"Let Us Now Praise...?" Rethinking Heroes and Role Models in an Egalitarian Age.

Citation

Levinson, Meira. 2009. "Let Us Now Praise...?" Rethinking Heroes and Role Models in an Egalitarian Age. In Philosophy of Education in the Era of Globalization, ed. Yvonne Raley and Gerhard Preyer, 129-161. New York, NY: Routledge.

Permanent link

http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:8454064

Terms of Use

Share Your Story

"Let Us Now Praise…?"
Rethinking Heroes and Role Models in an Egalitarian Age
Meira Levinson
Harvard Graduate School of Education
DRAFT   DRAFT   DRAFT   DRAFT

Martin Luther King, Jr., is an American hero. Everyone agrees with this. In a recent Gallup poll, for example, he came in second only to Mother Teresa as the most admired person from the twentieth century (Newport 2006). He and Christopher Columbus are the only two non-presidents to have national holidays designated in their honor. Last year, a full two-thirds of high school students surveyed in a nationally-representative sample named Martin Luther King as one of the five "most famous Americans," easily vaulting him into first place on the list. A parallel survey of adults similarly earned King one-third of the vote, putting him second only to Benjamin Franklin (Wineburg and Monte-Sano 2008, although it is important to note that respondents were explicitly told to exclude presidents and their wives from the possible list of "most famous"). These results presumably reflect, at least in part, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s ubiquity in American history textbooks that cover the period, every U.S. civics book, literally thousands of trade books for children and adults, and I would wager in almost every classroom and media outlet across the country during Black History Month. There is little doubt that Martin Luther King is widely taught and recognized as an "American hero" (Bond 1993).

What are the civic implications of Americans' recognition and elevation of King as a heroic figure? These are much harder to discern. The techniques used by King and his colleagues in the civil rights movement are arguably moribund, despite the fact that our country faces a multitude of ills (and commits a multitude of sins) that threaten justice, equality, and liberty as much now as fifty years ago. Civil disobedience, collective action among thousands of citizens for a sustained period of time, nonviolent protest—these are evident neither in school

1

curricula, which tend to treat King as a towering figure who single-handedly led Americans into

"the promised land," nor in American civic or political practice in the early 21st century.[1] Young

people (and probably adults, too) fail to recognize even that they could carry forward King's

work in any but the most anodyne ways. Among the thousand or so middle school students that I

taught over the course of about a decade, for example, almost all expressed fervent admiration

for Martin Luther King while never thinking to try to put his techniques into action. They would

speak generally of King's perseverance, his standing up for what he believed in, his willingness

to sacrifice himself to the cause, and other such platitudes. But they rarely if ever referenced his

broader civic leadership, or his empowerment of others to advance the causes for which he and

they stood. Furthermore, even the sanitized and "antiseptic" (Bond 1993) personal

characteristics they did identify did not motivate them to act in a different way on a day-to-day

basis. This is admiration devoid of emulation.

Why does this matter? Why should it matter that at least one—and I would actually argue

many more—of America's "most famous" heroes lives on in words but not in deeds? In part, I

think it matters because our democracy would be stronger, and we as citizens would be better, if

we did emulate King in addition to venerating him. I think that young people as developing

citizens *should* learn about the power of collective action, such as by learning and practicing the

techniques for identifying and working with allies on behalf of a common cause. I also think that

we would do well to recognize that the goals that King fought so tirelessly to achieve are not yet

fully realized, and to feel an obligation to promote those goals ourselves. It is no diminution of

his heroic stature to admit that the struggle needs to continue if his and others' hard-fought gains

are to be sustained. In this respect too, it is disturbing and even a bit bizarre that so many

---

[1] It is possible that Barack Obama's presidency will change this, but it is way too soon to know or tell.

Americans profess deep admiration for King while failing actually to work to advance the causes for which he fought.

On the other hand, there are some ways in which our worshiping King in words but not in deeds are perfectly acceptable. Heroes are frequently referred to as symbols of what people or a nation identify with, care about, or see themselves as standing for. Rev. Peter Gomes remarks, for example, that "a discussion about heroes and heroines is essentially an exercise in self-discovery and cultural introspection; and in choosing to honor certain persons as heroes and certain actions as heroic, we invest those persons and actions with ideals that we ourselves value and admire" (Gomes 2002: xi). In this respect, the fact that we hold up Martin Luther King—a liberal African American who crusaded for social and economic justice, civil rights, and racial equality, among other goals—as an American hero is itself worth celebrating.[2] Whether or not we actually emulate him, the fact that we hold him up as a symbol of what's good about our country is itself a valuable good.

The purpose of this article is to delve more deeply into the complicated network of relationships among heroes, role models, and democratic civic education in the US in the early 21st century. In this article, I argue that while heroes have historically served many purposes in educating young citizens and shaping and sustaining the *civitas*, these purposes are frequently being lost or even undermined because of heroes' diminishing stature and changing roles in the United States today. Much ink has been spilled bemoaning the loss of heroes in the American contemporary imagination. Arthur Schlesinger complains, for example, that "Ours is an age without heroes….Today no one bestrides our narrow world like a colossus; we have no giants" (Schlesinger Jr. 1968 [1958]: 341). Charles I. Glicksberg concurs, "What is wrong with their age

---

[2] I am passing over here whether our selective civic memory about his principles and practices is itself some cause for concern or even shame.

is that it has lost its faith in the greatness or the capacity for greatness of man" (Glicksberg 1968: 357; see also Boorstin 1968 [1962]; Porpora 1996; Gibbon 2002). Unlike these authors, I do not bemoan this state of affairs: in part because it's not entirely true, as the example of Martin Luther King shows;[3] in part because I think our country is stronger, and certainly history is more accurate, when we recognize and discuss individuals' complexities, nuances, and even failings; in part because it's just not worth fighting what we cannot change; and in part because we can achieve the same civic goals for which we used to use heroes in other ways. But to do so, we need to be thoughtful and intentional, and I would argue that this is been missing in much democratic civic education both taught in schools and promoted through the media.

The rest of the article is structured as follows: first, I examine the various reasons that people have given for needing heroes, creating heroes, and/or teaching about heroes. I focus in particular on the civic uses of heroes, and give examples of how civic educators in the past used heroes to advance these purposes. In the second section, I consider whether these uses of heroes are appropriate for democratic civic education in the United States in the early 21st century. This question has two components: (a) Are the goals themselves that heroes were used to promote actually worthy of democratic civic education? and (b) To the extent that they are, is it possible in this day and age to use heroes to achieve such goals? Question (a) is essentially a normative and political question, while (b) is essentially a sociological, psychological, and pedagogical question. In the third section, finally, I consider how we might achieve worthwhile goals of democratic civic education in 21st century America without the widespread use of heroes, as well as highlighting where and how heroes still can play an effective role in democratic civic education. With respect to the latter, I suggest that order truly to learn from heroes, students

---

[3] Daniel Boorstin wryly notes in this regard, "The universal lament of aging men in all epochs…is that greatness has become obsolete" (Boorstin 1968 [1962]: 326).

need to learn more about their techniques—their step-by-step mechanisms for achievement. As we teach this, we and our students will discover that many heroes are public symbols for the important work and efforts of many "behind the scenes" individuals. In this vein, I will also argue that we should spend at least as much time in school helping students learn about these "behind the scenes" participants and activists, particularly in students' own communities, as we spend studying the "heroes" in the front. Sustained study of and interaction with these "ordinary role models," I suggest, can take us a long way toward motivating simultaneous admiration and emulation—and thus overcome the paradox with which I opened this essay. I conclude with some brief reflections on the potential implications of Barack Obama's presidency with regard to these issues.

