapable of being dishonest." Chiodo herself tells of a friend once saying to her, "You are a woman of determination." That little sentence still echoes in Chiodo's head, and every time she is struggling, she refuses to give up, knowing that to do so would violate a decade-old statement of faith in her. And that's the power of praising character — it gets in amongst a person's self-image and self-worth. It becomes you, in both meanings of that expression.

And the best way to communicate about character, Chiodo insists, is in writing. That way you can reflect upon the praise. She told me of the time she was asked to give the commencement address at her university. It was her first time speaking outside the classroom, and she was nervous. "The president was on my right, the vice president on my left, my dean and my chairman behind me, and Daddy in the front row. But it came off just fine. It went so well that when it was over, the president leaned over and gave me the most wonderful compliment, and I thought, 'I can hardly wait to tell Daddy what he said.'"

"The only problem was that by the time I'd talked to all the other people on the dais, and got to talk to Daddy, I'd forgotten what the president had said. To this day, I don't remember." When you put praise in writing, it's a memorial — to show to visitors and to revisit yourself.

Character traits discussed

Chiodo has started a new exercise in which students discuss character traits with parents and friends, and write a report about values — their own and their family's. Students have found these reports useful when it comes time for job interviews, leaving them able to comfortably discuss character issues instead of mere job skills.

One student told Chiodo that his father made copies of his report and sent it to three employers, and all three responded with versions of "I want to meet the young man who wrote that report." I can't think of a better topic for a job interview, Chiodo says. "Tell me about the people you admire." I recently met the mayor of a town in Ireland, who told me of an Irish supermarket chain where all the employees wear miniature boomerangs on their lapels. The goal is to remind everyone that "whatever you send out comes back to you." No wonder Beverly Chiodo is a hero.

—Hey, don't you call me on the Corporate Curmudgeon message line, 612-673-9030, and leave me your opinions, questions and suggestions? Or you can write me in care of King Features, 235 E. 45th St., New York, NY 10017, send e-mail to dale@dauten.com or visit our Web. Distributed by King Features.
What makes a hero?

By Paul Levy
Star Tribune Staff Writer

"Me? A hero?" Tim Krieger asked incredulously. "I think of a hero as a person who does something astronomical, not someone who does something piddly, like saving one person. I don't see myself as a hero. Anyone could have done what I did."

"A hero? Me?" echoed Kelly Mark Sullivan. "You think what you want, but let me be honest with you. I have a traumatic brain injury from a car accident ten years ago. Otherwise I probably wouldn't jump in the water after somebody. I probably had one of those dark moments when I couldn't think of my options.

"Do you still think I'm a hero?"

The Carnegie Hero Fund Commission acknowledges heroic deeds, not modesty. Earlier this month, Krieger, a student at St. Cloud Technical College, and Sullivan, a nurse's aide from Duluth who is disabled, were two of 89 North American civilians to receive the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission's prestigious medal of honor and a $2,500 grant.

Two other Minnesotans, Jim Kollath and the late Don Lee Hoven, also were cited by the private Pittsburgh, Pa.-based foundation, which has been commemorating heroes since its establishment by Andrew Carnegie in 1904.

Kollath, who has since moved to Georgia, is the man Sullivan, 39, saved from drowning on Aug. 15, 1993, in turbulent waters of a narrow, rock-walled section of Duluth's Miller Creek. Kollath, then 23, and his friend, Hoven, 23, of Duluth, were attempting to save Cecil Collette, 13, who had been caught in the swift current. They struggled together against a stream swollen by heavy rain. Collette made it to safety, and Sullivan managed to save Kollath. But when other rescuers pulled Hoven from the water, he could not be revived.

"I've been swimming in that ravine since I was a kid," recalled Sullivan. "When I saw him [Kollath], I went to the bottom of the ravine, where there's this one rock about eight to 10 feet under the water. I knew that if you hit this rock you have a chance to stand up to the current.

"I'm 6 feet 2 and at the time weighed about 300 pounds. I was able to get underneath him and push him up above the water. I lifted him up, straddled the rock wall on each side with my feet and then put him in my lap. He was blue, cold, kind of delirious, yelling, 'I can't hold on any more.'"

"A few minutes went by. I was getting cold myself. I couldn't hold on much longer, not with him on my lap. We moved three or four feet before the water started to push me under."

According to Sullivan, Kollath — still clinging to Kollath — pushed against the rock and launched himself toward the waterfall. Sullivan, who is a former body builder, landed behind one of two waterfalls, where he leaned against a rock wall. Kollath cradled across his lap. At that point, someone tossed a rope, and the two were pulled to safety.

"And then I found out that one of the men had drowned," Sullivan said. "You find out something like that, you don't feel like much of a hero.

"What is a hero anyway?"

Kelly Mark Sullivan was one of 89 North Americans recognized for heroism by the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission. He jumped into Duluth's Miller Creek to save a drowning man.

Star Tribune photo by Duane Bray
Tim Krieger pulled a motorist from a burning car just before it exploded in Mounds View.

Star Tribune photo by Joey McDale
HEROES from E1

Official heroes say what they did wasn't really that heroic

According to the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission, a hero is a person not in the military or in public safety work who knowingly risks his or her life to an extraordinary degree while saving or attempting to save another person.

In the case of the Carnegie Fund, being a hero almost always means being a man: Only 8.8 percent of the 7,049 Carnegie winners have been women. Of the 89 folks chosen from last year's 800 nominees, only two were women. Of the 74 Minnesotans who have been recognized by the Carnegie Fund, only six have been women, the last in 1964.

"We're not trying to slight women," insisted Walter Kutkowski, the Carnegie Fund's executive director. "The process by which we select award winners is very competitive. Maybe women aren't noticed for their deeds, for whatever reason."

"Folks like Tim Krieger seem to better fit the mold, even if Krieger thought so little of his heroics that his parents and the police knew nothing about his amazing feat for days. He simply did not think his actions merited conversation, much less citations."

Burning desire to help

Krieger, now 19, was walking along a road near Hwy. 10 in Mounds View on Oct. 3, 1994, when he saw two cars collide. One car then jumped the curb, struck a tree and rolled into a ditch. As the car burst into flame, Krieger spotted the driver, apparently unconscious, slumped against the steering wheel.

Leaping over a trailing gasoline fire, Krieger raced to the car only to find the driver's door jammed shut. He scurried to the passenger side, again hopping over flames that by then had spread under the car. He opened the door, crawled into the burning car and pulled the 170-pound driver out and away to safety.

As Krieger ran to the other vehicle to check on that driver, he heard the car had just left ex-

plode. If the explosion had occurred seconds earlier, it probably would have killed him.

"It was as if everything was happening in slow motion," said Krieger, who was a high school student at the time. "When I saw the cars ram into each other, I knew I had to do something. By the time I saw the fire, I had already made up my mind. I never thought much about getting hurt myself. It was too late to think."

"What motivated me? I told myself, 'Get this guy out of the car or he's going to die.' If he died, and I hadn't done anything to help, well, I don't think I could live with that. So maybe I did what I did for selfish reasons."

Yet when police arrived, Krieger acted like a witness, not a hero. He never mentioned what he'd done. Even today he thinks so little of his actions that he buried the medal with the likeness of Andrew Carnegie in a box inside a dresser drawer under the sink. He received it, rather than display it.

"I'm no hero," said the straight-A student. "I guess I don't know what a hero is."

Doing the unexpected

Because he's a Ramsey County sheriff's deputy, Art Blakey would not qualify for a Carnegie medal. He was shot in the abdomen April 13 while trying to stop three men who walked into a St. Paul VFW Hall, firing guns. But he says his actions did not merit the plaudits that have since come from the media and the community.

"I'm from the old school, where your reward comes every other Friday," said Blakey, who acknowledged that he's still feeling stiff but hopes to return to work in May. "Every day, when I go to work, this is what the community expects of me.

"I think hero is a very overused term. My idea of a hero is an everyday citizen who puts his life on the line when he doesn't have to. I'm talking about teachers, scoutmasters, baby sitters—someone who may not be highly trained but goes beyond the call of duty.

"Maybe they stop someone from running in the street when a car is coming. Maybe they perform CPR or prevent someone from choking. To me, these are the real heroes."

For Blakey, a hero would be somebody like Thurman Olson, who lives in Rose Creek, near Austin, Minn. Ten years ago, Olson, a retired farmer, rescued a 49-year-old woman who was being attacked by her former husband. Olson, who had arrived at the woman's home to fix her lawn mower, tried to chase the assailant from the house. He was shot in the foot but continued to pursue the man, who then shot Olson three times, once in the stomach and groin area. The gunman was apprehended by police later.

"Olson received a Carnegie award for his efforts. His son, David Olson, recently said that his father, who is 84 now, feels that "most anybody would do the same if confronted with that situation."

Blakey could certainly appreciate the exploits of Luke Schaaf, of Crystal, who on Jan. 3, 1993, broke through the ice of Middle Twin Lake and swam to the rescue of a woman and her small son who had fallen through the ice. Schaaf, a student at St. John's University in Collegeville, received a Carnegie medal. But his mother, Molly Schaaf, said he told her what he had done was "no big deal, that everybody would do this."

Would they?

"I'm sure they would," said Tim Krieger. "When you're in a situation like I was in, what choice do you have?"
How to be Great!

What does it take to be a hero? Start with six basic character traits.

John F. Kennedy had it, Bill Clinton doesn't. John Wayne personified it, but Sylvester Stallone comes up short. Martin Luther King Jr.? Certainly. But Colin Powell remains a question mark.

We're talking about heroism. Greatness. That special something that wins you admiration, adoration, and maybe even your face on a postage stamp.

Heroes may seem passé in a cynical era where we seem to relish tearing down icons more than we do creating new ones or cherishing the ones we already have. Some folks, moreover, find the very idea of heroes objectionable, arguing that there's something elitist about exalting individuals who, after all, are nothing more than flesh and blood, just like the rest of us.

But we sorely need heroes—to teach us, to captivate us through their words and deeds, to inspire us to greatness. And if late 20th-century America seems in short supply of them, the good news is that the pool of potential heroes has never been greater. That's because every one of us—ourselves, our friends, even our kids—has heroic potential. And there is plenty we can do to develop that untapped greatness, to ensure that the next generation gets the heroes it needs.

Portrait of a Hero

Though our personal heroes differ, we all share a common vision of what a hero is—and isn't. Temple University psychologist Frank Farley, Ph.D., has distilled this vision into what he calls his “5-D” model of greatness. Together the five “Ds” help explain what makes a hero, where they come from, and why they're so important.

The first “D” is for determinants, six character traits Farley believes define the essence of heroism. Not every hero has them all. But the more you have, the better. So if you seek greatness, either in yourself or your children, you would do well to nurture these aspects of personality:

* Courage and strength. Whatever a hero is, he isn't a coward or quitter. Heroes maintain their composure—and even thrive—under adversity, whether it be the life-threatening sort that war heroes face or the psychological and emotional strains that politicians and business leaders must endure.

* Honesty. It's no coincidence that "Honest Abe" Lincoln and George "I can't tell a lie" Washington are among our nation's most cherished figures. Deceit and deception violate our culture's conception of heroism. "Ronald Reagan once said that Oliver North was an American hero," observes Farley. "But Ollie obviously would founder on the honesty standard."

* Kind, loving, generous. Great people may fight fiercely for what they believe, but they are compassionate once the battle is over—toward friends or foes alike. General George S. Patton was a brilliant military man, but his hero status was impaired when he publicly slapped one of his soldiers in the face. "The American public was revolted by that," notes Farley. "He wasn't kind to his men."

* Skill, expertise, intelligence. So far, our archetypical hero is courageous, kind, honest—in other words, a lot like Forrest Gump. But Forrest falls short on one measure: A hero's success should stem from his talents and smarts, rather than from mere chance—although, for the sake of modesty, a hero might well attribute his hard-earned achievements to luck.

* Risk-taking. "Even though many people won't take risks in their own life, they admire risk-taking in someone else," notes Farley, much of whose research has focused on Type-T personalities—perpetual thrill-seekers. No matter what their calling, heroes are willing to place themselves in some sort of peril. FDR, for example, took enormous political risks by defying the rank and file of his own party; Martin Luther King Jr. laid his life on the line for his ideals.
Objects of Affection. We might be impressed on an intellectual level by somebody's deeds. But admiration is not enough—heroes must win our hearts as well as our minds.

In addition to these six determinants, heroes also exhibit depth, the second "D" in Farley's model. Depth is that timeless, mythical, almost otherworldly quality that marks a hero. It's hard to articulate exactly what this is, admits Farley, but we all know it when we see it—it's what makes even physically diminutive heroes seem larger than life.

"I think of depth as sorting out true heroes from celebrities, or the passing hero from the timeless one," Farley says. Clint Eastwood, for example, often shows up on lists of today's heroes because of his rugged individualism. But studies show that he lacks that mythical depth factor that ensures long-standing heroic status.

Great Expectations

Heroes don't exist in a vacuum. They make specific contributions to the culture. So the third "D" is domain, the field in which a hero makes his mark. Although elected officials are currently held in roughly the same regard as, say, carjackers, politics remains the number one source of heroes. It may help, though, to be a dead politician, or at least a former one. Sitting presidents don't do very well when people are surveyed about their heroes. One reason.

(continued on page 54)

Heroes are more than a convenient way to hook us on history. They spur us to raise our sights beyond the horizon of the mundane.

Farley thinks the intense media scrutiny to which we subject national figures.

Neck and neck for second place among the most common domains of heroes: entertainers (Barbra Streisand is big among women. Clint Eastwood among men) and family members (mom and dad, Uncle Bill who lost an arm in the war, your big sister). Religious figures rank fourth, with most of the rest coming from the military, science, sports, and the arts.

Why the low standing of athletes? The sheer number of them, for one; it was much easier for Joe DiMaggio to become a national icon when baseball and football were the only sports of any popularity. Moreover, sports have become big business, with athletes seemingly motivated as much by lucre as by love of the game.

Some charge young fans to autograph a baseball. "Would Martin Luther King sell his autograph?" asks Farley, who wonders if public disillusionment with pro athletes means that most of tomorrow's sport heroes will be fictional characters like Rocky.

The fourth "D" is database, Farley's term for where we get information about heroes. The main sources are television, radio, magazines. Conspicuous by its absence is the one place where tales of heroism ought to dwell: history class.

"Schools are not dealing enough with studying the lives people who changed the world and did great things," Farley warns. "Nowadays schools deal more with abstractions, with isms—communism, feminism, racism. But if you really want to instruct young people in these ideas, embody them in the life and times of an individual."

The idea of nonviolent protest, for example, must seem quaint—if not downright irrelevant—to today's kids, who turn on the TV and see the world being changed through violence. "If you talk about nonviolent protest being a viable alternative, they're not going to understand it," Farley explains. "But if you embed it in the life of Gandhi, all of a sudden you see the lights coming on: "This little man brought the British empire to its knees."

(continued on page 62)
Why We Need Heroes

Heroes are more than a convenient way to get kids hooked on history. Above all, they spur us to raise our sights beyond the horizon of the mundane, to attempt the improbable or impossible. "Being inspired by people who do great things is one of the oldest, most reliable forms of motivation," notes Farley. In fact, many heroes themselves, including Winston Churchill and Patton, have cited biography as their favorite form of reading, as a source of both information and inspiration.

In this context, a recent survey reporting that nearly half of kids have no heroes at all has ominous implications. How can our children hope to transcend adversity—such as poverty or racism—without the example of the great men and women who came before them? "The great American story is the person starting from nothing and becoming something," Farley says. "We need more depictions of that."

Heroes are also a window into the soul of a culture. Look at a nation's top heroes, and you'll get a pretty good idea what values its citizens ascribe to, what ideals they cherish. American heroes tend to be individualists and risk-takers. But in China, heroes might be more likely to conserve tradition. That has important implications for everything from international business dealings to political and military negotiations.

Heroes at Home

The last "D" is distance, how close we are to our heroes. If the mythical quality of many great people makes them seem somewhat distant and inaccessible, that's not true of the answer people most often give when Farley asks them to name their heroes: "Mom" and "Dad."

Parents may not be heroes to the masses. But if their kingdom is small, their influence within that kingdom runs deep indeed. So it's no exaggeration to say that each of us has the potential to be a hero in our way. There are few more effective ways to make a difference than to be a hero. ❖ end!
The End of Heroism

In a time of tranquillity, the very idea eludes us. Result? Weird heroes

A sample of the historical figures currently being lionized at your local multiplex: one fascist (Evita), one Nazi agent (The English Patient) and a pornographer with a penchant for sadistic misogyny (The People vs. Larry Flynt). Is this just an unusual run of Hollywood perversity?

I think not. It is, rather, a reflection of how hard heroes are to come by today. When you are as totally estranged from the experience—the very idea—of heroism as we are, you improvise.

This is not an anachronistic time like the '60s, a time of protest when it was important to make John Wayne and G.I. Joe into scoundrels. No, ours is a merely unheroic time. We don't despise the veterans of the '90s war, the Gulf War; we merely pity them. We have taken the heroes of the most lopsided military victory since Agincourt (1415) and, via Gulf War syndrome, the sole remaining trace of the Gulf War in the American consciousness, transmuted them into victims. Fit subjects for Oprah and a disability check. We can handle that. But not heroism.

Nowhere is the unheroic nature of our time more apparent than in our politics. If Bill Clinton were struck by lightning today, I asked a friend, what could we possibly count as his legacy? Why, even Jimmy Carter left the Panama Canal treaties and Camp David. But Clinton?

To which my colleague responded, "What would—what could—anyone have done in these four years?"

Touché. Clinton is the least consequential President in at least 60 years. But maybe it's not him. It's the times.

For an idea of what a heroic time sounds like, read the Inaugural Address of John Kennedy. By sentence 4, Kennedy had outlined the stakes, the drama of his era. Today, he declared, "man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life." The eradication of poverty. Salvation from Armageddon. These are biblical tasks. Kennedy took them as his own.

Kennedy issued a call to arms in "a long twilight struggle... against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself." Clinton went around the country in 1996 calling for school uniforms, a 48-hour stay on the maternity ward and tax credits for first-home buyers. His year-end radio address to the nation was devoted to air-bag safety. It featured the admonition "We must always wear our seat belts." Bully pulpit indeed.

But what else is there to do? In this century—I dare say, in the life of this country—we have never known a time of such profound tranquility at home and abroad. Anxiety, yes. There is no life without anxiety. But danger? Risk? Threat? Challenge?

From where?

Pop historians have taken to calling the '90s premillennial or fin de siècle. Wrong on both counts. There is none of the true agitation and apocalyptic fervor of the kind that swept Europe in the late Middle Ages or America in the early 19th century. Indeed, there is nothing now even resembling the nuclear hysteria that seized America in the early 1980s. All our current Year 2000 hype is either number play or marketing.

Nor are we wallowing in fin-de-siècle decadence. If anything, we are seeing a return to bourgeois domesticity. Such traditional institutions as marriage and parenthood are enjoying a new vogue. And the latest college-freshmen survey finds an increase in volunteerism and, for the fourth year in a row, a decline in support for legalized abortion and casual sex. (And 80% support for the death penalty!)

What are the '90s then? A classic postwar era, tranquil and enervating. Our great war, the war we hardly recognize, was the long twilight struggle that Kennedy pledged us to. It ended as no other great war in history—with utter silence and not a drop of blood. That is why we have not noticed.

We traditionally call the late '40s postwar. But, in fact, there we went directly from one existential struggle (World War II) to another (the cold war). The '90s saw a real end to the wars of this century. And with that come fatigue, exhaustion, malaise—and loss of heroism. The romance of struggle is done.

As Francis Fukuyama predicted, the West, triumphant, faces the sheer ennui of normal life, ennui that manifests itself in our eccentric taste in heroes. With heroism so debased and democratized—Flynt!—our own lack of it is so much easier to abide.

"How dull it is to pause, to make an end," laments Tennyson's Ulysses upon his return home to Ithaca. After Troy and Circe and Cyclops, he rests and reigns, "an idle king... I met and dole unequal laws unto a savage race, that hoard, and sleep, and feed." Home safe at last. And miserable.

We are living Ulysses's nightmare. Our wars are done, our wishes granted. Now we suffer the consequences: the quiet satisfactions, the banality, of normality. We made it through Scylla and Charybdis—and now what? We seek out large, dark rooms in which to cheer Juan Perón and his consort.
Outrunning ‘Fire’

In the comic drama ‘The Magic Fire,’ writer Lillian Garrett-Groag draws on a life’s experience of staying just out of reach of the next tyrannical regime.

By Rohan Preston
Star Tribune Staff Writer

feeling oppressive political regimes runs in the family of writer and director Lil- lian Garrett-Groag. Her mother’s side escaped fascism in Italy after World War I; her father’s family fled Nazi Ger- many. Her parents settled in Ar- gentina, where she was born, only to confront another brutal dictatorship, so they ran again to Uruguay — and eventually faced yet another tyrant. Each move took its toll. When Lillian arrived in the Chicago area as a 15-year-old college freshman in the late 1960s, her parents included not just getting an education, but bringing her mother and brother to what she calls “this tree nation” built by immigrants, refugees, slaves.

Her play ‘The Magic Fire,’ which opened Wednesday at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, uses snippets of her compelling personal and family histories to make a statement about humanism at the close of this millennium. She sees the comic drama around a Buenos Aires dinner table in 1952, where a family revels in music and laughter together as a way of coping with rising fascism. But their escapades prove bittersweet. As the play unfolds, the family descends into death, madness and exile.

“I think we’re all immigrants and vagabonds, because so many of us move from place to place and so many of us are not at home in our own skin,” said Garrett-Groag during a recent visit from Los Angeles, where she lives with her mother. “I’m drawn to the sites of being a stranger everywhere, trying to find a place in life and the world.”

“But when I was a child, I was asked about ‘home’? she said in a lullaby that sounds familiar. “In the other languages in which she is fluent: Italian, Span- ish, French and German, it is a physical place or is it something we carry inside of us?”

Unshakable questions

Garrett-Groag started writing plays a decade ago, although she has been involved with theater and opera for 30-plus years. “The Magic Fire” is her third effort. “I write because I have questions and issues that get under my skin,” she said. She’s obsessed with indivi- dual morality in the face of soci- etal apathy, another theme in “The Magic Fire.” Ideals and self-sacrifice propel “The White Rose,” her second play, based on a true story, which centers on a group of German students executed for writing anti-Nazi pamphlets.

“I don’t think we have a choice in Hitler’s Germany, but these kids — blond, blue-eyed Aryans — these kids did,” she said. “All they had to do was shut up and they would be OK — but they didn’t.”

GARRETT-GROAG continues on F5

The Magic Fire

When: Guthrie Theater, 755 Vineland Pl., Minneapolis.
Opens: 8 p.m. Wed. Runs through Feb. 14 at 7:30 Tues.-Thurs., 8 p.m. Fri.-Sat. and 7 p.m. Sun. plus 1 p.m. matinees on Jan. 23, 27, 30 and Feb. 3, 7, 13 and 14.
Tickets: $15-$37.50. Call 612-377-2222.

Her play is partly autobiographical “but not a true story,” said Garrett-Groag. “Art can be more truthful than reality.”
GARRETT-GROAG from F1

The ‘most dangerous’ people are those who shrug and turn away

"They are [like] white lights hitting us, and we can’t hide our wrinkles or imperfections. They make us confront ourselves because of their example."

A character in "The Magic Fire" echoes that belief, saying: "Heroes are very frightening... because they remind people of what they’re not."

Garrett-Groag, who is also an actor, pointed to an incident she witnessed a few years ago in an L.A. theater. In front of her and other cast members, the director verbally abused a female crew member for wearing a short skirt. Garrett-Groag drafted a letter of protest asking the director not to insult the woman, and circulated it among the dozen-plus cast and crew members. No one else would sign it.

"I understand their decision," she said. "I’m trying to find out what it takes to make a statement when we’re terrified of losing our jobs, our homes, our lives."

Although she admitted it’s hard to hold her tongue about such comparatively small injustices given the huge trials her family suffered, she does not make herself out to be a hero. "The most dangerous human beings is not the ogre leading a society— not a Hitler — but each of the individual millions who go [shrugging], ‘I’m sorry, I can’t do anything.’"

She paused. "If I had lived in the South in the 1940s, would I have thrown myself in front of lynching mobs? Probably not. We — average people, the passive majority — are the most dangerous people of all because we know right, we have a moral sense, and yet we are frozen."

Music and tears

Time magazine recently named "The Magic Fire" one of its best theater picks for 1998, judging from a production at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. The play caused a stir at the 1997 Oregon Shakespeare Festival, where it was staged by artistic director Libby Appel, who met Garrett-Groag while both were graduate students at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill. Appel is also directing the Guthrie production.

"This play makes me cry in a lot of different places," Appel said. "The play has brought things for me that may not have come out."

The whole sense of heroic journey, of peoples moving from native homelands into new worlds, is very personal, since my family came over from Russia."

Compared with the small stage where she mounted the play in Oregon and the Kennedy Center’s larger proscenium-arch playhouse, the Guthrie’s forward-thrusting stage makes the director feel "as if the audience itself was sitting at that dining table on stage." The nature of the Minneapolis theater "brings out the musicality of the language, like a Mozart opera," she said.

Many talents

Garrett-Groag has written libretti for operas and has translated plays. She has acted in theaters across the country and on Broadway. She has even had a career on TV and in the movies; she played a party guest in the 1997 thriller "Fatal Attraction," and had a recurring role on "The Bob Newhart Show."

But as a Latin American woman, she said, she too often has been cast as a whore or a gardener.

Her theater career was also a challenge to her family, who expected her to get an impeccable education and a diplomat husband. The school years, like the seasons, are opposite in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, so she was sent to school in South America from March through December, then to convent school in France for the other three months of each year.

She was 15 when she arrived at Lake Forest College in Illinois. Immature and maladjusted, she spent the first few years "trying to make sure that nobody found out how old I was," she said.

When she earned her bachelor’s degree, she was still a minor who had lived in dormitories half of her life. She earned a master’s and a doctorate in French literature from Northwestern.

Force of will

Garrett-Groag became a theater artist by force of will. She remembers pulling down the curtains and draping them around her shoulder as a 4-year-old and singing along to operas. She records her father brought home. But she was not seriously encouraged to pursue performing. Though her parents frequented the theater and opera, they considered art "a spectator entertainment," she said.

She was expected to go into international relations "because that was the best place to find a husband."

"If I could ever have a resentment towards them, [it] was that they always made fun of that; they never supported [my aspirations], she said. "But now I know that most of the time they were scared: scared in Argentina under [Juan Peron], scared in Uruguay as it started turning into a horrible junta."

Even though her plays deal with large, often contentious issues, they are not political tracts, she said. "I don’t think I handle on answers or truth... I try to ask the right questions."

SUNDAY, JANUARY 17, 1999

Entertainment
Movies and television teach our children what to admire

By Katherine Kersten

Recently my 10-year-old daughter received an invitation to a friend's slumber party. As usual, I called the mother to ask what movie the girls would be seeing. She named a PG-13 film filled with crude humor and profanity. When I expressed reservations, she replied, "Well, that's what my daughter wanted to see. I figure they hear all that at school anyway."

Most parents carefully supervise what their children eat, seek out the best schools and vigilantly monitor homework. Yet many seem to exercise little oversight — and impose few standards — when it comes to the movies, TV and video games that fill their children's out-of-school hours. In part, this is because parents see such monitoring as an uphill battle. "I may not like it," they reason, "but that's what they do."

Most of us see little harm in this approach. While there's been a wealth of evidence that education occurs in many places besides the classroom, he defined education broadly, as any "sustained effort" to "transmit or evoke . . . attitudes, values and sensitivities," including "any learning that results from that effort, direct or indirect, intended or unintended."

What our children watch on Saturday night profoundly shape their attitudes, values, and behavior. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, "The more a child watches television, the more likely he or she is to display aggressive or violent behavior." The Institute of Medicine's Committee on Television and the American Child states, "Children who watch ... a lot of television are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior, to be less likely to value education, and to have lower grades." The American Psychological Association finds, "Heavy television viewing is related to lower self-esteem, even among children who do well in school."

The content of children's entertainment, he emphasizes, "does much to form their ideals, ideals which often determine the level on which they will live their lives."

As a society, we used to understand that entertainment is central to character education. Until recently, children's movies and TV shows — whether drama, humor, whimsy or adventure — tended to include moral lessons, some subtle, some heavy-handed. "The good guys" in productions like "Old Yeller" and "The Parent Trap" were usually honest, courageous and kind. They showed a modicum of respect for authority, and believed that life was about more than "being cool" and "getting theirs."

Most of us agree that the sex and violence that pervade today's entertainment are harmful to children. But subtle and troubling changes have occurred even in the most innocuous family fare.

To illustrate, it is useful to compare two Disney films: "The Incredible Journey," made in 1963, and "Homeward Bound," a remake released in 1993. Both movies are about two dogs and a cat who make a daring trek in search of their young owners. "The Incredible Journey" portrays all three animals as stalwart, resourceful, and animated; it teaches them the noble affections of their owners and each other. In "Homeward Bound," a single old dog remains noble and wise, but the two characters children are most likely to admire — Chance the bull terrier and Sassy the cat — have become mousy, cocky, shallow, cynical and self-absorbed. Interestingly, parents and teachers in today's young people.

"Homeward Bound" is hardly "Die Hard with a Vengeance." In fact, we welcome family movies like it with relief. But a steady diet of "in-your-face" heroes of the type it celebrates may contribute to the slow corrosion of civility that mars our common life.