PART I: Ten Civic Functions of Heroes

Society's elevation and recognition of heroes may serve many civic functions—at least ten, by my count. In particular, social and civic recognition and elevation of heroes may:

1. provide models for emulation by citizens.

2. impart and reinforce common civic values and norms.

3. establish touchstones for the qualities citizens should expect of elected officials and other civic leaders.

4. teach citizens their place by contrasting their own ordinariness with heroes' extraordinariness.

5. inspire patriotism.

6. unify the country via establishment of a civil religion.

7. unify the country via establishment and reinforcement of symbolic, inclusive membership.

8. combat historical fatalism and thus inspire potential leaders to grasp the reins of power and citizens in general to become civically engaged.

9. motivate citizens to look for and realize greatness within themselves.

10. symbolize human possibility.

Although these functions are often conflated in theory and overlapping in practice, it is important to tease out their conceptual and empirical distinctions in order to understand what we have potentially lost in losing common civic heroes, and hence also in order to reflect sensibly on how we can overcome or at least minimize those aspects of this loss that are troubling. In the rest of this section, therefore, I explain each of these civic functions of heroes and provide evidence of their historic use in civic education inside and outside schools.

1. Provide models for emulation by citizens

One of the most basic functions that the public elevation of heroes has served in the past—and I will argue in Part II that "role models" have taken over today—is that of providing models for emulation. We valorize, and teach our children about, heroes in order to inspire ourselves and our children to behave like them and thus be better people in general—and from a civic perspective, better citizens in particular. Thus, "[t]extbook writers typically used statesmen like George Washington as exemplars of republican character" (Tyack 2001: 337). A typical nineteenth century school recitation taught, for example:

> Perhaps the reason little folks
> Are sometimes great when they grow taller,
> Is just because, like Washington,
> They do their best when they are smaller. (Wecter 1941: 99)

By engaging "in a constant striving to live up to" such heroes (Kelly 2003: 89), young citizens practice and imbibe specifically republican and/or democratic civic virtues. Nor is this confined

to the early days of our republic, as the 1954 textbook *Civics for Americans* strikingly

exemplifies. It quotes a naturalized citizen in a chapter on naturalization and the benefits of

American citizenship:

> [T]his George Washington, who died long before I was born, was like a king in greatness, and he and I were Fellow Citizens….It thrilled me to realize what sudden greatness had fallen on me; and at the same time it sobered me, as with a sense of responsibility I strove to conduct myself as befitted a Fellow Citizen. (Clark et al. 1954)

There is a clear message here, reinforced throughout this textbook and others from the same time

period, that good citizenship is a common responsibility resting on shared civic virtues; as our

greatest citizens (such as Washington) did, so should we try to do in our own small ways. Dixon

Wecter similarly remarks rather ruefully in his landmark work on American heroes, he and his

schoolmates were constantly taught, "if we worked very hard and took infinite pains, and always

did our duty, we might become little Washingtons." This is a two-sided sword, to be sure: "He is

therefore a silent reproach to our shortcomings. Some of us, especially in boyhood, were inclined

to resent the fact" (Wecter 1941: 130). In Part III, I will discuss the risks of this approach, and

consider how alternative uses of heroes and role models may ameliorate such resentment and

potential attendant disengagement.

2. Impart and reinforce common civic values and norms

Closely related to the first goal of using heroes to provide models for civic emulation is

that of establishing and promoting the civic values, norms, and virtues that are intended to tie the

nation or *civitas* together. As I noted in the Introduction, each nation's heroes are often thought

to provide a window into understanding the nation's soul: what it values and emulates, and how

it conceives of itself—what it believes it stands for. Thus, Wecter lauds Washington, Franklin,

Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Robert E. Lee, Theodore Roosevelt, and others as those "from

whom we have hewn our symbols of government, our ideas of what is most prizeworthy as 'American,'" linking them as tangible symbols of American values with "touchstones like the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution" (Wecter 1941: viii). As many authors have noted, this is in large part a constructive, even artificial process. Thus, Jackson symbolizes democratization and populism, not Native American genocide or anti-intellectualism, even though these may equally accurately capture both the man and some foundational American values. On the other side, the "heroification" (Loewen 1995: 19) process has similarly turned Martin Luther King into a symbol of America's on-going "dream" of equality and diversity, rather than its persistent racism or militarism, against which King protested so mightily.[4] (See Kammen 1991 for a monumentally comprehensive account of this process throughout U.S. history.)

This process of national civic self-conceptualization and self-actualization through hero identification and elevation is made transparent when one looks at the treatment of national heroes in civics textbooks. Youth are explicitly instructed in the meaning they should ascribe to such heroes, and thus in the values they should ascribe to their country. Thus, *Civics for Citizens* (1974) instructs students about a photo of Mount Rushmore that it honors "four great Americans who were dedicated to the American ideal of freedom" (Dimond and Pflieger 1974: 7). In the same vein, *Magruders American Government* (1953) shows a picture of students literally dwarfed by the statue of Thomas Jefferson at the Jefferson Memorial. [See photo #1 at end.] The caption reads,

---

[4] As Sam Wineburg and Chauncey Monte-Sano put it, "We doubt that many high school students in an all-white classroom in Montana (or anywhere else) would recognize the King who told David Halberstam in 1967 'that the vast majority of white Americans are racists, either consciously or unconsciously'; the King who linked American racism to American militarism, calling both, along with economic exploitation, the 'triple evils' of American society; the King who characterized the bloodbath in Vietnam as a 'bitter, colossal contest for supremacy' with America as the 'supreme culprit'; or the King who in a speech two months before his assassination accused America of committing 'more war crimes almost than any nation in the world.'" (Wineburg and Monte-Sano 2008: 1201)

8

These students in the Jefferson Memorial, Washington, D. C., find inspiration from one of our greatest patriots. Jefferson believed that all men were created equal, that men should make their governments, and that men should enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, and of religion. In his sixty years of public service, Jefferson stamped his personality and ideals indelibly upon our country. (McClenaghan 1953: 23)

In this case, the author drives home the point by not just telling the reader what Jefferson himself stood for, but further emphasizing that these ideals are "indelibly" stamped upon the country as well. Linking this use of hero identification with the purpose of inspiring emulation, the 1956 civics textbook *Youth Faces American Citizenship* similarly pictures Lincoln towering over visiting high school students, explaining, "These young men are rededicating themselves to the democratic ideals for which Lincoln stood" (Alilunas and Sayre 1956: 384). Here Lincoln's heroic figure provides both civic self-definition and a model for citizens' personal emulation.

3. Establish touchstones for the qualities citizens should expect of elected officials and other civic leaders

In addition to imparting the values that define the country in general, the identification and elevation of civic heroes can also serve to teach citizens the values and characteristics that ideally define their civic leaders in particular. In this respect, civic heroes may not necessarily be models of emulation for all citizens. Rather, the implication is that such heroes are "the kind of people" who should be running the country. Thus, the elevation of military heroes may serve to teach citizens that their elected leaders should also have served in the military, or at least demonstrate the virtues of strength, fearlessness, and discipline that military heroes often possess. Conversely, if young people are taught about heroes who fought injustice, bucked the system, worked to incorporate the disenfranchised, and so forth, they may similarly learn to look for civic leaders who possess these virtues or embody these ideals.

A corollary of this approach is the potential demeaning or civic exclusion of those who are not hero-ized. If certain kinds of people—women or non-whites, say—are *not* elevated as heroes, then the implicit (or even explicit) message is that such people are also not appropriate civic leaders. In response to a vast array of pressure groups, contemporary textbook publishers are now exquisitely sensitive to this concern about the exclusionary power of symbolism, and thus focus intensely on making sure that the heroes that students learn about are visibly diverse and multicultural. White men are now almost never featured consecutively in sidebars or photos in civics (or any other) textbooks; rather, every white man or other apparent "mainstream" hero is followed by a visible ethnic or racial minority, woman, naturalized citizen, disabled person, or other "multicultural" hero (see, e.g., Davis et al. 2005; Hartley and Vincent 2005; McClenaghan 2003; Wolfson 2005; Glencoe/McGraw-Hill 2005) In this case, the aim is to provide multiple touchstones for civic leaders—touchstones for each racial and ethnic group, both genders, etc.— in order to inspire an inclusive conception of desirable civic leaders. (I come back to this issue in I.7, below.)

4. Teach citizens their place by contrasting their ordinariness with heroes' extraordinariness

At its extreme, this elevation of heroes as touchstones for civic leaders but not for "ordinary" citizens can result in the antidemocratic lesson that ordinary citizens in fact should not be involved in governance or civic leadership at all. Thomas Carlyle expresses this conviction throughout *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History*:

> We come now to the last form of Heroism; that which we call Kingship. The Commander over Men; he to whose will our wills are to be subordinated, and loyally surrender themselves, and find their welfare in doing so, may be reckoned the most important of Great Men. He is practically the summary for us of *all* the various figures of Heroism; Priest, Teacher, whatsoever of earthly or of spiritual dignity we can fancy to reside in a man, embodies itself here, to *command* over us, to furnish us with constant practical teaching, to tell us for the day and hour what we are to *do.* (Carlyle 1893: 217)

Here, heroes are specifically granted powers and rights of civic leadership that ordinary human beings do not possess or deserve. Furthermore, ordinary human beings are not encouraged to develop heroic traits, to aspire to the virtues or powers possessed by "Great Men" such as Cromwell or Napoleon. According to this view, most people are not capable of leadership insofar as good leadership necessitates heroism, and we wouldn't want them to try—especially since society would be a shambles if we had more than a few heroic civic leaders in any generation. "Greatness is hard for common humanity to bear….great men live dangerously. They introduce extremes into existence" (Schlesinger Jr. 1968 [1958]: 342). Thus, in this approach heroes are taught as people to be admired and even feared, but definitely not be emulated in aspiration or practice.

Insofar as civic leaders are considered to have qualitatively different virtues from ordinary citizens, another approach to civic education is simply to eliminate heroes from the curriculum at all. Joseph Moreau explains the perspective of a textbook author from 1885 thusly: "The problem with colorful stories of past heroes, argued Alexander Johnston of Princeton, was that the 'mass of pupils' had little chance to emulate a John Smith or Pilgrim Father in contemporary, industrial America. They needed 'to learn from history the simply and homely duties of good citizenship'" (Moreau 2003: 50). The practical implications of this approach may be found in the many 1950s civics textbooks that devoted full chapters to teaching the civic importance of having "a pleasing personality," being a "good date," and other such duties. [See photo #2 below.] This approach sidesteps the obviously anti-democratic implications of Carlyle's arguments while nonetheless maintaining a stark separation between the heroism of the elite and the more mundane virtues required of the rest of us.

11

5. Inspire patriotism

A fifth purpose of identifying, elevating, and teaching about heroes can be to inspire patriotism. As Noah Webster argued, "Every child in America should be acquainted with his own country….As soon as he opens his lips, he should rehearse the history of his own country; he should lisp the praise of liberty and of those illustrious heroes and statesmen who have wrought a revolution in her favor" (Noah Webster, "On the Education of Youth in America," quoted in Pangle and Pangle 2000: 32). This patriotism may sometimes require some historical reconstruction or even deception, as in I.2: "Although he had not admired Washington's leadership during the war, Rush thought it wise to tell less than the full truth about the founding fathers: 'Let the world admire our patriots and heroes. Their *supposed* talents and virtues…will serve the cause of patriotism and of our country'" (Tyack 2001: 337). Similarly, the accomplishments—both real and mythic—of such iconic heroes as Lewis and Clark, Douglas MacArthur, Harry Truman, Theodore Roosevelt, and the American cowboy, both reinforce America's "can do" spirit (function I.2: imparting common civic values) and inspire love of the country that exemplifies such a characteristic. A variation on this approach is to inspire patriotism by highlighting the nation's history of nurturing and inspiring heroes: for example, by teaching that "only in America" could heroic entrepreneurs such as Andrew Carnegie or Bill Gates achieve their dreams—and thus achieve the "American dream" more broadly—or could heroes such as Helen Keller and Colin Powell rise from obscurity to greatness.

6. Unify the country via establishment of a civil religion

At the same time, "mere" patriotism is just one stage along the continuum of civic purposes that heroes can be made to serve. Further along the continuum, civic heroes can be turned into "demigods" (Tyack 2001: 337), used to establish or burnish a civil religion that unites

the country in a shared reverence of their deified patriots. This process has been especially

apparent with George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Martin Luther King. "[H]ero-worship

of the living Washington," for example, started as early as the 1770s and has continued virtually

every decade since (Wecter 1941: 111, 106-107). Consider *Legends of the American Revolution*,

published in 1847, which

> told of a mystic who had heard the voice of God, 'I will send a deliverer to this land of
> the New World, who shall save my people from physical bondage, even as my Son saved
> them from the bondage of spiritual death!' This mystic came from Germany to the New
> World and one midnight consecrated Washington with holy oil, a crown of laurel, and a
> sword. (Wecter 1941: 139)

Seventy-five years later, the civic impact of such deification can be seen in the report of a young

immigrant girl: "'Never had I prayed…in such utter reverence and worship as I repeated the

simple sentences of my child's story of the patriot. I gazed with adoration at the portraits of

George and Martha Washington, till I could see them with my eyes shut'" (Tyack 2001: 356).