Increasingly, our children's character education comes courtesy of "Beavis and Butt-Head," "Clueless," and "Dumb and Dumber." We are teaching them — largely unintentionally — that cocky, swaggering, foul-mouthed people are glamorous, that treating parents and teachers with disrespect is the mark of true autonomy and that spewing obscenities is the "authentic" way to express anger and frustration.

In our fragmented and materialistic world, children need inspirational character ideals more than ever. By offering them an endless train of selfish, superficial goof-offs incapable of serious reflection, we are narrowing their horizons and stunting their moral imaginations. As the editor of "The New Junior Classics" noted 40 years ago, a rich imagination "is fundamental for ethical development." "Much of the unknowingness in the world," he pointed out, "results from lack of imagination — the inability to put oneself in the other's place."

Obviously, fighting the popular culture is an uphill battle. But if more parents would fight, more would win. We can't control what our children hear on the playground, but we can seek to neutralize it by teaching that "our family doesn't talk or behave like that." Yet our children will not take us seriously if — after the lecture — we legitimate bad behavior by bringing shows that glamorize it into our homes. It is hard enough for children to be good today. We must help by encouraging them to adopt heroes and heroines truly worthy of their admiration.

Katherine Kersten, an attorney from Edina, is vice chair of the Center of the American...
There's More to Heroes than He-Man

By Marcie Osinsky

As part of a yearlong folktale curriculum, I began a study of heroes and heroines with my first- and second-grade class. First the kids and I brainstormed about heroic characters. The Ninja Turtles and He-Man topped the list. The children's concept of heroism did not include people in their lives.

As a result, I decided to use oral history and storytelling techniques to highlight the heroism of people close to them. Children need to see models of strength and courage within their own families and communities in order to identify such qualities in themselves. I have also found that oral history and storytelling are wonderful ways to include parents in building a classroom community that respects differing perspectives and voices.

After making our own definitions of heroism using storybooks and folktales, we invited parents to a "story-sharing breakfast" to talk to us about people who were heroic in their lives. In phone conversations and informal chats, parents and I spoke about heroic people and role models in our lives.

To prepare the children, I modeled an interview where I made a lot of mistakes. I interrupted and asked questions out of the blue. The kids told me what I did wrong. We then did mini-interviews where I interviewed another adult about his or her heroic person.

Then we had our "story-sharing breakfast." The parents sat in groups with children and told stories and answered questions. The images of all the characters in the stories filled the room. One grandmother talked of how she stowed away on a ship to Europe in World War II to be a foreign correspondent. A man told how he delivered eggs early each day to put himself through college while raising his family.

As the stories progressed, the atmosphere became one of listening, telling, and questioning. Kids were involved in the conversation and learned what was dear to their parents. They learned the importance of listening and realized how experiences and values are passed down through generations.

Soon after the story-sharing breakfast, for example, Gabriel and Brent were chopping onions in class to make soup. Gabriel was having difficulty and Brent showed him his technique to cut onions, explaining: "This is how I chop onions. This is how my mom chops onions and my nana chops onions. This is how my whole family chops onions. We've been chopping onions like this since — since the cavemen."

The Parents' Stories

The stories connected the kids to another time in history when people also faced everyday hardships and difficult decisions, as some of the kids do now.

While quite a few parents told dramatic stories about war and conflicts from their home countries, others told stories that showed the heroism of difficult decisions and everyday struggles.

One parent, Lynne, told how she wanted to be a dancer and moved from the West Coast to Boston. She explained how hard it was to be alone in a strange city and to try to make it in a career such as dancing. She told of another dancer who encouraged her and gave her confidence. "I will always remember her," Lynn said of the dancer, "because she gave me such strength to go after what I wanted to do."

One student said of Lynne's story, "She was her own hero." When I asked why, the child said, "Because it was a scary thing to move from California and to become a dancer and live here, and she did it."

One parent told of a man saving her mother's life when she was hit by a car in Haiti. The accident occurred during curfew at a time of political unrest, and the driver did not stop. An ambulance was called but did not come. People were afraid the woman might die. "Then a man walked to her, grabbed her and put her on his shoulder," the parent said. "He carried her to the hospital. If he had not carried my mother, I would not have a mother right now. That man was not afraid to get killed on the street."

The kids were upset after hearing the story. They asked questions like, "Why couldn't you go out in the street? Who would shoot you? Why would you get shot by police if you had not done anything wrong?"

Kids connected stories they had heard to events in Boston or Los Angeles. I felt it was important to give the children a forum to raise their concerns and know that there are adults who share those concerns. The story-telling became a sophisticated discussion of attitudes toward solving conflicts.

As we continued, I began to see how stories help connect the listener to a different time, place, and cultural context, giving the children a sense of belonging to a larger history. After learning that she had family roots in Africa and hearing more stories about the continent, Darlene said, "Oh yeah, I been to Africa, with my ancestors."

Through the project, I discovered the power of storytelling not only to create a curriculum respecting diverse perspectives but to allow parents and children to help shape that curriculum so that it reflects their realities.

The stories from our breakfast became an important part of life at our school. We illustrated and transcribed them and made a book. Throughout the year, the book was read over and over again by the kids and parents.

Marcie Osinsky teaches first and second grade at Martin Luther King, Jr. School in Cambridge, MA.
Why do kids do such awful things?
Look in mirror, adults

By Misti Snow

As is too often true in these times, Minnesotans once again are struggling with questions about why young people are committing so much violence, whether it be young adults brutalizing a deaf man or kids ambushing a mother and shooting her to death. Adults anguish over the violence and share anecdotes about lesser, though frightening, crimes and ask: What have the children become? Why are they doing these awful things?

Why are kids doing these things? It's something I learn about every month when I read thousands of letters from children and teens about their lives. It's become very clear to me, in the 12 years I've been reading letters to the Star Tribune "Mindworks" feature, why kids do these crazy and violent things: because of us adults.

We have increasing numbers every year of angry and fearful kids, many of whom are experiencing deep pain. They're feeling from the effects of divorce, a time when adults aren't at their best as parents — they can't be when they're busy fighting over money and visitation and property and are aided and abetted by a family court system that continues to treat adults as more important than children.

The kids live in a society that for reasons that confound me automatically treats fathers as if they are secondary or superfluous parents, rather than human beings capable of profoundly loving their children, and as a result we have too many children suffering from a deep hunger and yearning for good men in their lives. This leaves them hurting, angry and vulnerable to exploitation and abuse by molesters, drug dealers, criminals, you name it. And that figures into how they treat other people. They live without real men in their lives and feast instead upon the images of men Hollywood throws in front of them.

They do these things because we're a self-centered society — particularly we baby boomer parents, who too often seem to care more about doing what we want, when we want, than about doing right by our kids. They're surrounded by adults unwilling to do the hard work of being good parents — of thinking deeply about childhood and values and facing the tough work head-on, such as setting limits, saying no and making sacrifices.

Our society is rife with very lonely children who don't have enough time with their parents or other loving adults, and who write poignantly about that pain. It's a society that congratulates itself on having a hard-won three-month unpaid parental leave policy, a society that doesn't understand that this pathetic policy speaks volumes about how little we care about the youngest and most vulnerable among us. Practically from day one the babies spend more of their waking hours with day care providers and strangers than with those who purport to love them the most, and you think that doesn't affect how they view the world?

The kids grow up with deluded adults who seem to think that these wonderfully sentient creatures whose job it is to discover the world by taking in everything around them come with an "off" button to that sentiment and can watch, unaffected, hour after hour of gratuitous violence — because the parents are absent or too lazy, too cowardly or too concerned about their own appearance of sophistication to regulate it.

There are myriad reasons and they all point to the adults.

Adults who don't get it that the schools are going under, that telling kids they have to be computer literate and then not seeing to it that they have enough computers in the classroom creates frustration and anger and lost kids. Adults who have destroyed for children the luxury of gradually discovering the mysteries of sexuality; instead, kids have images of assaultive sexuality thrown in their faces while they are still in primary school.

Adults who have been hard at work destroying innocence and are engaged in their own act of violence — an assault on childhood itself.

And it's caused by adults who don't have the courage to tell the truth. I meet frequently with educators, child advocates and parents and I'm amazed by the cowardice. Teachers who talk privately about the rapists in their classrooms, sometimes sitting
in the same class as their victims, teachers who will admit that they're slow to break up fights if a "good" kid has finally become so disgusted with one of the "bad" kids who terrifies the school but is protected by a "conduct disorder" label, that he's beating the hell out of him. That, in some schools, is justice, because the teachers are hamstrung by political correctness and surreal policies. And what does that teach the good kids, as well as the troubled?

The advocates minimize the truth publicly because they worry about getting funding and don't want to offend anyone; social workers lie about their view of such things as family preservation because they don't want to risk professional suicide; parents whisper to each other, but are publicly silent, because they don't want to step on other parents' toes or to make anyone feel bad, so the hard conversations that need to be occurring aren't. And the real reason these people, most of whom do care deeply about children, don't tell the truth is that they realize most adults don't want to know — because then they might be forced to recognize their own culpability and have to work to change things. And until it's our own children or our own selves who are threatened, we won't do what has to be done.

A veteran child advocate said recently that if we told the truth about what's happening to the children, we'd scare adults to death.

While the adults are busy protecting themselves and each other, the children suffer.

After reading nearly a half million essays from kids describing not just their lives but the lives of the adults they know, it's no mystery to me why kids are killing kids and kids are killing parents and parents are killing kids and the whole world of childhood seems to have gone crazy. If we adults look long and hard in the mirror, both the individual and the collective one, the answers are there.

Misti Snow, 41, of Minneapolis, is editor of Mindworks, a monthly forum for students in first through 12th grades. She is also the author of "Take Time to Play Checkers," a book based on Mindworks. She is the parent and stepparent of four children from age 16 months to 14 years.
THE EARLY ADS for the summer blockbuster Gladiator announced gravely, "A hero will rise," and who could fail to be stirred by those words? Here in the Western democracies, at least, we're not supposed to need, or even to believe in, heroes anymore, yet the concept still has an irresistible allure—especially when, as in Gladiator, the hero's exploits take place in the distant past and have no obvious relevance to the world we moviegoers live in. Ridley Scott's picture takes us back to the Roman Empire in A.D. 180, the year in which the great philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius was succeeded by his weak son, Commodus, here portrayed as one of those flamboyant imperial degenerates (Nero, Caligula, et al.) with whom moviemakers and their audiences have always been inordinately fascinated. The devious and sexually ambiguous Commodus (played to the gilded hilt by Joaquin Phoenix) provides a suitably stark contrast to the manly title character, Maximus (Russell Crowe), making the protagonist's warrior virtues shine all the brighter in the viewers' eyes. Eyes, it should be said, that do not ordinarily look this kindly on military prowess—Maximus had been a general under Marcus Aurelius—or skill in hand-to-hand combat. Maximus's proficiency in slaughter is not a quality we prize highly these days, except metaphorically, when we're watching a sporting event and suddenly find ourselves urging our team to "move in for the kill" or to "finish off" its opponent. We retain these bloodthirsty metaphors even in a society in which physical aggression is generally frowned upon and in which conflict? Who, aside from family and friends, could name a single soldier or pilot who served with distinction in the Gulf War or the NATO campaign in the Balkans? In this country and at this time, practically the only way to acquire the status of military hero is to come home and get elected to Congress; a man now becomes a hero to the American public not because he has performed extraordinary acts of valor on the battlefield but because he has survived to achieve success in civilian life, i.e., in the only arena most of us know or understand. Although we may recognize the names of a few generals, we surely don't regard them as heroes in the sense of Achilles or Hector; in modern war, generals order men into battle but don't lead the charge, as Maximus does in the first (and best) sequence of Gladiator.

There's clearly a collective nostalgia for that sort of physical bravery. Every time Patrick Ewing, with hardly a functioning joint in his entire body, hobbles onto a basketball court, sportswriters breathlessly describe him as a "warrior"; every time a prominent person comes down with a serious illness (Muhammad Ali, Michael J. Fox, Rudy Giuliani), the media resound with tributes to his "courage" in "battling" the infirmity. The strength of character displayed by such people is beyond question. But so, I think, is the almost childish yearning revealed by our insistence on martial metaphors for their trials.

This may be the only way to account for such cultural phenomena as the recent spate of interest in the Second World War...
(the movies Saving Private Ryan and The Thin Red Line and bestselling books like The Greatest Generation and Flags of Our Fathers) and, perhaps oddest of all, the unexpected popularity of several new translations of literary epics. Robert Fagles' energetic versions of the Iliad and the Odyssey have sold hundreds of thousands of copies in the past decade, and Seamus Heaney's teeth-rattling new Beowulf spent several months on the New York Times best-seller list. Readers who have largely ignored the latest work of Derek Walcott, Jorie Graham, John Ashbery, W. S. Merwin, Anne Carson and Heaney have demonstrated an unmistakable hunger for heroic narrative in verse—for poetry that chronicles, and ennobles, the exploits of famous (literal) warriors.

Beowulf is a particularly striking example, because this poem—written in Old English (or Anglo-Saxon), sometime in the last three centuries of the first millennium, by a poet whose name has not survived—has heretofore been widely regarded by students in English-literature classes as a deadly snoozer, a work that no one ever read for pleasure. Years after, you might remember the poem's first big battle, in which the eponymous hero slays a murderous beast called Grendel, and retain some faint impression of that conflict's sequel, in which Beowulf dispatches Grendel's ferociously angry mother and—several decades later, in his old age—kills a rather large dragon, at the expense of his own life. But you’re not likely to recall enjoying any of these exciting-sounding encounters, much less the long descriptive passages, the remembrance-of-wars-past anecdotes and the military pep talks that occupy the space between the battles.

Heaney's Beowulf delivers the sanguinary goods, though, in harshly beautiful language that does justice both to the savagery of the poem's events and to the jagged, alliterative strangeness of the original Anglo-Saxon verse (which is printed alongside his modern-English rendering). Listen to these lines, taken from Beowulf's struggle with Grendel:

Mighty and canny,
Hygelac's kinsman [Beowulf] was keenly watching
for the first move the monster would make.
Nor did the creature keep him waiting
but struck suddenly and startled in;
he grabbed and mauled a man on his bench,
bit into his bone-lappings, bolted down his blood
and gorged on him in lumps, leaving the body
utterly lifeless, eaten up
bodily and foot.

The vivid grisliness of the action hugely enhances the hero's stature: Anyone who wins fights like these—who has the courage to engage in them in the first place—deserves to be considered a great man and to be commemorated in a great, enduring song.

Poets don’t do that kind of thing anymore. They still write long poems, but even the most ambitious of them (for example, Walcott in Omeros) don’t dare embrace the epic form; they meditate on it instead, or limit themselves to flirting with it. Where would they find a subject? They could look to the past, of course, just as Homer and Virgil and the Beowulf poet did, but what slymsie contemporary poets even in this, I think, is the difficulty of identifying a hero whose deeds can speak to our current sense of ourselves.