Similarly, although it took longer for Lincoln to achieve demigod status,

> In the twentieth century…Americans began to refashion the man of the people [Lincoln]
> along epic lines. Increasingly, they saw the Christ-like Man of Sorrows. They saw the
> Savior of the Union who takes upon himself the pain of his people. They saw the great
> moralist, the prophet of democracy, the Great Emancipator, the giant who changes the
> course of history. They saw the man that can never be reached: a man, for sure, but too
> good, and too big, to be treated as a man. (Schwartz 1990: 98)

Martin Luther King, Jr., too, has attained an almost Christ-like stature in the United

States. The standard narrative could be summarized, only a little facetiously, as: "King lived and

died for our sins. He wanted all people to live as brothers and to love each other. For some

reason there was a lot of racism when King was alive. Through his work and especially his 'I

have a dream' speech, he taught people to love each other and not be racist anymore. A racist

person then killed him. But his dream lives on and now everybody gets along." This myth was

carried to a logical extreme a few years ago by the four year-old son of a friend of mine. One

day in late January (so a week or two after Martin Luther King Day), Hersh asked his teacher, "Who gave us nature?" Before his teacher could respond, Hersh burst out, "Martin Luther King gave us nature! Since he wanted us all to be kind and nice to each other he gave us nature to help us remember how to be nice." As his teacher wryly remarked in an e-mail to his mom, "I thought this was wonderful, but reminded Hersh that while MLK did want all those things, nature was here before him" (Kanner 2007).

In all of these cases, Washington, Lincoln, and King are constructed as Christ-like heroes used to center a civic religion. As Wecter puts it, without irony (and probably appropriately so), "these heroes are…men who stand somehow for the essence of our faith, whose birthplaces and graves we make into shrines, and whose faces we carve upon mountains as our American way of writing poetry" (Wecter 1941: viii; see also Kammen 1991).

7. Unify the country via establishment and reinforcement of symbolic, inclusive membership

Another way to unify the country is by establishing and reinforcing an inclusive narrative in which all the nation's peoples (however defined) play a variety of heroic roles. I discussed in I.3 above the potentially exclusionary characterization of civic leaders' necessary virtues—say, being white, a military veteran, or male—and I noted contemporary textbook authors' attempts in response to expand these often literal images of civic leadership in order to establish more inclusive ideals. A similarly self-conscious, symbolically inclusive approach to establishing and teaching civic heroes can also be deployed for the purposes of promoting a common national story in which all citizens are encouraged to see themselves and of which they are encouraged to feel a part. As Chicago mayor "Big Bill" Thompson put it in 1928, "All nationalities are entitled to a place in the sun, and our national heroes are the stars in the firmament of our patriotism" (quoted in Zimmerman 2002: 21). Although there have been sporadic challenges to this

approach, historian Jonathan Zimmerman makes a persuasive case that this blandly unifying narrative essentially won out in textbooks throughout the 1980s and beyond: "texts retained an emphasis on 'positive images' in history: every ethnic group could have its place in the textbook sun, so long as no textbook ever said a dark or critical word about its members….Whites allowed new actors into the national story so long as the story stayed the same" (Zimmerman 2002: 128). The 2005 edition of *Civics: Government and Economics in Action* (Davis et al. 2005), a fairly typical middle and high school civics textbook from this decade, demonstrates this logic. Although it doesn't feature "heroes" as such, it does feature 15 "Citizen Profiles" ranging from Mickey Leland, James Madison, Carol Moseley Braun, and Louis Brandeis to Andrea Jung, Alice Rivlin, Thurgood Marshall, and Madeleine Albright. Each paragraph-long (5-7 sentence) profile—which invariably highlights the subject's non-white, non-Christian, or female status—is accompanied by a photo and followed by a question that reinforces the civic contribution made by that person to the country.

8. Combat historical fatalism

Public identification and elevation of heroes serve an entirely different set of civic purposes when they are used to demonstrate the importance of individual agency to civil society. These comprise the final three (#8-10) functions discussed in this Part of the paper. First, as Arthur Schlesinger emphatically argues, if citizens can be taught to recognize heroes' power to "shape history" (Gibbon 2002: 23, citing William James), then they will realize that historical fatalism is foolish and thus that they must assume some responsibility for shaping the future, too. "It takes a man of exceptional vision and strength and will—it takes, in short, a hero—to try to wrench history from what lesser men consider its preconceived path" (Schlesinger Jr. 1968 [1958]: 350). When such "lesser men" realize this, then they will themselves potentially refuse

15

to "acquiesce[] in the drift of history" (Schlesinger Jr. 1968 [1958]: 350) and assume civic responsibility themselves.

9. Motivate citizens to look for and realize greatness within themselves

Combating historical fatalism (I.8) is an essential first step for inspiring citizens' assumption of even limited civic responsibility. A more ambitious goal still is to inspire citizens to reach for the same level of greatness in assuming that responsibility as their heroes have achieved. "Great men enable us to rise to our own highest potentialities. They nerve lesser men to disregard the world and trust to their own deepest instinct" (Schlesinger Jr. 1968 [1958]: 350). In a certain way, this takes us back to the very first civic function of heroes: to provide models for emulation (I.1). But that first goal was fairly modest. Citizens were expected to emulate their heroes only in specific ways—to be honest, for example, because George Washington was honest—and to a limited—to a human rather than heroic—degree. One may teach about the heroes of the past, however, in order to inspire and even create the heroes of tomorrow. As Ralph Waldo Emerson puts it, "Great men exist [and are taught about] so that there may be greater men" (Emerson 1907: 40). This function of teaching about heroes is to inspire citizens to seek out and achieve their own heroism, not necessarily in the same domain or with respect to the same virtues as the original hero made his or her mark, but in some way that enables "the higher self to prevail" (Gibbon 2002: xxi). Thus, someone who learns about Washington's heroic bravery may be inspired to reach for greatness inside of herself and become a great teacher, a remarkable sportswoman, or attain some other heroic standing, even if her achievement has nothing to do with bravery or politics (or honesty) as such. The Giraffe Heroes Project, which works extensively with young people and adults to "find new heroes, to tell their stories, and to help more people be heroic" (Giraffe Heroes Project 2008a), clearly attempts to

16

promote this civic function of identifying and elevating heroes. As they put it, "*Everyone* has what it takes to be a Giraffe"—their term for a hero who "sticks their neck out for the common good" (Giraffe Heroes Project 2008b).

10. Symbolize human possibility

Finally, heroes can be used to expand our sense of what is possible for all of humanity. I discussed above (I.3) heroes' use in establishing touchstones for elected or other civic leaders; in this case, heroes are used to help citizens envision possibilities beyond those represented in their own lives or experiences. "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 our search for models of excellence. They enlarge our imagination, teach us to think big, and expand our sense of the possible" (Gibbon 2002: 13). This is obviously related to I.8 and I.9, but its purpose is not necessarily to inspire citizens to become their own heroes; rather, it is to inspire citizens to develop civic aspirations that go beyond the realm of the apparently possible and even realistic in order to set society on a better, more uplifting path.

Having taken the time to distinguish these ten civic functions of hero identification and education, I should reiterate that these rarely are so purely separated in practice. Consider, for example, a representative discussion of Rousseau's enthusiasm for heroes:

> [G]ood citizens…identify with great citizens from the past and with legislators. Citizens can be made to engage in a constant striving to live up to these great examples. As Rousseau says, 'From the effervescence excited by this shared emulation will be born that patriotic intoxication which alone can raise men above themselves, and without which freedom is only a vain name and legislation only a chimera.' (Kelly 2003: 89-90)

17

In these brief few sentences, heroes are called upon to play at least three different civic functions: as models for emulation, sources of patriotism, and sources of unity that together help to construct a common civil society. Furthermore, Rousseau's formulation of the civic purposes of hero-worship seems intimately to connect all three functions; they are simultaneously and mutually reinforcing, as opposed to sequential or separable. The taxonomy of heroism's civic educative uses is thus admittedly more theoretical than empirical, and runs the risk of missing important interconnections. Nonetheless, I suggest that it is worth keeping in mind the many different—and at least in theory distinguishable—civic functions that heroes can serve as we move into a consideration of whether each of these functions is in fact desirable or even possible in contemporary democratic societies.

PART II: Uses of Heroes in Contemporary Democracies

1. The fall of heroes and rise of role models

It is no accident that most examples of civic education about heroes in Part I came from earlier times (18th, 19th, early 20th centuries). There is strong evidence that heroes' salience is severely limited in the contemporary United States, and thus that they no longer can (or do) fulfill many of the functions listed in Part I. In an October 2000 Gallup Youth Survey, for example, young people were asked, "Do you have any heroes or heroines in the world today— men or women whom you personally greatly admire for their achievements and for their strong moral character?" Over a third of respondents (36 percent) answered no; they were unable to identify any hero or heroine whatsoever. The next largest group, comprising almost a quarter of young people (23 percent), selected a family member. After that, selection slowed to a relative trickle. In other words, barely 40 percent of young people were able to identify anyone beyond

their own family whom they greatly admired for their achievements and character (Gallup and

Lyons 2002).[5] Furthermore, even those non-familiars whom youth do claim to admire are

diminishingly likely to be viewed as true heroes. Between 1979 and 1996, young people ages

13-17 were asked annually, "What one man/woman that you have heard or read about, living

today in any part of the world, do you admire the most—not including relatives or personal

friends?" Consider the list of top ten admired men from 1979, 1986, and 1996 (Lyons 2008):

1979	1986	1996
Jimmy Carter	Ronald Reagan	Michael Jordan
Anwar Sadat	Jesse Jackson	Bill Clinton
Gerald Ford	Don Johnson	Brad Pitt
Menachem Begin	Pope John Paul II	Jesse Jackson
Richard Nixon	Desmond Tutu	Anfernee Hardaway
Muhammad Ali	Lee Iacocca	Emmitt Smith
Jerry Lewis	Bob Geldof/Prince (tie)	Ken Griffey, Jr.
Pope John Paul II/ Gov. Jerry	Tom Selleck	Cal Ripken, Jr.
Brown (tie)	Rob Lowe/ Bruce Springsteen	Michael Jackson
John Travolta	(tie)	Jim Carrey/ Shaquille O'Neal
		(tie)

In contrast to the list from 1979, which includes a number of men to whom it is possible to

ascribe heroism of some sort (although Gerald Ford?!), it is hard to imagine that many teens in

1996 would define most of the men they listed as *heroes*, despite their potentially fervent

admiration for them. Perhaps even more to the point, if they did in fact view Pitt, Hardaway,

Smith, or Carrey (say) as heroes, that would suggest as much about the diminishment of the

contemporary conception of heroism as about teens' propensity for selecting heroes in the first

place.

---

[5] Unfortunately, there's little way to get a longitudinal view of young people's attitudes toward heroes—at least with regard to their selection of a family member or other person known to themselves—since prior to 2000, the poll question specifically excluded family and friends from the list of possible answers: "What one man (woman) that you have heard or read about, alive today in any part of the world, do you admire the most, not including any of your relatives or personal friends?" Data are also unavailable on the percentage of youth who declined to name any person they admired prior to 2000.

Young people aren't operating in a vacuum, of course. Their contemporary disavowal of heroism arguably reflects a more general cultural shift. As I was researching the literature on heroes for this article, I was taken aback by the rash of articles starting in the late 1970s specifically titled "Where have all of the heroes gone?" Articles by this title have shown up in publications as diverse as the *New Statesman, Columbia Journalism Review*, *Newsweek*, *Control Engineering*, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, and *Journal of the American Osteopathic Association* (Axthelm 1979; Hanson 1996; Marr 1998; Silverman 2003; Truchard 2005; McDorman et al. 2006). As far as I can tell from a fairly extensive electronic database search, there are few if any articles with such titles before the mid-1970s. I would suggest that the sheer breadth of articles with this title signifies a common sentiment within American culture over the past thirty years. *Control Engineering* is not trying to present a new idea about the loss of heroism in contemporary life (or even in contemporary engineering); rather, it is tapping into a loss already collectively felt and acknowledged. Book titles have undergone a similar transformation. Consider the ambivalent *The Hero in Transition* (Browne and Fishwick 1983) and the despairing *Everybody Is Sitting on the Curb: How and Why America's Heroes Disappeared* (Edelstein 1996), in comparison to such previous studies of heroism as *The Hero, American Style* (Fishwick 1969) or Dixon Wecter's 1941 classic *The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero-Worship* (Wecter 1941). Along the same lines, in "Hero Worship in America," published in 1949, sociologist Orrin E. Klapp grapples with the challenge of explaining why there is so *much* hero worship (Klapp 1949). It is hard to imagine a sociologist identifying such a challenge today.

Admittedly, every age bemoans loss of great heroes of previous age and their replacement by apparently transient and superficial stars of the present. "[T]oday seems always

less heroic than yesterday" (Wecter 1941: 489). Churchill himself regretfully noted in 1925, "The great emancipated nations seem to have become largely independent of famous guides and guardians. They no longer rely upon the Hero, the Commander, or the Teacher as they did in bygone rugged ages, or as the less advanced peoples do today." After asking, "Can modern communities do without great men? Can they dispense with hero-worship?", he commented in sorrow, "We miss our giants. We are sorry that their age is past" (Churchill 1925).