Our recent fascination with warrior heroes does not, in fact, mean that we’re a fully responsive audience for epic. We experience the heroic values of the Iliad, the Odyssey and Beowulf as exotic, alien. That’s what attracts us to them; they’re so unlike anything in our everyday lives. It’s worth remembering that when the epic poets of Greece and Rome and Beowulf-era England celebrated the heroes of the past, they were still celebrating the basic worldviews of their own cultures; if there was a difference between the values of the bygone heroes and those of the poets’ audiences, it was one of degree rather than of kind. (Homer, in the Iliad, frequently reminds his listeners that they’re not as strong and brave as, say, Achilles.) For the poets and their audiences, warfare was an inarguable condition of life, violence was a means to glory, and the fiercest warriors were men to be imitated as well admired. I think it’s safe to say that very few of us in the great middle class that makes up the primary audience for today’s books and movies believe any of those ideas, and that most of us wouldn’t even want to meet someone who does.

For us, that is, the physical heroism of combat is purely entertainment, an escape from life rather than a model for living. Or to put it yet another way, epic-style heroism is now a form of fantasy—at least for grown-ups, who see precious little of it in the workplace, or anywhere else, and who know (without admitting it) that courage is no longer an asset in our society. Civilization and its discontents. To respond wholeheartedly to epic values would, I think, require a willful reversion to a state of innocence, a childlike belief in the virtue of force. It’s no accident that the violent idealism of the epic mode survives most vigorously in what are considered the lower reaches of culture, in comic books, anime, the Hong Kong-type action melodrama and even in the cartoonish good-versus-evil confrontations of the WWF—all of them spectacles aimed largely at younger or relatively naive audiences.

And it’s no accident, either, that the only art form that has constantly strived for the epic in this century is the youngest one: the movies. It’s one of the lovely discontinuities of our recent culture history that the pioneers of film, such as D. W. Griffith and Ace-Gance, were earnestly mounting epics just as the modernist poets
were decisively rejecting the grand, extroverted gestures of heroic song in favor of irony and self-consciousness. In the early days of cinema, movies such as Griffith's The Birth of a Nation, Intolerance and Orphans of the Storm and Gance's Napoleon aspired to a sensuous immediacy and a philosophical simplicity that the older arts had long since evolved beyond. Maybe the struggle to master this new art, to stake out unclaimed territory, made the filmmakers feel some affinity for the intrepid, hard-charging heroes of the ancient world.

Or maybe it was just the refreshment of being able to show the world in motion that impelled those artists to reexplore the dynamic possibilities of epic. And perhaps audiences, after the modern horrors of the First World War, were beginning to feel that mysterious yearning for the old, simple verities of courage and physical strength. Whatever the reasons, the movies improbably reawakened in the overloaded twentieth-century consciousness some form of childish wonder at the joys and terrors of the natural world, and the best of them deserve to be called poems. That sense of newness inevitably wore off, and as it did the neo-epic aesthetics of Griffith and Gance began to disappear from the screen. And in the real world, the rise of Nazism and Fascism made the idealization of strength look obscene; the difference between a hero and a bully was, under the circumstances, perhaps too fine a distinction to be very useful. In the combat films Hollywood made during the Second World War, our side apparently wins just because we're nicer guys: Military superiority doesn't seem to have much to do with it.

Of all the American movies about World War II that were produced during the conflict, the only one that approaches the condition of epic is, improbably, a half-hour documentary, commissioned by the War Department, called San Pietro. This film, directed by Captain John Huston, records a single engagement in Italy in 1943: An American infantry regiment captures a farming village held by the enemy. Between its startlingly intimate images and its intelligent, somber narration (written and read by Huston himself), San Pietro in its brief running time provides as comprehensive a vision of war as any movie this century has produced: The viewer not only feels the fearful chaos of combat but also understands the strategy and tactics of the assault, the cost to the combatants and the helpless villagers and its effect on both the outcome of the war and the conditions of life after the war. The picture is as lucid, as mournful and as inspiring as a passage from the Iliad: the War Department considered it demoralizing and kept it on the shelf for a year. (Ultimately, General George Marshall rescued it from oblivion.)

The example of San Pietro is interesting because the qualities that link that work to the epic tradition are the very ones that alarmed the army brass. The Greeks of Homer's time wouldn't have had any problem with it. There is no true epic in which combat is not, in every conceivable sense of the word, terrible. (If it weren't, the heroism of the participants would be diminished.) That's not the sole criterion for epic, but it's an essential one. And it's the area in which Gladiator, along with practically every other would-be movie "epic" since the silent era, is most seriously deficient. I know it sounds perverse to say this, but the film isn't violent enough. Scott lays on plenty of clanking and grunting, but he's oddly coy about the visual details of the carnage in the arena, blurring them with rapid cutting and leaving the rest to our depleted imaginations. And although Gladiator tries, sporadically, to use the bloody contests in the Colosseum as vehicles to comment on our own culture's attraction to violence as entertainment, the movie lacks the courage to portray it otherwise and thereby risk baffling or infuriating the ticket-buying public. When in Rome, you know...

Moviemakers around the world have called plenty of their productions epics in the past half-century, but not many of those pictures are likely to make anyone think of Homer. Hollywood in particular has always used epic as just a fancy synonym for big: Anything long, expensive and set in a remote historical period was designated by the E-word, no matter how unheroic and unpoetic the movie might be. (Take a look at Quo Vadis sometime, or at any of Cecil B. De Mille's lavish pseudohistorical soap operas.) There's no point complaining about that; terms break loose from their origins all the time. What's interesting to me, though, is the possibility that the original spirit of the epic is now so alien to us that it's genuinely incomprehensible. Those who enjoy violence as a cool revenge fantasy can't be said to understand the meaning of epic; those who shrink from the portrayal of violence as a state of nature—in, say, San Pietro, Akira Kurosawa's The Seven Samurai, Sam Peckinpah's The Wild Bunch or Terrence Malick's consciously Homeric The Thin Red Line—probably understand it even less. If physical courage has for most of us become nothing more than a metaphor (or manifests itself merely as an impulse toward willfully "adventurous" activities like mountain climbing and white-water rafting), then the quality itself is bound finally to lose its grip on the imagination. And therefore to cease being a possibility for action in the world. A hero will rise? From what dim, distant memory, I wonder?

All I can say with certainty is that our idea of heroism is getting more and more abstract, less and less substantial, and that when I read the Iliad or run The Wild Bunch through the DVD player one more time, I'm exposing myself to something I need but can't quite grasp. Virgil began the Aeneid with the three words—among the most famous in literature—that express the pure essence of epic. Arma virumque cano: Arms and the man I sing. And for all the images of men and arms that the movies supply for our amusement, the poet's music remains frustratingly elusive. It's stirring, but strange to our ears. It just isn't our song.

Terrence Rafferty is GQ's critic-at-large.
INTRODUCTION

When I was a boy, adults I knew went to the trouble of helping me find a few heroes. At first, the ones I admired most were not people I knew personally, but figures who nonetheless possessed qualities of human excellence worth striving for: baseball and football players who persevered on and off the field, famous explorers from the pages of history who dared to face the unknown, cowboys from Hollywood Westerns who rode hard and stood up for what deserved to be loved and protected. As I grew older, I learned that heroes could be found closer to home, too—neighbors, friends, and members of my own family. In all of them, there was a certain nobility, a largeness of soul, a hitching up of one’s own purposes to higher purposes—to something that demanded endurance or sacrifice or courage or compassion.

Looking back, I see how lucky I was that so many of my teachers thought it was worth their time to help me pick the right kind of heroes. As every parent knows, children imitate what they see and hear. They naturally look for examples to follow. Today’s popular culture offers plenty. Countless “stars” and “superstars” are put on pedestals for children to idolize and mimic. The problem is that most are celebrities, not heroes (it has been said that the difference between the two is that while the hero is known for worthy actions, the celebrity is known for being well known). And often, especially in our times, the behaviors for which many celebrities are famous are not worthy of imitation. But little children don’t know that. They can’t foresee that some pedestals, in time, turn out to be shaky and come crashing down. So it makes a big difference whether or not adults make efforts to point out what actions merit honor and which individuals deserve to be admired.

This book is meant to aid parents in such efforts. Its heroes give young people targets to aim for and examples to follow. Their tales come to life in Michael Hague’s charming, magical paintings, which speak to the hearts.
and imaginations of children. The combination of a few good stories, Michael's illustrations, and a parent's voice reading aloud is a great way to lift children's thoughts toward what is noble and fine.

Some of these heroes are doers of ancient, famous deeds ("mighty men which were of old, men of renown," as the book of Genesis has it)—shining victors, knights in armor, adventurers on the high seas. Their stories often unfold in far-off places—dusty plains, stormy seas, dungeons dark, castles high. Theirs are tales of epic drama—battles against overwhelming odds, daring rescues, struggles to the death, triumphs of good over evil.

But in truth, most heroes are not men and women of great renown. They live close by and, more often than not, perform deeds noticed by only a few. You'll find those kinds of heroes here, too. They come from every walk of life—boys and girls, mothers and fathers, men and women of God, teachers, a neighbor lending a helping hand, the cop around the corner. They win our admiration by committing the sort of acts every one of us might be called upon to perform—by offering some unseen gesture of compassion, by taking a quiet stand for what is right, by managing to hang on just one minute longer, or perhaps by persevering through a lifetime of struggle and toil.

Some of the heroes in this book are real people. They have lived and breathed, just as you and I. Others tread only the worlds of our imaginations. But factual or fictional, they all put a face on and give a meaning to heroism. They give us a chance to say to children, "Look, there is a person who has done something worth imitating."

It is important to say that to children, because believing in the heroic can help make each and every one of us a little bit better, day in and day out. If our children are to reach for the best, they need to have a picture of the best.

I hope this book helps boys and girls to believe in heroes. I hope it inspires parents and children to look around them and together pick out a few heroes of their own.
THE HERO IN LITERATURE

by Paul Zweig

We still call the principle characters in books "heroes," although this has become a sort of joke, since in our day the heroes rarely have anything risky or noble to accomplish. On the contrary, they are so ordinary, so tentative, that we have coined the expression "anti-hero" to describe them. Our greatest modern stories are written about characters like Stephen Dedalus, in Ulysses, or Marcel, in Remembrance of Things Past, who want to write books but can't; or the woman in Beckett's Happy Days, who is buried to her neck in sand. We are fascinated by Conrad's haunted Lord Jim, who "saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane ... always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book." If Jim had actually done any of these things, we might read about him in some bloodcurdling boys' tale by Robert Louis Stevenson. But when the moment comes for Jim to be a hero, he cannot act; he is paralyzed and spends his life brooding on his lost moment.

Take another famous example. Kafka's castle stands on top of a misty hill, but the hero who is trying to reach it—he doesn't even have a name, only a letter, K.—never will, for K. is the victim of forces beyond his control. Unlike the knights of medieval romance who pried their way into castles to stir up trouble and make a name for themselves, the K. of Kafka's story flails about in a maze of rules and restrictions. He gets nowhere, and that is where we join him: in a bemused limbo, a sort of no-exit world which, we are made to understand, is the very one we live in.

Our modern "hero" today becomes interesting when his dreams are punctured, and his stark limitations—known to us as the "human condition"—begin to strangify him a little. The failure of the dream is one of the great subjects of the novel, from Stendhal's youthful Julien Sorel, in The Red and the Black, to Flaubert's icy dreamer, Madame Bovary, to the gaspingly claustrophobic, pain-greed character of Joseph Heller's Something Happened, whose life collapses before our eyes over hundreds of pages of perversely eloquent internal posturing.

Certain emotions are apparently no longer available to us in literature, and not very much outside of it either: awe, tremendous admiration, the sort of feeling one gets for a truly great human being who touches our lives. For the most part we wade about in a debris of failed hopes. The literature of our century reflects this, or perhaps it taught it to us. In The Fall of Public Man, Richard Sennett argues that we have lost our cultural feeling for public actions, and replaced it with a mystical conviction that actions of the mind, internal movements that surge out of control in the "free" space of the psyche, are the only real actions. This represents the ultimate democracy, for everyone, even the most spinless of us, has a mind. And so we are all real, and don't have to do anything strenuous to prove it. But the hero is a public man, if he is anything. He is made not only of muscle and courage, but of values. He is a moral warrior who defends us against our own helplessness.

The heroic ideal has slowly declined since the Age of Pericles, when the Iliad was the Athenians' Bible. Plato, our first social theorist, banished Homer from his ideal Republic, because heroes like Achilles and Odysseus could never fit into a community of sensible people. As heroes, they lived by their swords, and their wild emotions. They tested the limits of man petulantly because they were themselves only partly human. (The other part was god, devil, or magician.) Yet the Athenians loved the extravagant claims of their heroes because, despite the vaunted rationality of the Greeks, they suspected that life's "secrets" had to be wrested from the concealing gods, like a Golden Fleece, or the Apples of the Hesperides. Only a hero could do it. Heroes were counter-gods; they were the true philosophers, because they found out what things meant, and brought back magnificent stories to spread the word.

And in the end, it is Plato's judgment that has won out. When the Roman poet Virgil wrote his heroic poem, The Aeneid, he portrayed Aeneas transforming himself from a passionate warrior into a good gray citizen. Thirteen hundred years later, in The Divine Comedy, Dante descending into the Inferno is a remarkably passive sort of hero, more like a voyeur in hell. By the 16th and 17th centuries, heroes had become comic figures, like Don Quixote.

During the Age of Exploration, men like Columbus, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Captain Cook undertook journeys that made Odysseus look like a tourist, yet they never became true culture-heroes. Nor did Europe's inerminable wars produce any enduring heroic myth. The greatest travel story of modern times, Robinson Crusoe, is about a terrified ordinary man who loathes risk and spends his life building insanely complicated walls to shield him from a menace that may not even exist. Crusoe is so unadventurous that in 28 years on his solitary island, he doesn't even explore every part of it.

Instead of the impulsive rushing about of "heroes," we have come to admire the talkative leisurely lives por-
trayed by Jane Austen, or the self-afflicting mania of the characters in Dostoyevski. We want to know the hidden things that seep out when baffled, struggling men and women reveal more of themselves than they know, as in the cruelly decorous world of Henry James or in the recent fiction of, say, John Cheever. We are excited by this close-up view of "secret" lives, provided by the snooping sensibility of the novelist, for he reveals what is going on in people's hearts.

Who was it that said no man is a hero to his valet? Or, for that matter, to his wife, his children, his close friends—to anyone who has learned to know him in his flesh and private feelings. In our great literature, it is the valet's point of view that has won out. The important innovations of modern literature—stream of consciousness, fragmented time sequences, dream-narratives—take us to the antipodes of the life of action, into unfettered wordy dramas of the mind.

WHICH IS NOT to say that the contemporary world does not have its "heroes." For I doubt that human beings can live without some expanded ideal of behavior, some palpable image of the spaciousness of man. We want to know that our personal limitations are only a special case, that somewhere there is someone who can translate his words, thoughts, and beliefs into acts, even if we can't. Heroes in this sense represent a profoundly humanistic ideal. It says a great deal about our cultural moment, therefore, that we should have squeezed our heroes into the cultural badlands of popular culture, genre movies, and television serials. Here is where we find the Lord Jims who leap into action when the emergency arises. They are muscular, lithe; they know right from wrong; they also know who they are, and this gives them a lacquered, mineral aspect.

But what sort of heroes are they? Like the heroes in Homer, they are larger than life; they gleam with physical exuberance; their courage and good intentions emanate from them like a visible aura. But today these very characteristics somehow disqualify them as serious exemplars of what man can do; they seem like caricatures, a sort of comic relief or grotesque memory between acts of the weightier drama of real life. These popular heroes have no maze of inner qualities that seep into their talk and gestures, through gaps of hesitation, of failure. As a result they strike us as partial figures, a sort of half-men who give us a playful kind of pleasure. This is what we mean when we call such stories escapist. They remove us from ourselves too neatly, too lightheartedly, leaving no residue of reflection by which these enlarged personages can become alternative lives for us.

In her recent book, The Last Cowboy, Jane Kramer writes about a Texas cowhand who goes to see John Wayne westerns to find a life he could be happy with. Wayne's world of fists and bullets is his idea of a proper world where a man can make himself feel. Yet according to Kramer, this cowboy who attempts to model his life on a hero in the movies is a desperately sad case, and most of us would agree. For John Wayne's movie world doesn't apply to a modern cowboy any more than it does to us. Kramer's cowboy is taking the mummeries between the acts for the play itself, and he is making a touching tool of himself.

The truth is that these larger-than-life heroes of popular entertainment aren't heroes at all in the old sense. They are not invitations to grandeur, as Odysseus was to the lords of Mycenae, but a sort of hide-and-seek we play with our lives. By losing ourselves in their overtidy worlds of right and wrong, courage and death, we leap sideways out of time and responsibility into a sideshow of brazen grotesques: a jerky miniature version of the spacious alternatives offered by Odysseus and his heroic kin.

HAVING SAID this, I would have to take at least some of it back, for it would be wrong to underestimate the complex attraction of popular culture, its function as a seedbed for attitudes that often have a long and rich life in the larger culture. It is by now a commonplace to recognize the roots in popular entertainment of Balzac, Dickens, and even Dostoyevski. The rampant popularity of the most forgettable Gothic tales of the late 18th century, later influenced writers like Poe, Melville, Conrad, Sarre, and Beckett.

In our own day, writers like Vonnegut and Pynchon draw on the cardboard heroes of popular adventure literature to create their comedies of modern life. Norman Mailer, too, in all the phases of his career, has taken a kind of heroic template from popular storytelling, and transferred it, with only the barest trace of irony, into the sultry, garrulous, existential atmosphere of his novels. The Naked and the Dead, The American Dream, Why Are We in Vietnam strain to create characters who are both men of action and moody failure-bound anti-heroes. The contradiction is, I think, the key to Mailer's distinctiveness as a novelist.

There is in cultural history a "displacement upwards" of popular forms and ideas from folklore, religious superstition, popular theater, and storytelling, to the enduring creations of Homer, Sophocles, Dante, and our best modern writers.

We must acknowledge, therefore, that a phantasmagoria of heroes parades across our lives after all: rock stars magnified by stupendous lightshows and banks of loudspeakers; athletes purified to a lean, entrancing skill made magical by the huge sums of money they earn; transatlantic balloonists; mountain climbers; solitary around-the-world sailors, like Sir Francis Chichester; Philippe Petit, who crossed between the towers of the World Trade Center in New York on a wire last year. And, of course, the Kojaks and Baretas, not to mention the crude anonymous heroes of violent films: the karate masters, the black glinting giants of blacksploitation films. On all sides, these larger-than-life figures are at play, and their play hypnotizes us.

Perhaps it is the idea of play that is important here. We tend to admire acts that are magnificently useless, risks taken for their own sake. Because the "serious" world is desperately unheroic; because we are all equal and, therefore, cramped in our mind's perspective; because failure and intimacy take up so much room in our sense of ourselves, we squint sideways into a circus fairway of ballooning figures who are free, lighter than air in their lovely futility. We don't have any Odysseus or Beowulf or even Moby Dick. But we have the trivial playfulness of the heroes of popular entertainment; we have the garish electric rock and movie worlds; we have gladiatorial sports in which no one dies; we have playful killer-lovers like James Bond. All of this amounts to more than bad taste, and less than great, or even good, art. The historian Johan Huizinga has argued that man is an essentially playful animal, who plays the game of law, of war, of love, of thought; who sports even when he is mired in seriousness. If that is so, then these play-heroes of popular culture, crude and repetitious as they may be, remind us with an unexpected realism of who we are, and what we do.

Paul Zweig is chairman of the comparative literature department at Queens College. He is author of The Adventurer, Three Journeys: An Automythology, and several books of poetry.
THE HEROES
OF OUR TIMES

by Reynolds Price

OUR NEED FOR HEROES is at least as old as our need for enemies. The earliest literary texts of western civilization were propped in powerful compulsion round the names of actual men—large, honorable, and honored in proportion: Gilgamesh, Abraham, Moses, Achilles. The compulsion and its famous results continued, with few interruptions, till a hundred years ago. Tennyson’s “Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington” and Whitman’s poems on the death of Lincoln remain, oddly, the most recent in a line of heroic monuments nearly four millennia long. Where are their successors?

Maybe the pause is not odd and is in fact a break. Where after all are our epics and tragedies?—fragmented into novels and movies, ghosts of their old life-giving forms. Tennyson himself, in contemplating the Iron Duke’s corpse, predicted the end—“Mourn, for to us he seems the last.” Of later poets writing in English only Auden, in his elegies for Yeats and Freud, succeeded in erecting sizable and apparently durable memorials. Where are the poems on, the distinguished portraits of, the hymns to Marie Curie, Albert Einstein, Douglas MacArthur, Pablo Picasso, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Claus von Stauffenberg? Where are the odes to the three popular heroes of the recent American past—John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr.? They are plainly honored in the national imagination—millions of chromos in millions of homes attest to that, and a grotesque hunger for news of their survivors (no goblet too small or rank) continues to gorge itself. They are of course the subject of numerous memoirs, biographies, films. But is their absence from serious imaginative art only another sign of the disastrous separation of cultured life from common life; or have good writers, painters, sculptors, and composers been sensitive and responsive for years to a rising sound that is only now being widely heard?—There are no present heroes. Most dead ones were frauds.

An answer to the first question would lead far afield (though whatever claims are made for a national “arts explosion” can be quickly refuted by any good artist). My answer to the second is a quick yes—artists in droves have turned their backs on their ancient love and preservation of heroes. Why? Because artists of all sorts, as society’s most attentive observers, began early in this century to abandon the traditional definitions of heroism and have found no equally fertilizing substitutes. The explanations, again, would be complex; but important among them are the growth of compassion for the poor and powerless (traditional heroes being mostly highborn and powerful), the backlash of revulsion after the Great War at the patent stupidity and savagery of politicians and generals, and—crucial—the steady spread by press, radio, and now television of intimate information.

It’s the merciless flood of information that has made living heroes apparently so rare, if not invisible, and so perilous on their heights. The classical world decided wisely that any human being accorded the honors and monuments of a hero must be, above all, dead. Even with their primitive apparatus for the dissemination of news, Greeks, Romans, Jews, and early Christians saw that today’s still-breathing “hero” may easily become tomorrow’s criminal or fool. (The first hero of whom we possess anything approaching a full picture is King David; and if—with his womanizing, his murders and family scandals—he seems more human and interesting than Moses or Elijah, he is also proportionately less inspiring of reverence and emulation.)

By contrast, Americans in the 19th and 20th centuries have often rushed to elevate the living only to discover dark patches of fungus on the idola’s face and hands—Henry Ward Beecher, Warren Harding, Richard Nixon, to name only three from a long roll of fallen. All subsequent would-be heroes have suffered from the ensuing disillusion. (It’s obvious but accurate to say that President Carter and his family are unavoidably attacked by the lingering spores of the Johnson-Nixon blight.) And in the past decade the dead themselves have proved alarmingly vulnerable. Posthumous allegations of sexual adventuring by Franklin Roosevelt, John and Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr.—men who capitalized on the public desire for immaculate family loyalty—have shaken if not toppled their shrines. In short, another human need—for unenameled praise the side idolatry—has been balked; and any parent now searching the walls of his child’s room, for icons of heroes is likely to find no face older than a rock star’s or an athlete’s, no person likely to do what he presently does throughout a lifetime.

“Alas. But ho-hum. It was always thus,” you may well respond, and I’ll partly concur. The cult of living heroes has always been dangerously close to adolescent crush at best and, at worst, to psychopathic craving. At the very word hero, a number of our minds automatically run vivid home-movies of Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin on balconies—genuine
beasts borne grinning toward us on seas of faces damp with adoration. And nearer to home, most of us endured the daily televised arrival in our homes of the villainous faces of the Vietnam War—just as we continue to endure the efforts of newly skilled electronic artisans to stoke our old hungers to fever-pitch for some man or woman with no greater claim than an out-of-hand ego yearning for worship. In such a dizzying tide, surely we could relish a period of calm, admiring the admirable souls we meet in daily life but sworn off the hunt for national saviors or personal outsized templates for glamour and bravery?

I doubt we can. The need is too old, too ingrained in the kind of creature we are (slow to leave childhood and capable of love). At its purest, the need has always been our strongest lure to education; lives of great men and women have always reminded us we can make our lives quite literally sublime—lifted up, raised above the customary trials our nature has cut for itself through eons. And while many of us have had the early good luck to encounter and recognize heroic figures in our own homes, schools, or towns, such encounters have not often permanently satisfied the full need. The need is for figures both grand and distant. Why?

Partly because grandeur is best comprehended from a distance—an eye pressed to the floor of the Grand Canyon is seeing only grit. Partly because grandeur seen close often reveals beer cans, chicken bones, immortal plastic. Mainly, however, because distance itself implies a journey—time and effort, endurance and strengthening. Hometown models have a disconcerting tendency to seem too possible and to shrink as we grow. What we want are models visible on their heights and all-but-inimitable in gifts and achievements. Tennyson at Wellington’s beer defined the hope—“Oh God, and Godlike men we build our trust.” Provided that our God is merciful and just, we have always profited from real demi-gods who lure us up. And up is the catch. Illusory heroes have frequently lured us or if not done. Hence the current healthy suspicion and aversion, the falling-off in attendance at old shrines, the consequent awarding of fame and awe to pathetic instant celebrities.

The classical world decided wisely that any human acceded the honors of a hero must be, above all, dead.

But a lull is a good time to look back and forward, to brace for the next wave—bound to come. What, in an age of nearly total information, can heroes be? Can they exist at all, in any form worth noting? Must we choose them blind as romantic lovers choose—and accept them at our doors like foundlings, bane or blessing? Or may we exercise study and judgment and select what is likely to serve and last? Since I’m proposing a true fool’s errand—laying down law for regions where wisdom has always prevailed—I’ll push to a rash end and answer the questions.

Heroes must be figures whom we feel to be unnaturally charged with some force we want but seem to lack—courage, craft, intelligence, stamina, beauty—and by imaginary contact with whom we experience a transfer of the force desired. Since we require that they stand at a distance and since they no longer come to us veiled in impenetrable art, we learn of their triumphs from a press that is equally prone to discover their faults. We’re lucky, therefore, when our heroes are chosen for qualities that function more or less independently of our personal sense of morality. If we admire a priest for his charity and self-sacrifice, our admiration will be shattered by news of his intrinsic involvement with a ring of superior call-girls. If the same revelation includes the name of an idolized professional athlete, the new light may only enhance the athlete’s glamour and power (Tennyson was plainly undeterred by Wellington’s parallel fame as the sexual hero of a thousand boudoirs).

Hence there’s profound unconscious wisdom at work in the present mass cults for athletes, actors, musicians. Since we honor them for what we perceive as physical skills, the honor is not so fragile as that we bestow on peacetime rulers, clergy, doctors, lawyers, all kinds of teachers (in wartime, obviously, soldiers are honored for defensive ferocity). Brilliant performing artists are the safest heroes. In the current state of moral tolerance, their heroism is seriously threatened only by their health, and maybe by discovery of some involvement in the cruel exploitation of children.

Ideally then, in prevailing conditions of scrutiny, our heroes should be either dead (and judged safe) or alive but revered for strengths that are relatively amoral, though never vicious. Such a caution isn’t meant to preclude the finding of large rewarding figures almost anywhere one needs to look—commerce, science, literature, fine arts, law, the military, cookery, labor, even government. It is, however, meant to define again the original core of true heroism, its first and most nearly irresistible base—the human body (at its strongest, boldest, most beautiful) and the deeds that flow direct from that body, broad memorable gestures on the waiting air. Few of us are agile, graceful, picturesque, or eloquent enough to be immune to the use of models who stand today in that ancient line. And luckily there’s a long line of candidates—from Leontyne Price, John Travolta, and Natalia Makarova to Johnny Weismuller, Bruce Jenner, Martha Graham and on: their recorded perfection preserved from age and failure.

Yet however heroic in their different ways such names seem to me, I cannot hope to convey them intact into your pantheon. For if the recent hawking of celebrities (solid or weightless) has demonstrated their fragility as models, it has simultaneously proved the impossibility of arousing the degree of permanent excitement and admiration that is indispensable for the choice of heroes, by masses or individuals. Lasting and useful heroes are objects of love—love of all sorts: altruistic, erotic, passive, potentially destructive—and are chosen by levels of the mind beyond the reach of external persuasion. They may thus be either helpful or damaging, but not premeditated, interviewed, selected by cool personality procedures. Their suddenness and mystery is precisely their power, their promise and threat. The best we can do, as we scan their dazzling faces and feel their strong pull, is to scan ourselves—to probe our own weaknesses, vacancies, and know which of them need filling and why. Then at least we can wait, informed and prepared, for the unconscious acts of choice and adoration.

It may in fact seem a bad time for heroes. Their old gleam, the old force they promised to lend us, seem genuinely and justly tarnished, worthy of suspicion. It also seems a bad time for love. There can be no question that it’s always seemed so (world literature says very little else). Still the world has proved lovable year after year—though in shrinking enclaves of beauty, honesty, excellence, persistence. The chief surviving enclaves, now as always, are single human beings. The list of those whom we—at our own best—can love, serve, honor, and use as anchors in the riptides round us is surely no shorter than it’s ever been. To say we lack heroes is to come dangerously close to saying we lack the capacity to love. It is certainly to say that we lack self-knowledge of our own predicament as incomplete creatures, capable of height.