Churchill's regret, however, was rooted in heroes' replacement by measures, machines, and "'the common sense of most'" (Churchill 1925). He didn't bemoan generalized indifference or even antipathy toward heroes and heroism in general, the way many do today. Tyler Cowen remarks:

> The modern image of a leader is not Theodore Roosevelt charging up a hill, but rather Jimmy Carter fighting off a rabbit with a canoe paddle, Gerald Ford stumbling and bumping his head, or George Bush vomiting in the lap of the Japanese prime minister. Bill Clinton will be defined forever by his handling of the Monica Lewinsky affair. These images demystify power and produce a culture of disillusionment with politics and moral leadership. (Cowen 2000)

In recent decades, Cowen's comments I think accurately suggest, the conception of heroism—especially to the extent that it has historically been tied to leadership—has become diminished and even potentially debased. Heroes are no longer "great men" and women straddling the world like a colossus. "Today," by contrast, "many Americans define heroes as decent people who sacrifice or try to make a difference. They name streets after local World War II veterans, parks after teachers, bridges after local politicians and philanthropists.…[T]hey democratize the word *hero* and jettison the Greek notion of the hero as superhuman and godlike" (Gibbon 2002: 11).

One potent contemporary example of this trend may be found in CNN Heroes, a "global initiative" that intentionally "showcase[s] examples of ordinary people who have accomplished extraordinary deeds" (CNN 2008). When I randomly checked CNN's links to "Heroes in the

21

News" one afternoon (August 16, 2008, 4:19 p.m.), every single link highlighted a person who

had intervened in a crisis to save someone's life:

- Missing toddler found safe
- Wheelchair-bound woman pulled from train's path
- Boy, 10, saves girl's life
- Pit bull tears into tot, then teen leaps in
- Baby pulled from burning car
- Teen who died helping boy is called a hero
- Waitress uses CPR to save diner's life
- Boy, 8, saves pal choking on rock
- Flight attendant reunites with cardiac patient

This vision of heroism is totally divorced from any notion of societal change, greatness of

character, or even intentionality. Perhaps even more to the point, this list hardly presents a

model for civic emulation, unless we want young people to grow up quite literally to become

ambulance chasers.[6]

None of this evidence suggests that admiration and even emulation of others are

impossible or even unusual in contemporary American society—just that heroes are not the

means by which such admiration and emulation are likely fostered. In place of outsized heroes, I

believe that Americans have come to value life-sized *role models*. "Role models," as the concept

was first defined in the 1950s—interestingly, just as conceptions of "hero-worship" seem to have

been drawing to a close (Addis 1996: 1381; see also Gibbon 2002: 12)—and continues to be

used today, are people whom we admire and attempt to emulate. Heroes could in theory thus

also be role models. But as an empirical psychological matter, at least in contemporary times,

heroes do *not* serve as role models. Instead, role models are almost inevitably "ordinary": people

---

[6] Even this notion of heroism, which at least highlights the accomplishment of a heroic deed, seems to have become optional in contemporary usage. The fifteen-year-old "Harvard Heroes" program, whose purpose is to "spotlight[] exceptional staff members while emphasizing the excellence required to run an institution of Harvard's immense scale and complexity," recently "honored" an editorial assistant "for her role as calendar editor for the *Harvard Gazette*" (Farrell 2008). I have no doubt that this woman does an excellent editing job. To designate her as a "hero," however, suggests an almost irretrievable debasement of the term.

who seem generally similar to ourselves and whose differences from us tend to be along one particular dimension, rather than those who are truly extraordinary, especially across multiple dimensions (Addis 1996; see also Kemper 1968; Speizer 1981; Lockwood and Kunda 1997; Lockwood and Kunda 2000). It is their very ordinariness that inspires us to act differently, to emulate their achievements, not any overarching greatness of character, stature, or even impact.

Americans' shift from emulating (at least admiring) extraordinary heroes to emulating ordinary role models may help explain recent poll and survey results in which family members and friends have come to trump others in meriting mention as heroes or role models. Among adults, for example, the percentage of Gallup poll respondents identifying a family member or friend as their "most admired" living man has sextupled over the past 60 years; it has likewise doubled for most admired living woman.[7] Youth over the past 20 years have similarly embraced their family and close friends as being among the most admirable people. At the beginning of this Part, I mentioned that one quarter of youth surveyed in 2000 identified a family member as their hero. This response was not anomalous. Studies of children, adolescents, and college students in the 1980s and 1990s consistently showed that young people more frequently selected their parents as heroes than anyone else (Averett 1985; Porpora 1996: 222; Pomper 2004: 22). In a 2002 study of young children, for example, 34 percent "named their parents as role models and heroes" and another 22 percent named friends and acquaintances (Anderson and Cavallaro 2002: 166); a 2003 study likewise showed that teenagers were most likely to identify

---

[7] In 1949, when the question was first asked and coded for this kind of response, only 1% of survey respondents named a family member or friend as the man that they "have heard or read about, living today, in any part of the world" whom they admired the most. 3% of survey respondents similarly named a family member or friend when asked about their most admired woman. These numbers stayed steady in 1955, the next year that results were broken down in this way. By 1966, however, the numbers started creeping up—3% for men and 5.6% for women—and they more than doubled again for men by 2006, when a full 9% of those identified were family or friends. Women have held steady at around 6% since the 1970s; I conjecture this is because of a shrinking gender gap with respect to recognition and publicity of public figures. (Original analysis of Gallup Organization 1949; Gallup Organization 1955; Gallup Organization 1966; Gallup Organization 1977; Gallup Organization 2006)

their parents as their "most admired" living woman and man (Robison 2003; see also Yancy et al. 2002).[8]

Maria, a young woman whom I interviewed in Boston when she was a senior in high school, exemplifies this rejection of the distant, extraordinary hero in favor of the intimate, ordinary role model. In response to my questions, "Who do people try to teach you to take as role models? And who are your actual role models?", her reply speaks volumes:

> Of course, famous leaders. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, people who have brought changes in our culture. But …. the one role model…that's like my hero or whatever you may call it, is my father. I didn't have the privilege for him to raise me as a child, as a baby or whatever….My father was in jail. He served his time. He got out and the first thing he did was move from New York to Boston to start life. So I kind of got my father like 10 or 11 years old. And from then we've been growing as father and daughter…. You see my father now and you don't think that he had a hard life and that he did that stuff or whatever. Because he's left that behind and he started something new. And through his trial and error he succeeded through everything.

Maria is well aware of whom she is supposed to view as a hero. But she is equally aware that these "famous leaders" do not directly inspire her in the way her father does. To some extent at least, it is her father's very weaknesses and struggles—matched by his slow but steady success "through everything"—that makes him a hero. Maria's attitude in this regard is absolutely typical of the young civic leaders (Maria was a representative on her neighborhood council) whom I interviewed in 2004 as a means of determining how and why some youth from historically disenfranchised backgrounds beat the "civic achievement gap" (Levinson 2007). Well over half of the youth civic leaders I talked with selected a formerly-incarcerated family member as a role model or hero. Again, this was not because they were unaware of more traditional heroes. Rather, it was the personal relationship that was key, as Joel, a seventeen year-old high school student in Boston, explained:

---

[8] Although I am confining my discussion for the sake of clarity and brevity (!!) to the United States, there is ample evidence that young people in Europe, too, overwhelmingly select their parents, and then others directly known to them, when asked to identify heroes or role models (Bucher 1997; Bricheno and Thornton 2007).