Reynolds Price is James B. Duke Professor at Duke University.
A PORTFOLIO OF PORTRAITS

"The best we can do, as we scan their dazzling faces and feel their strong pull, is to scan ourselves—to probe our own weaknesses, vacancies, and know which of them need filling and why."
— Reynolds Price

While the public hero may be a victim of overexposure and skepticism, most of us possess private heroes whom we respect for private reasons. What follows is a gallery of such heroes, chosen by individual editors of Saturday Review and photographed by Hiro, together with brief explanations of the reasons why they were chosen. To the extent that they mirror our aspirations, these men and women reflect values that are worth celebrating.

Photographs by Hiro

ROBERT PENN WARREN

Because he wrote "What is man but his passion?" and lives life in strict, calm discipleship to his passion, never ceasing to seek some transcendent meaning to existence, and to strive to articulate that meaning in poems and fictions. Because, in this age of hype and sell-outs, he has never sold out. And because, now that he is 70 years old, his passion, like that of Verdi, Weill, Tchaikovsky, Picasso, and those precious few other masters who retained their mastery in old age, does not flag, and his vision grows in strength and in wisdom.
WILLIAM MASTERS AND VIRGINIA JOHNSON

Because in a period of unenlightened sexual attitudes, these "just plain folks" from the American heartland—disheartened at the prevailing ignorance in an area of human concern—had the courage to undertake the first scientific study in history of human sexual activity. Because they not only finally revealed the detailed physiological course of events that characterizes the normal human drama, but also evolved a system of therapy—and trained other therapists in their methods—to relieve the anguish of uncounted thousands of sexually troubled couples.

HANS SELYE

Because he is a doctor-philosopher in the best tradition, a tradition made luminous by such great names in medicine as Walter Cannon (who was his teacher), Hans Zinsser, Sir William Oster, and Donald Mayou. Because his classic book, The Stress of Life, detailed more comprehensively than ever before the way anxiety, irritation, suppressed rage, and hate produce alterations in the endocrine system. Because his concerns range beyond medicine to the human condition, and most of all, because he inspires respect for the possibilities of a human being.
LEONTYNE PRICE

Because at a time when her race constituted a discouragement, in a profession where it constituted a milestone, she trusted the pressure of her enormous endowments, and ascended to eminence in opera and concert. Now—25 years after her professional debut—she continues to bless the world with a voice so beautiful as any in memory; an artistry and dignity unsurpassed. The first American-trained singer since Rosa Ponselle to achieve supremacy in international opera, she gives emphatic notice of retaining her unchallenged place in the circle of purest excellence.

ISAAC STERN

Because he has grown to greatness as a violinist in America, where he was brought from Russia at the age of two. Because he regards music as a means of communication, not as an opportunity to show off, and has given selflessly to promote the careers of such younger artists as Itzhak Perlman and Pinchas Zukerman. Above all, because he showed a rare order of initiative and artistic responsibility in organizing a lobby for the preservation of Carnegie Hall, which is now flourishing as never before.
WALTER CRONKITE

Because he is first a reporter, he does not—like so many of his colleagues—cover himself.

Because he is first a reporter, he does not—like so many of his colleagues—cover himself.

Because he has not allowed himself to be swayed by covering a story or report to sensationalism. Because he has not allowed himself to be swayed by covering a story or report to sensationalism. Because he has not allowed himself to be swayed by covering a story or report to sensationalism.

Because this trusted, familiar television newsmen has become something of a diplomat. (His 1977 interview with Begin and Sadat, for instance, led directly to the first face-to-face contact between the two men.) Because he has bettered the world for those who observe it, and for those who direct its events.

MUHAMMED AU

Because from the first he was exceptional, bringing dazzling physical gifts and personal magnetism to a profession desperately in need of both. Because he announced that he was the greatest, and for 18 years no one has proved him wrong. Because he protested the Vietnam War at great cost—when he might have served the armed forces by doing something more dangerous than entertaining with his skills—and then endured his exile from being. Finally, because in an age when other great champions have discreetly retired, he continues to put himself to the test.
Because outside of the publishing field, book editors usually go unheralded, and he is one whose imagination, generosity of spirit, and unfailing instinct for quality should be celebrated, because in the age of commercial hot properties, as president and editor-in-chief of Knopf he has never let the demands of business pressure him into abandoning works of literary distinction that may not be profitable, because although he insists that he is not an intellectual, he feels sympathy for writers, including intellectuals, of a broad range of prose. Most important of all, because his enthusiasm for reading is infectious.

Because for half a century he has held fast to the most impeccable of journalistic goals, an informed iconoclasm. Because his mind is too strong and too clear to be muddled by prejudice. Because he wades into a sea of detail, and somehow returns with a gem at the bottom. The recent reissue of his Underground to Palestine, with its wise and impassioned Zionism, renews his intellectual courage, and the news that he is studying Greek and delving into the origins of freedom of thought calls to mind his abiding concern for the lessons of history.
Heroes for Our Age

How Heroes Can Elevate Students’ Lives

By Peter H. Gibbon

Human beings are deeply divided, eternally torn between apathy and activity, between nihilism and belief. In this short life, we wage a daily battle between a higher and lower self. The hero stands for our higher self. To get through life and permit the higher self to prevail, we depend on public models of excellence, bravery, and goodness. During the last 40 years in America, such models have been in short supply. Except among politicians and Madison Avenue advertising firms, the word hero has been out of fashion since the late 1960s as a term to describe past or present public figures. We are reluctant to use the term this way, doubtful as to whether any one person can hold up under the burden of such a word.

After the September 11 terrorist attacks, hero was resurrected across the nation to describe the firefighters and police officers who lost their lives in the World Trade Center, rescue workers who patiently picked their way through the rubble, passengers who thwarted terrorists on a hijacked airplane, and soldiers who left on planes and ships. In difficult times, we turn to the word hero to express our deepest sorrow, our highest aspiration, and our most profound admiration.

In 1992, I gave a commencement speech to high school students in which I described three women of extraordinary courage: missionary Eva Jane Price, who in 1900 was killed in the Boxer Rebellion; artist Käthe Kollwitz, who lost her son in World War I and transcended her grief by creating one of the most powerful sculptures of the 20th century; and writer Eugenia Ginzburg, who spent 18 years in Stalin’s gulag (see sidebar, page 14). Newsweek picked up the introduction to the speech and called it “In Search of Heroes.” In this piece, I argued that reverence, skepticism, and mockery permeated the culture to such a degree that it is difficult for young people to have heroes and that presenting reality in the classroom is an empty educational goal if it produces disillusioned, dispirited students. The heart of the article was that we had lost a vision of greatness, in our schools and in our culture.

People responded. From a remote mining area of the Appalachian Mountains, a high school teacher wrote that in 33 years she had observed that “the more affluent students’ visions of greatness” had been “clouded by materialism.” From the University of Illinois, an assistant professor of broadcast journalism commented that he had found “an increasing cynicism among my students that is most disturbing.”

Since then, I have plugged hero into every available database; read hundreds of biographies and books on heroism; traveled the country talking to Americans about heroes; and interviewed educators, historians, journalists, ministers, politicians, scientists, and writers, asking questions that gave shape to my book, A Call to Heroism: How did we lose our public heroes? Why does it matter? Where do we go from here?

Peter H. Gibbon is research associate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Over the last five years he has traveled extensively talking to students, teachers, and general audiences about heroes. He was a high school history and English teacher for 24 years and is the former headmaster of Hackley School in Tarrytown, N.Y. This article is excerpted from A Call to Heroism © 2002 by Peter H. Gibbon and reprinted with permission of the publisher, Atlantic Monthly Press.
As a historian, I have been tracing the changing face of the American hero, researching what has happened to the presentation of heroes in history books, and analyzing ways revisionist historians have shaped teachers' attitudes, which in turn shape the way students respond.

The most rewarding part of this odyssey has been the five years I spent talking to students about heroes. Most of my audiences have been in high schools—from a thousand students sitting on bleachers in a gymnasium to small classes in history and literature. In these talks, I challenge the notion that they are too old, too jaded, or too cynical for heroes. I quote Ralph Waldo Emerson, another true believer in heroes and a writer most students will know: “Go with mean people and you think life is mean” and “with the great, our thoughts and manners easily become great.” In spirited debate, they agree, disagree, challenge, and probe. “Is Malcolm X a hero? John Brown? Why is Adolf Hitler any worse than Christopher Columbus?” They ask about celebrities, athletes, historical figures, politicians, and rescuers, and about such personal heroes as parents, teachers, and friends.

What is a Hero?

For most of human history, hero has been synonymous with warrior. Although we often link these words today, we do have an expanded, more inclusive definition of hero than the one we inherited from the Greeks. Modern dictionaries list three qualities in common after the entry hero: extraordinary achievement, courage, and the idea (variably expressed) that the hero serves as a “model” or “example”—that heroism has a moral component.

Today, extraordinary achievement is no longer confined to valor in combat. As well as military heroes, there are humanitarian heroes, cultural heroes, political heroes. Thomas Edison lit up the night. Harriet Tubman rescued slaves. Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence. Beethoven is a hero of music, Rembrandt of art, Einstein of science.

Likewise, courage means many things besides physical bravery: taking an unpopular position, standing up for principle, persevering, forging accomplishment out of adversity. After her life was threatened, activist Ida B. Wells continued to condemn lynching. Franklin Roosevelt battled polio. Helen Keller transcended blindness and deafness.

The moral component of the meaning of heroism—and, I believe, the most important one—is elusive. In French, hérois is associated with generosity and force of character. And in Middle English, herioc is means noble. In dictionaries, heroic is an adjective of praise: some of its synonyms are virtuous, steadfast, magnanimous, intrepid. The Oxford English Dictionary uses the phrase “greatness of soul.” It’s an imprecise concept, like the word hero itself. There are many different ways to describe it, but I believe greatness of soul to be a mysterious blend of powerful qualities summarized by Shakespeare in Macbeth (IV.iii.91-94), where he describes the “king-becoming graces” as:

... justice, verity, temperance, stability, bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness, devotion, patience, courage, fortitude.

Heroes enlarge our imagination, teach us to think big, and expand our sense of the possible.

When Nelson Mandela received an honorary degree from Harvard University in 1998, the seniors sat in the front rows. My son, who was among them, commented that there was an aura about Mandela, something about being in his presence that evoked a surprisingly powerful response. I believe the reason he was describing is awe, and it came from contemplating Mandela’s extraordinary achievement, his profound courage, and his greatness of soul.

The greatest burden the word hero carries today is the expectation that a hero be perfect. In Greek mythology, even the gods have flaws. They are not perfect but rather hot-tempered, jealous, and fickle, taking sides in human events and feuding among themselves.

In America today we have come to define the person by the flaw: Thomas Jefferson is the president with the slave mistress, Einstein the scientist who mistreated his wife. As a society, we need to explore a more subtle, complex definition of the word hero, one that acknowledges weaknesses as well as strengths, failures as well as successes—but, at the same time, we need a definition that does not set the bar too low.

Some Americans reject the word hero outright and insist on role model, which is less grandiose, more human. People often ask me, “Why do we need heroes? Why aren’t role models enough?” I like author Jill Ker Conway’s distinction. In a lecture on extraordinary women, she stated “Women should have heroines, not role models.” I asked her what she meant. Women, she said, are as physically brave and as daring as men, and the routine use of role model to describe
outstanding women conceals their bravery and diminishes their heroism. Conway’s distinction argues that heroine is a more powerful word than role model and that heroism is a reach for the extraordinary.

The definition of hero remains subjective. What is extraordinary can be debated. Courage is in the eye of the beholder. Greatness of soul is elusive. Inevitably there will be debates over how many and what kinds of flaws a person can have and still be considered heroic.

Nevertheless, today we are reluctant to call either past or present public figures heroic. The 20th-century assumption that a hero is supposed to be perfect has made many Americans turn away from the word—and the concept—altogether. The contemporary preference for terms like role model and the shift from the recognition of national to local heroes are part of the transformation of the word hero that occurred in the second half of the 20th century.

There is something appealing about a society that admires a range of accomplishments, that celebrates as many people as possible. Making the word hero more democratic, however, can be carried to an extreme. It can strip the word of all sense of the extraordinary. It can lead to an ignorance of history, a repudiation of genius, and an extreme egalitarianism disdainful of high culture and unappreciative of excellence.

We need role models and local heroes; but by limiting our heroes to people we know, we restrict our aspirations. Public heroes—or imperfect people of extraordinary achievement, courage, and greatness of soul whose reach is wider than our own—teach us to push beyond ourselves and our neighborhoods in search of models of excellence. They enlarge our imagination, teach us to think big, and expand our sense of the possible.

The Shifting Role of the Hero in American History

In some ages there is “an extravagant worship of great men,” and in others “a disposition to disbelieve in their existence,” wrote British historian James Froude in 1880, in an introduction to an elegant leather-bound, eight-volume anthol—

George Washington

In 1927, Mount Rushmore sculptor Gutzon Borglum had no doubt about whose face he should carve first, but in 2002 George Washington is not an easy sell. Washington was a soldier, an aristocrat, and slave-owner. Students today want to know about Washington’s fierce temper and whether or not he grew marijuana at Mount Vernon.

It helps to remind my audiences that Washington was human. His father died when he was eleven; his mother was dour. He didn’t attend college or travel to Europe, couldn’t marry the woman he loved, and didn’t get from Britain the commission he thought he deserved. He watched his half-brother, Lawrence, die from tuberculosis and his stepdaughter, Patsy, succumb to epilepsy. His own face was scarred by smallpox, his body at times weakened by malaria and dysentery.

Although he achieved a measure of fame for his military actions in the French and Indian War, until 1775 he seemed ordinary. Then the war came. He did not seek to be commander, and he should have lost. Great Britain was confident and formidable, wealthy and well-equipped—an 18th-century superpower.

Washington failed at first, at Brooklyn Heights and Brandywine. And he suffered—as his men went without pay, Congress squabbled, his army melted away, and defeat seemed increasingly certain. In 1776 he told his brother he would gladly quit.

But he didn’t. He dodged and retreated and somehow kept an army in the field and endured the harsh winter at Valley Forge. He took risks, attacked at Trenton and Princeton, and forced himself to appear confident and indomitable before his men, despite fatigue and frustration.

Washington learned to use America’s wilderness and to exploit England’s arrogance. Patiently, he extracted authority and supplies from a divided Congress. Stoically, he shook off critics. Above all, he endured—until the French sent money and Great Britain grew weary of their losses of men and material. I tell my audiences that Washington is great because he showed extraordinary courage, not just the courage to face bullets but the courage to stick to a cause no matter how great the odds.