Like all my teachers want me to look at Martin Luther King and Caesar Chavez. Martin Luther King. And I look at them and I don't see them as role models. You know? …. I mean, they were great leaders and all of that, but I don't mean, like, 'Wow, that's a fine role model.' You know, my role model is Jésus [the youth organizing leader at the non-profit where Joel worked]. He has helped me so much. He's talked to me, you know. He's done things for me that I don't know if anybody would have ever done for me. And I'm so grateful for him. That's my role model right there. I look up to him.

I found identical results in a survey I conducted with approximately 100 young people in four communities. One of the survey questions asked them to complete the sentence, "My role model(s) is (are)…" *Ninety-three* percent of those who answered included at least one family member or friend and/or a religious figure such as God, Muhammed, or Jesus—someone with whom the students also seemed to feel a direct, personal relationship. This is not because students were unaware of the more famous or extraordinary exemplars. They uniformly mentioned leaders such as Martin Luther King and others in listing four people "everybody from the United States has heard of." Rather, these data strongly reinforce the notion that personal relationships totally trump as a practical matter abstract knowledge of distant heroes with respect to role model identification.

2. Are democracies better off without heroes?

What are the civic implications in a democracy of this contemporary disavowal of extraordinary heroes in favor of ordinary role models? Not surprisingly, it's complicated. Some thinkers assert that heroes' fall from grace, and role models' concomitant upswing, is actively good for a democracy. Four arguments support this contention. First, democracies are founded on a notion of equality—especially civic equality—that seems profoundly at odds with the public recognition and elevation of heroes.

[T]he most important component in our unease about authority or greatness is surely democracy. Previous generations had democratic machinery and rhetoric: the outside scaffolding. We have gone further. We have a democratic culture: the spirit, the

25

essence…. We find the notion of people being innately better or worse than we are frankly offensive. (Marr 1998: 26)

Marr's claim here seems to be about democratic psychology, but the point here can and should be made more broadly. To the extent that democracy is rule "by the people," we should not look for or expect significant distinctions between ourselves and our leaders. All citizens should be capable of democratic deliberation and participation. Citizens may well learn from and be inspired by fellow-citizen role models in this process, since role models are in essence equal to oneself except for in defined particulars. It is antithetical to democratic egalitarianism, on the other hand, to identify *heroes* whose achievements and strength of character ordinary citizens could never hope to match. As Christopher Kelly explains it,

> Liberal democrats tend to be suspicious of hero worship, fearing that it encourages inequality and dependency on those who are, or claim to be, superior. While they can be generous in their praise of heroic action, in their ordinary speech they frequently replace heroes with 'role models,' for whom the part played or the function fulfilled predominates over intrinsic admirable qualities. It is easier to consider oneself as equal to one's role model than to one's hero. (Kelly 2003: 82-83)[9]

This preference for well-defined "functions" over personal virtue inspires Gerald Pomper's more radical, second argument that "Within the structures of a democracy, heroism is based on institutions, not personalities…. [D]emocratic heroes are ordinary men and women who ably perform their institutional responsibilities in times of crisis" (Pomper 2004: 4). According to this vision of democratic citizenship, the whole point is to create "roles [that] can be taken over interchangeable equal individuals" (Kelly 1997: 348) within democratic institutions, while fostering each individual's skills and commitment to the democratic enterprise so that they inevitably perform at a high level, even at times of crisis. Democracy is premised on the value of

---

[9] It should be noted, though, that Kelly thinks that heroes arise in democracies nonetheless. "Democratic regimes have never lacked heroes. They have always found people who pledge their lives, fortunes, and sacred honor to establish governments based on democratic principles and people who give their last full measure of devotion to see that these governments endure" (Kelly 1997: 347).

the individual, including a belief in each individual's potential to contribute to the collective good. Along this line of reasoning, if democratic structures are designed correctly, citizens will almost automatically be enabled to contribute to the collective good through their ordinary actions. No extraordinary efforts of will would be required, or even be desired, since democratic institutions should have been structured so as to anticipate and provide for a nation's needs through the everyday acts of its citizens, all of whom have the capacity to so contribute. "The basic premise of self-government is that the people themselves have enough character and collective wisdom to chose appropriate leaders and resolve their common problems…. Reliance on…heroes too easily leads to disdain for the staple of democracy, the ordinary citizen…. Human success will require common effort, not extraordinary intervention" (Pomper 2004: 5).[10]

Following on this, third, it is arguably profoundly dangerous for a country to put its faith in individuals' greatness with regard to civic leadership.

> [W]e so often look for champions to protect us and preserve our society…. [W]e search for the charismatic leader who will easily solve the complex problems of modern life. This conventional view, however, has serious—and worrisome—implications for democratic politics. Demigods—people like Achilles—are few and far between. Relying on such heroes makes human welfare contingent on the exceptional intervention, often unreliable and always arbitrary, of these unique individuals. The successful resolution of crises then depends essentially on luck—on the chance that extraordinary people will be found to meet a crisis or that some person will undergo an ennobling transformation at the critical moment. (Pomper 2004: 4-5)

In a way, this argument turns Schlesinger's claims about historical fatalism (Part I.8 above) on their head. Pomper agrees with Schlesinger that history's direction and outcomes are not inevitable. People—especially heroes—can make a profound difference in shaping the history of a nation. Pomper and Schlesinger part ways, however, on who should be expected—or accorded the right and responsibility—to make such changes. It is not the individual actor, acting almost

---

[10] Thomas Carlyle would be appalled, albeit unsurprised, by this utter rejection of heroes' desirability in a democratic society. He famously castigated "Democracy, which means despair of ever finding any Heroes to govern you, and contented putting up with the want of them" (Carlyle 1918 [1843]: 249).

as a legislator unto him or herself, who should be reshaping the destiny of a democracy. This would be antidemocratic in the extreme. As Sidney Hook warned, "If the hero is defined as an event-making individual who redetermines the course of history, it follows at once that a democratic community must be eternally on guard against him" (Hook 1943: 229). By contrast, the point of democratic governance is that all citizens should be empowered to work in concert to decide the direction of the nation and shape history. In addition, as a practical matter, it would be catastrophic for a nation's fate to depend on the heroism of a single, extraordinary individual. This is truly the path toward fatalism and historical impotence, for the reasons Pomper elucidates above.

Finally, a fourth argument against "heroification" in a democracy is that the presentation especially of those in power as heroic can discourage citizens from exercising the level of scrutiny that is necessary for a well-functioning and just democracy. In his influential *Lies My Teacher Taught Me*, for example, James Loewen argues that history textbooks which seem inevitably to heroize the state are essentially "anticitizenship manuals—handbooks for acquiescence" (Loewen 1995: 216). Citizens in a democratic society should maintain a healthy skepticism about their leaders and the claims made on behalf of the state. If they do not, then they are effectively abandoning their governance and oversight role. But one does not treat heroes with healthy skepticism; to do so is effectively to deny their heroism. Thus, democracies may be better off without heroes—or at least, without the heroification of those in power.