When the war was over, Washington gave up his sword and returned to Mount Vernon to tend his estate. His magnanimity astonished the world. Washington was not brilliant like Hamilton or eloquent like Jefferson. He lacked Franklin’s originality and Madison’s insight. But our first president had character. Like the Stoics whose words he read, he exercised self-control. He valued honor and reputation above wealth and power; he believed in conscience, kindness, and a caring and watchful God.

In all cultures, the founders of nations are considered preeminent heroes. But Washington is more. He believed the president should be an example to the nation, he injected majesty and humility into the office, and became a symbol of incorruptibility. Into American political life, he infused the Roman notion of self-control and the ancient belief that the state comes before the self. By giving up his sword and disbanding his armies, he established at our founding the principle of civilian control. By backing the Constitution and agreeing to serve as president, he made it possible for us to start our history as one nation instead of 13 squabbling states. Thomas Jefferson thought him great and good. So might we. —P.G.
ogy, The Hundred Greatest Men. Attuned to the rhythms of history, Froude recognized that in some ages the predilection is to deny greatness. We live in such an age.

It was not always so.

Until World War I, the ideology of heroism was intact and influential in American culture. It permeated parlors, schools, farms, and factories. It could be found in novels, newspapers, and eulogies; inscribed on statues, tombstones, and public buildings; and in the exhibits at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition of 1876 and the Chicago World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893.

The ideology of American heroism formalized in the 19th century could be seen in the names parents chose for their children. The Marquis de Lafayette named his son after George Washington, as did the parents of George Washington Carver. After the battle of New Orleans in the War of 1812, thousands of Americans named their sons Andrew, after Andrew Jackson. In 1919, the year Theodore Roosevelt died, Jackie Robinson’s parents named their first son Jack Roosevelt Robinson—in remembrance of the president who had invited Booker T. Washington to the White House in 1901, a politically daring thing to do at the time.

Pioneers moving west named their cities Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, and Hamilton. Americans also named cities Athens, Rome, and Corinth, as many of the founding fathers had looked to classical models like Cicero and Cato for their heroes. An expanding democratic America produced new heroes, men of modest education but brave and self-reliant. Known as “the Hero,” Andrew Jackson was as admired as George Washington, better loved than Thomas Jefferson. Dying at the Alamo in 1836, Davy Crockett became a war hero.

On May 30, 1868, our first official Memorial Day, children all over America picked wildflowers and placed them on the graves of soldiers. In Washington, D.C., people wore mourning scarves and decorated the graves of unknown men who had died at the Battle of Bull Run. Four thousand citizens marched to the National Cemetery in Richmond and marked each of seven thousand graves with a miniature American flag. From Nantucket to San Francisco, in large and small towns, Americans honored their Civil War dead by creating statues and memorials on an unprecedented scale.

Near the end of the century, Bostonians chose architect Charles Follen McKim’s plans for their new Boston Public Library, a building that celebrates greatness. Looking up to the granite exterior of the second story, one sees etched in stone the names of over 500 artists, writers, inventors, and scientists of Western civilization. Inside, on the first floor, woven into the vaulted mosaic ceiling, are the names of American cultural heroes like Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. On the top floor are John Singer Sargent’s huge painted murals of the ancient hero Sir Lancelot, seeker of the Holy Grail.

Not everyone in the 19th century joined in praise of heroes. Richard Hildreth, a sophisticated New England historian, wearied of celebration and called for the depiction of “living and breathing men...with their faults as well as their virtues.” Edgar Allan Poe wrote, “That man is no man who stands in awe of his fellow man.” And even in the 19th century, journalists mocked the exploits of Buffalo Bill, satirized the decisions of Abraham Lincoln, and questioned the reputed heroes of General George Custer. The dominant voice of the century, however, was affirmative and confident, even if sometimes sentimental.

Of course the 19th-century idealists knew their heroes were not perfect. Even so, they believed that heroes instruct us in greatness, that heroes remind us of our better selves, and that heroes strengthen the ordinary citizen trying to live decently.

Recognizing Heroines

In patriarchal 19th-century America, women were free to marry, teach school, and work in factories. They were expected to have large families and often died young, due to the complications of childbirth. Those born privileged could patronize the fine arts and play uplifting music. If unusually daring, they crusaded. But they were not considered leaders or given center stage. Women could not be warriors, explorers, orators, or politicians—the normal routes to heroism in the 19th century.

Noah Webster and William McGuffey featured women as wives and mothers. When Mason Locke Weems looked for subjects for his best-selling juvenile biographies at the beginning of the 19th century, he did not think of women. New Yorkers at the dedication of the Hall of Fame for Great Americans in 1901 watched as 29 plaques were unveiled, but not one celebrated a woman.

Unable to vote or hold office, generally excluded from the ministry, law, and medicine, and discouraged from speaking in public, women in 19th-century America—many of them motivated by their religious faith—channeled their heroic impulses into altruism and reform. Between the American Revolution and the Spanish-American War, America became a better nation, a more humanitarian nation, in part through the efforts of women of extraordinary achievement, courage, and greatness of soul, who tried to improve prisons, abolish slavery, and forge equality for women. Although not fully recognized in their time, these women not only reflected the ideology of heroism in 19th-century America but helped shape it.

Influenced by Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing, one of her heroes, Dorothea Dix wrote a book of uplifting poetry as a young teacher. In 1841, Dix was asked to teach a Sunday school class in a cold East Cambridge jail in Massachusetts, where she found mentally ill inmates “bound with chains, lacerated with ropes, scourgéd with rods.” Dix reported her findings to the Massachusetts legislature and initiated a movement to reform treatment of the mentally ill and build new hospitals for them. She raised money from private donors in Massachusetts, then took her cause on the road, traveling ten thousand miles through other states in three years and going abroad in 1854 to meet with Pope Pius II and Queen Victoria. Dix volunteered during the Civil War and became the Union’s Superintendent of Female Nurses. Accustomed to having her way, she alienated the Union medical establishment while managing to raise money and secure supplies. After the war, she continued to...
America became a better nation through the efforts of women of extraordinary achievement, courage, and greatness of soul, who tried to improve prisons, abolish slavery, and forge equality for women.

visit hospitals and prisons. By the end of Dix's 40-year crusade, the number of mental hospitals in America in 1881 had grown from 13 to 123.

Before the Civil War, Harriet Tubman, who was called the Moses of her people, made 19 trips south to rescue nearly 300 slaves, wearing different disguises and carrying a pistol. So effective was she that Maryland planters offered $40,000 for her capture. She addressed abolitionist rallies, supported the radical John Brown, and condemned Abraham Lincoln for his initial refusal to free slaves. During the war, she served as spy, scout, and nurse and witnessed the attack on Fort Wagner, where Colonel Robert Gould Shaw's 54th African-American Regiment fell. While well-known in abolitionist circles, Tubman was never given the recognition in her lifetime that Frederick Douglass eventually received in his, and for many years the government denied her a pension for her service in the Civil War. In a letter in 1868, Douglass wrote to Tubman: “I have received much encouragement at every step of the way. You, on the other hand, have labored in a private way. I have wrought in the day—you the night... The midnight sky and the silent stars have been the witness to your devotion to freedom and of your heroism.”

As the 19th century progressed, women who became reformers and humanitarians received increasing respect and some recognition. Abraham Lincoln credited Harriet Beecher Stowe with starting the Civil War because so many Americans read Uncle Tom's Cabin. After calling Clarissa (Clara) Barton the Angel of the Battlefield, the chief Union Army surgeon at the Battle of Antietam wrote that Barton was more of a hero than General McClellan, the commander of the Army of the Potomac. By the end of the century, suffragist Susan B. Anthony, once vilified, had traveled all over America giving interviews to hundreds of newspaper reporters.

At the start of the 20th century, Jane Addams's efforts on behalf of immigrants gained her the accolade of heroine. Up until World War I, however, no woman commanded the adulation given Robert E. Lee or Abraham Lincoln. No woman in 19th-century America had the status of Joan of Arc in 15th-century France or of Queen Elizabeth in 16th-century England. In 19th-century America, heroism and greatness were linked to public life, physical bravery, war, and gender. Not until the feminist movement of the late 20th century would American women be given full access to public life and fair representation in our history books. Not until then would altruists and reformers compete with soldiers and political leaders for the title of hero.

The Warrior Hero
Throughout most of America's history, our heroes were warriors. We have extolled the preacher, the statesman, the capitalist, and the humanitarian, but until recently we reserved our highest status and most respected medals for soldiers. To generals who won the greatest glory. Outnumbered and short of rifles, Andrew Jackson defeated the British professional soldiers at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815, losing only a dozen men while the English casualties numbered over two thousand. After Admiral George Dewey defeated the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay in 1898, New Yorkers built him a triumphal arch at Washington Square and Americans named their babies, racehorses, and yachts after him. Following World War II, General George Marshall—chief of staff during the Allied victory and architect of the financial plan to resuscitate Western Europe—became the most admired man in America. Generals George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Zachary Taylor, Ulysses S. Grant, and Dwight Eisenhower all became president.

In America, foot soldiers as well as generals are heroes. After World War I, we built the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. In Arlington National Cemetery, the tomb was intended to honor the nation's soldiers who had been denied glory and rendered anonymous.

For its living hero, Americans turned to a Tennessee farmer, Alvin York, who found himself behind the German lines on a foggy morning in 1918 when his patrol came under heavy machine-gun fire and half his men were shot. York alone—armed with only a rifle—attacked, killing over 20 Germans and capturing 132. York became an American hero because he had protected his men and had shot skillfully, but he garnered even further admiration when, in the spring of 1919, the Saturday Evening Post revealed that York, a pacifist, had gone to war reluctantly.

Reluctant Warriors
America typically has made heroes out of soldiers who do not like war. The colonists praised George Washington when he defeated the British but were relieved when he gave
up his sword at the end of the Revolutionary War. The founding fathers, fearful of a military dictatorship, wrote into the Constitution that only Congress—not the military—could declare war and that the president—a civilian—would be the commander in chief. Unlike the ancient Romans, we do not glorify war. We have, for the most part, always been reluctant warriors.

In 1899, Roosevelt wrote Rough Riders, a description of his military career in the Spanish-American War. In it, he described Princeton polo players and Arizona cowboys becoming brothers through battle: their training in Florida for the attack on Cuba, the heat of combat, and the bravery of wounded soldiers who fall without complaint and refuse to retreat to field hospitals. In Rough Riders, there are no reluctant warriors. Roosevelt put into words an ethos atypical in American history and antithetical to the views espoused by such esteemed Americans as William James and Andrew Carnegie, an ethos that temporarily captured the imagination of many Americans before World War I. With the memory of the Civil War growing dim at the turn of the century, Rough Riders provided the nation with new warrior heroes.

In June of 1914 the Great War began. In the cities of Europe, citizens cheered and young men flocked to recruiting stations. Everyone believed the war would be short and glorious. But the impersonal, seemingly senseless, and catastrophic losses of trench warfare shattered the beliefs that man is rational and inherently good and that progress is inevitable, influencing a whole generation of European and American intellectuals.

Before he died in France at age twenty-five in 1918, Wilfred Owen wrote antitwar poems like Dulce et Decorum Est, describing the horror of a gas attack and mocking the Roman notion that it is sweet and decorous to die for your country. In Ernest Hemingway’s A Farewell to Arms, Frederick Henry, a medic on the Italian front, concludes that he was “embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious, and sacrifice

---

Eugenia Ginzburg

It is 1935. Eugenia Ginzburg is a teacher, writer, mother, and Communist, proud and idealistic, a believer in truth and justice. It is a bad year to be proud and idealistic, a bad year to be a believer in truth and justice. The Great Purge has begun. Joseph Stalin is determined to rid Russia of the proud and independent.

Over the next four years Stalin will murder political rivals, decimate the Communist party, execute generals, purge his own secret police, and send to prison camps poets, artists, historians, priests, peasants, and countless citizens who happen to live next door to a jealous neighbor or to have the wrong friend.

Because her professor is a Trotskyite and she refuses to denounce him, Ginzburg becomes suspect and loses her teaching position and party card. She repeatedly returns to Moscow to protest. In 1937 she is called to party headquarters, turned over to the secret police, accused of belonging to a terrorist organization, and thrown into the Russian prison system—the gulag. During her 18 years in the gulag, her husband will disappear and her youngest son will die of starvation in Leningrad.

Ginzburg goes from Kazan’s Black Lake prison to Yaroslavl. To ward off despair, she taps out messages to other prisoners through thick stone walls, talks out loud, and thinks of everything she has ever read. Insisting that solitary confinement can make one “kinder, more intelligent and perceptive,” she struggles for serenity. Finally out of solitary confinement, she is transported by boxcar from Vladivostok on the Pacific Ocean and ferried to the Elgen labor camp in eastern Siberia. There she endures night blindness, a diet of putrid fish, scurvy, frostbite, lice, malaria, attacks by criminals, threats of rape. Ginzburg is tempted to suicide, fears for her sanity, and collapses from dysentery.

How does Ginzburg survive? Through friendship. As she is being transferred out of Black Lake prison, a man taps through the wall, “I wish you courage and pride.” When she can’t stop thinking about her dead son and collapses in despair, her cellmate strokes her head and recites passages from the book of Job.

She survives through poetry. In a cold punishment cell, as rats scuttle past her, she recites Blok, Nekrasov, and Pasternak and writes poems, “Silence” and “The Punishment Cell.” In a crowded boxcar in the middle of Siberia, she recites poetry by the hour to divert her fellow prisoners who are dying from thirst. The guards hear her and are furious because they think someone has smuggled books into the boxcar. They stop the train and search for books, then demand proof of Ginzburg’s amazing memory, insisting that she recite Eugene Onegin and promising to give the women water if she can perform. For three hours Ginzburg recites Pushkin.

Refusing to denounce other party members, Ginzburg survives by having a clear conscience. She survives by refusing to think about her children, by escaping physical torture, by luck. Ginzburg also survives through insatiable curiosity: “My intense curiosity about life in all its manifestations—even in its debasement, cruelty, and madness—sometimes made me forget my troubles.” And she survives through defiant optimism. In a tragic world, she convinces herself that suffering offers insight. She almost succumbs to despair but always pulls back. She possesses an unusual gift of appreciation—whether of a park glimpsed through a prison window, a sunset, or prison camp children. Her misfortunes brought forth nobility. Ginzburg had a vision of greatness—the Russian literary giants—that sustained her in crisis.

---

—PG.
They fought Japan and Germany without sentimentality and returned home gratefully, chastened by the blitz, Auschwitz, Hiroshima, and civilian deaths unprecedented in human history.

The Legacy of Vietnam
Since World War II, a constellation of factors—primary among them the Vietnam War—has given rise to a skepticism about warrior heroes that persists even today, especially among many young Americans. Following the carnage of the two world wars came the conflicts in Korea and Vietnam. Korea ended in a draw, Vietnam in defeat. Vietnam was our longest war, our first televised war, and our most bitterly contested war.

In an unprecedented way, American writers and filmmakers have removed romance and glamour from war. Saving Private Ryan, which won Best Director and other Academy Awards in 1998, is in part a tribute to the soldiers who fought on the beaches of Normandy and liberated villages in France, but the first 20 minutes of combat footage is so graphic that students have told me it turned them into pacifists.

After Vietnam, American history textbooks gave less space to military heroes and more to reformers and humanitarians. In literature classes, students learned about war through antiwar novels, like Erich Maria Remarque’s All Quiet on the Western Front, Joseph Heller’s Catch-22, and Kurt Vonnegut’s Slaughterhouse-Five. As the curriculum in American schools became profoundly antiwar, it also became antimilitary, making it difficult for students to honor the men who fought and died for America and hard for them to think about volunteering for the armed forces.

The status of the American warrior has never been high in times of peace. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the retreat of communism, the American military lost its enemy of 40 years and started to downsize. Salaries lost pace with inflation, recruits became harder to find. As world trade expanded and democracy spread, nationalism seemed less important and globetrotting capitalists became more powerful than generals. But the September 2001 terrorist attack on America provided a new, if shadowy, enemy; and a nation that once felt secure at the end of the Cold War turned with fear and gratitude to the warrior heroes whom, until recently, it had taken for granted.

Talking to Students Today About Heroes
As I travel around the country making the case for heroism, I urge students to look for heroes but not to succumb to hero worship, to cast their nets wide, to look beyond the athletic field, the movie screen, and the recording studio, and to let some sort of grandeur be a factor in their selection. The trick, I suggest, is to be amused by popular culture but not seduced, to know the difference between heroes and charlatans, to pick worthy heroes. If they have trouble believing in heroes, I ask them to find heroic qualities in different people and to celebrate heroic moments.

I offer examples of heroic qualities. Heroes set the bar high. In the 1950s we were told that no one could ever run a (Continued on page 46)
HEROISM

(Continued from page 15)

four-minute mile. Yet Roger Bannister trained in secret, ran up and down the hills of Wales, and proved the world wrong. Heroes take risks. In June of 1940, Charles de Gaulle saw France vanquished by Adolf Hitler. His colleagues prudently surrendered; de Gaulle refused. Like Winston Churchill, he fought when there seemed no hope. Heroes are altruistic. Albert Schweitzer could have comfortably remained an organist and scholar. Instead, in his thirties, he remade himself into a missionary doctor. Heroes act on their deepest convictions. Eleanor Roosevelt and Florence Nightingale were born privileged and told to stay home. Yet they defied convention and became tough-minded humanitarians.

In mounting my defense of the hero, I stress that great men and women have shaped America as much as social forces and that ideals have been as influential in our history as economic self-interest.

While I describe signs of the times, my message is not that we are declining and decadent, like Rome in the fifth century B.C. I am patriotic and ardently believe in democracy and capitalism. We so love to criticize that we forget what we do well.

My message is not to turn back the clock and embrace the heroes of the 19th century—heroes who tended to be white, male, and privileged. Nor do I advocate the 1950s, when John Wayne sat tall in his saddle, Mickey Mantle sped around the bases, Ozzie and Harriet Nelson smiled on television, and we did not debate whether Columbus was an explorer or a killer. The 1950s tolerated a fair amount of hypocrisy and injustice in the middle of affluence. I believe in information, choices, and honesty. The heart of my message to students is that they learn to detect greatness in the midst of all their choices and information.

At a private school in New York City, I put my definition of hero on the blackboard: a person of extraordinary achievement, courage, and greatness of soul. "How can you argue that Lincoln was great-souled?" asks a student. "Abraham Lincoln was a racist." "Why was Lincoln a hero rather just an ordinary politician?"

Suffering from melancholy, Lincoln forced himself out of gloom with humor and hard work. When the Mexican War started, he protested, fully knowing it was political suicide. And when the majority of Americans were willing to extend slavery into the western territories, he denounced the plan as evil. With consummate political skill, Lincoln maneuvered the South into firing the first shot in the Civil War and kept a divided cabinet and fragmented Union from splitting apart. Aware that a president in a democracy cannot be too far ahead of the voters who put him in office, he insisted that the primary purpose of the war must be the preservation of the Union. He listened to abolitionists like Frederick Douglass and Ralph Waldo Emerson and—I believe—sympathized with them. When the moment was right, he made the war against the southern rebellion into a war for human freedom, working behind the scenes to assure the passage of an amendment that would free the slaves.

"Do you know," I always ask students, "that Lincoln commuted the death sentences of hundreds of deserters and Native Americans sentenced to be hanged by a Minnesota court? Have you read the Second Inaugural Address or his letter to Mrs. Bixby, who lost two of her sons in battle?" I try to explain that in their eagerness to find reality and expose hypocrisy, they have exchanged the myth of Lincoln the Saint for the myth of Lincoln the Racist.

Students rarely mention soldiers as heroes. When selecting public heroes, students tend to pick humanitarians. Interestingly enough, they rarely mention scientists or mathematicians. I have corresponded with a teacher in Philadelphia who has built his curriculum around scientist heroes. He believes great scientists should be as venerated as baseball players. Without radar and code breakers, he reminded me, America could have lost to Hitler.

I have found that many students are inclined to moral and aesthetic relativism. They do not want to be thought judgmental. As one teacher put it, many think one action is as good as another. "Who is to say Mozart is any better than Marilyn Manson?" "How can you say Shakespeare is better than Danielle Steel? Everything is interpretation." Several students have referred to my condemnation of Adolf Hitler as "just an opinion."

In a school in San Francisco, students were studying behavioral psychologist B. F. Skinner, prompting a long discussion about heroes and altruism. Skinner stresses that we are powerfully molded by our environment and thus have little free will, that we are conditioned like rats and pigeons. But only with the belief that human beings have free will and the capacity for generous impulses does heroism become possible.

At an all girls’ school in Connecticut, a student asked me whether I had read Albert Camus’ The Fall. Camus, she volunteered, believes that all people are selfish. She had been wondering as she listened to the list of great deeds in my talk whether at bottom all heroes weren't just selfish. Undoubtedly, their motives are mixed and human beings are very complicated, but, I asked, could selfishness have driven Harriet Tubman into Maryland to rescue slaves she did not know?
Students will often name a hero and link that person to one trait they admire. “Dennis Rodman is my hero. He brought himself up from nothing.” “Can’t Marilyn Manson be considered a hero because he defied society, like Tom Paine and Martin Luther King, Jr.?”

These one-dimensional definitions surface frequently. I ask these students to consider a more complex definition. What else does a man who has brought himself up from nothing do with his life? Of course athletes can be heroes, but shouldn’t they have something more than extraordinary skill to qualify? Is defying society always the right thing to do?

The founding fathers, the 19th-century reformers, and the civil rights protesters were all rebels in their time. Should we challenge our heroes? Of course. A healthy skepticism is necessary for a healthy society. Irreverence among the young is inevitable and in some ways desirable. But, I argue, irreverence, skepticism, and mockery permeate our scholarship and culture to such a degree that it is difficult for young people to have public heroes.

Teachers often ask me what schools can do to encourage a belief in heroism. For hundreds of years, a goal of American education was to teach about heroes and exemplary lives. Schools automatically offered young people heroes. How else to combat the ambiguities and temptations of adult life? Where else to find the good to be imitated and the evil to be avoided? And so young people read Plutarch’s Lives and were saturated with the pious maxims of their McGuffey’s “Readers” and inculcated with the triumphs of Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln.

This tradition has ended, and in its place we now offer lives that are seriously flawed, juvenile novels that emphasize “reality,” and a history that is uncertain and blemished. In an information-rich world, we need to guide our young people to a more realistic definition of hero and bring balance to the way past heroes are evaluated.

To counteract radical revisionist history, a moderate triumphalism would highlight America’s humanitarianism, our genius at invention and production, and our fundamental and ever-increasing commitment to equality. A moderate triumphalism would admit the mistakes America had made but insist that America learns from its mistakes and takes corrective action. From Wounded Knee, we learned. From the Homestead strike and the Triangle Sweat Shop fire, we learned. From the Treaty of Versailles and Vietnam. A moderate triumphalism would honor heroes like Chief Joseph, the brilliant strategist and magnanimous leader of the Nez Perce; would look into all corners of America’s population for heroes; and would expand the pantheon beyond explorers, soldiers, and generals. But it would not automatically denigrate heroes of the past because they were privileged or powerful, because they fought and explored, or because they did not surmount every prejudice of their era.

Why Heroes?

Heroes make our lives more interesting. With heroes, we confront crisis and experience terror. We discover new lands and help the sick. We write memorable poems and compose stirring symphonies. With heroes, we experience the extraordinary and expand our notion of what it means to be human. With heroes, we escape the mundane.

We hear Winston Churchill defy Adolph Hitler and Franklin Roosevelt denounce Japan in 1941. We voyage with Captain Cook to Tahiti; with Florence Nightingale, we sail to the Crimea. We watch Mother Teresa comfort the dying. We are in prison with Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Like Sir Isaac Newton, we explain the universe.

Heroes are fascinating and puzzling. What made Abraham Lincoln rise from poverty and obscurity to become a successful lawyer? In love with life and books and conversation, what made Sir Thomas More defy Henry VIII and die for the Catholic Church? Why did the villagers of Le Chambon risk their lives and hide Jews from the Germans? Heroes make us interested in the mystery of bravery and goodness.

Heroes instruct us in greatness. When Nelson Mandela leaves his South African cell without rancor and invites his guards to his inauguration, we are instructed in magnanimity. When Mother Teresa leaves her comfortable convent school and moves to Calcutta, we learn about compassion. Hearing that James Stockdale spent eight years in a North Vietnamese prison and is not broken, we understand bravery.

Heroes encourage us to search for our better selves. Shrewdly, George Orwell wrote, “There is one part of you that wants to be a hero or a saint, but another part of you is a little fat man who sees very clearly the advantages of staying alive with a whole skin.” When in 1936 he fought fascism in Spain, Orwell repudiated smallness and safety.

Heroes triumph but often fail. Before the Civil War, Ulysses S. Grant was an alcoholic, William Sherman chronically depressed. It took years for Pierre and Marie Curie to separate radium from pitchblende; months before Ann Sullivan could communicate with Helen Keller.

John F. Kennedy was moved by the courage of John Quincy Adams. For guidance, Martin Luther King, Jr. looked to Gandhi; Gandhi looked to Tolstoy; Tolstoy read Thoreau. In all serious endeavors, we depend on exemplary lives and link ourselves to loftiness. We are fortified by examples of resolution and high achievement and bravery.

But heroes are not perfect. “The one cruel fact about
heroes,” comments La Rochefoucauld, “is that they are made of flesh and blood.” We should search for greatness but not be surprised by flaws.

Aware of flaws, we can still admire. Clara Barton may have been arrogant, but she single-handedly founded the Red Cross. Admittedly ethnocentric, Albert Schweitzer cured thousands of sick Africans. Sir Thomas More sacrificed his life for the Catholic Church but authorized the burning of Protestants.

“Times of terror are times of heroism,” said Emerson. America’s new war reminded us of one kind of heroism, the brave deed, and of one kind of hero, the rescuer. My hope is that it will also encourage us to become more interested in past and present public heroes and that it will revive the qualities of admiration, gratitude, and awe too long absent from our culture. In a 1929 essay, “The Aims of Education,” philosopher Alfred North Whitehead wrote, “Moral education is impossible apart from the habitual vision of greatness.” What can we do to renew and sustain America’s vision of greatness?

We can make the case for all kinds of heroes, to show how they have transformed America and how they can lift and improve our lives. We can honor our soldiers in peace as well as in war. We can look in new ways at old heroes and into the obscure corners of history for new ones.

We can look back and learn from an age when the ideology of heroism was influential and imitation of the admirable was the norm. Immersed in the present, we need to pay more attention to our past. At the same time, we need to realize that a more mature society requires a more subtle and complex presentation of heroism—one that includes a recognition of weaknesses and reversals along with an appreciation of virtues and triumphs. And we need to recognize that an egalitarian multicultural society requires that the pantheon of heroes be expanded.

We can challenge the times and be combative. In a bureaucratic age, celebrate individual achievement; in an egalitarian age, praise genius; when everyone is a victim, stress personal responsibility. In addition to popular culture, high culture. In a celebrity age, caution young people about worshiping fame and beauty; in a society mesmerized by athletes, recall the moral language of sport.

We can teach our children and grandchildren that character is as important as intellect, that idealism is superior to cynicism, that wisdom is more important than information. We can teach them to be realistic and affirming, to see life not only as it is but also as it ought to be. Heroes are a response to a deep and powerful impulse, the need to emulate and idealize. “The search after the great,” said Emerson, “is the dream of youth and the most serious occupation of mankind.”

I cannot imagine a world without heroes, a world without genius and nobility, without exalted enterprise, high purpose, and transcendent courage, without risk and suffering. It would be gray and flat and dull. Who would show us the way or set the mark? Who would inspire us and console us? Who would energize us and keep us from the darkness? 

COGNITIVE SCIENTIST
(Continued from page 33)
entering the country is vaccinated against cholera (Cheng & Holyoak, 1985).

About which travelers do you need more information? You need to check the “entering” person (to ensure that he has the cholera vaccination), and you need to check the “flu mumps” person (to ensure that he is in transit).

This question has exactly the same formal structure (Modus Tollens) as the previous problem, but people are much more likely to get it right. Why? Because this problem has a concrete structure that makes sense—it doesn’t use letters and numbers—and the rule about disease and entry is sensible, not arbitrary. The idea that the human mind prefers to consider novel concepts in concrete ways should ring true to every teacher. When presented with a new abstract idea or formula, students clamber for examples.

So How Does Inflexible Knowledge Become Flexible?
You can probably think of many instances where your own knowledge seems quite flexible. For example, if you know how to find the area of a rectangle, that knowledge is probably generalizable; you can apply it to any rectangle, and the formula is not tied to the specific examples in which you learned it. You think of using the formula in novel situations, such as determining the total square footage of a hallway, kitchen, and dining room. Why is this knowledge flexible?

Knowledge tends to be inflexible when it is first learned. As you continue to work with the knowledge, you gain expertise; the knowledge is no longer organized around surface forms, but rather is organized around deep structure. That principle was nicely captured in an experiment by Michellen and Chi (1981). She gave experts psychologists and novices a set of physics problems and asked them to put them into categories of their own devising. The novices categorized the problems based on the surface features of the problems—that is, they formed one category for problems involving inclined planes, another for problems involving springs, and so on. The experts, however, created categories based on physical principles: one category for conservation of energy, another for Newton’s first law of motion, and so on. Similar experiments, using knowledge of dinosaurs, have likewise shown that experts’ memories are organized differently than novices’, whether the experts are children or adults.

Inflexible Knowledge in Perspective
The examples above should put this problem of inflexibility in context. Understanding the deep structure of a large domain defines expertise, and that is an important goal of education. But if students fall short of this, it certainly doesn’t