3. Democracies need heroes

Even if all of the above arguments are true, there may well be other reasons to identify and honor heroes within contemporary democracies. Many of the civic functions of heroes enumerated in Part I, for example, may remain desirable and even necessary in democratic states

28

despite heroes' potentially anti-democratic implications in other respects. For example, even democracies—perhaps *especially* democracies—need to unify themselves around some common cause, identity, sense of history, idea, norms, or civil religion. As I discussed in Part I, heroes have historically played a significant role in exemplifying, transmitting, symbolizing, and/or inspiring such unifying beliefs or characteristics (see I.2, I.5-7). Second, democratic leaders both need and deserve respect for doing their jobs. The diminishment or even negation of the heroic aspect of leadership, however, arguably weakens those who have demonstrated the courage and commitment to take on responsibility, as well as discourages other good men and women from assuming the mantle of leadership when they know they will be granted little honor or respect for so doing. Andrew Marr eloquently exposes this tension:

> The democratic culture shies away from the authority that gives democracy its focus, its story. We want, in our hearts, to have everyone on one level. That is the source of the pleasure when another big figure topples, boxer shorts round his legs. But the trouble is that effective representative democracy requires authority and respect – that willingness to look up to someone which we find increasingly hard to grant elected leaders. (Marr 1998: 26)

Relatedly, democracies as much as any system of governance—and possibly more than most—need to hold high expectations for their elected leaders and representatives (I.3). There was much talk in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections about President Bush's appeal to the electorate as a "regular guy" with whom they would enjoy sitting down and sharing a beer— unlike Al Gore and John Kerry, who few people at the time saw even as beer drinking types, let alone as enjoyable bar stool company. In this context, Bush's poor grades in college, drunk driving arrest, verbal miscues, and other peccadilloes made him more attractive to the electorate rather than less. "While the purpose of democracy was to give everyone a fair chance to rise, its method enabled rancorous men to invoke 'equality' as an excuse for keeping all down to their own level" (Schlesinger Jr. 1968 [1958]: 343). But democracies are not well served by

mediocrity (nor was it well served by Bush, as even most Republicans would agree at this point), and they do not have to foster it. "[G]reat men have been chosen President. Democracy demonstrates a capability for heroic leadership quite as much as it does a tendency toward mediocrity," even if "the dislike of great men" is "a permanent potentiality in a democracy" (Schlesinger Jr. 1968 [1958]: 344). By 2008, in fact, the American electorate seemed to have overcome its infatuation with electing someone who seemed ordinary (Sarah Palin and "Joe the Plumber"'s populism notwithstanding), perhaps recognizing that the country is better served by presidents who have extraordinary rather than merely run-of-the-mill skills and capacities. This recognition was arguably reflected in, and potentially even encouraged by, the candidates' emphasis on their own heroic qualities. John McCain's entire general election campaign was conducted on his basis of his status as a war hero and his heroism as a "maverick." Although Barack Obama's campaign did not argue directly that Obama himself was a hero, he was certainly treated as—and invested with the expectations of—a hero by a significant portion of the American electorate and even global population. To the extent that these appeals to and invocations of heroism raised the electorate's expectations for their future president and led them to demand more rather than less from each candidate, that can only be to the good. There is no innate democratic virtue in mediocrity—and much to recommend greatness instead.

In addition, democracies depend on virtuous and vigorous citizens to remain healthy, legitimate, and effective. As I discussed in Part I, heroes can be used to promote qualities of civic virtue, active civic engagement, and belief in and pursuit of excellence (I.1, I.8-10). Continuing with some reflections on the 2008 presidential election, Obama quite transparently reflected his ascribed heroism back onto his acolytes, repeatedly claiming, "We are the ones we've been waiting for" (Obama 2008), and featuring at the top of every page of his website,

"I'm asking you to believe. Not just in my ability to bring about real change in Washington …

I'm asking you to believe in yours" (Obama for America 2008a). The tenor of these messages is

to draw upon the implicit greatness ascribed to him by his followers (even the language of

"acolytes" and "followers," which comes so much more naturally in Obama's case than merely

"supporters" or "voters," emphasizes his heroic stature in some circles)—and to try to expand

that attribution of greatness to include heretofore "ordinary" citizens. Whether or not one agrees

with Obama's beliefs, policy positions, or readiness for the presidency, it's hard to deny the

power of these messages to energize and even potentially transform a democracy. Obama's

candidacy has also provided a tangible example of the way in which the perception of

extraordinariness in another (i.e. in Obama) can both bring joy to those who revel in human

possibility, and can push observers toward their "higher, better selves" (I.9-10).

At the same time, one reason that people have been both suspicious of Obama himself

and concerned about his message of citizens' being their own salvation (or at least their own

change agents) is that both have been perceived as self-satisfied in a way that undercuts another

potential civic function of heroes in a democracy: namely, to promote a healthy skepticism of

oneself, and a recognition of one's own fallibility. As George W. Bush's presidency has

demonstrated as well as any, implacable self-confidence and refusal to doubt one's actions or

judgments may have profoundly anti-democratic consequences. Recognition of others'

greatness—including others' superiority even to ourselves—may be necessary to combat such

hubristic self-satisfaction. Schlesinger, as usual, puts it pithily: "When we do not admire great

men, then our instinct for admiration is likely to end by settling on ourselves. The one thing

worse for democracy than hero worship is self worship" (Schlesinger Jr. 1968 [1958]: 349). This

is not to disavow the egalitarian concerns raised in II.2; teaching citizens their (lowered) place in

contrast to others' heroism (I.4) is clearly problematic from an egalitarian democratic

perspective. But there is a democratic version of this attitude, by which the encouragement of

humility, skepticism, and self-doubt can actually contribute to such democratic virtues as

tolerance, willingness to deliberate with others, and acceptance of the burdens of judgment

(Rawls 1971).

Most of the goals historically served by society's elevation and recognition of heroes thus

may remain desirable in a democratic society, at least when pursued in moderate fashion and

with non-overreaching aims. All could be pursued tyrannically, but none (except for the

unreconstructed version of I.4) need be so; I think that all others if suitably checked have a place

in a democracy. It is worth raising expectations for our leaders and elected officials, for

example, even though at the same time we do want young people, and citizens in general, in a

democratic society to feel as if they have the capacity and opportunity to become civic leaders.

This is the contrast between feeling as if we *could* be president and wanting a president to *be* the

same as ourselves. It's a surprisingly complex position to make sense of. Returning to the rather

frivolous but nonetheless politically potent example of beer drinking, I suggested above that our

decision about who is better qualified to be president should not depend on whom we would feel

comfortable having a beer with. At the same time, it is not unreasonable to expect that a

presidential candidate know approximately what a beer (or a gallon of milk—consider Bush 41)

costs, and it is also appropriate for a president to drink a beer—in other words, for a president to

be human.[11]

---

[11] I will refrain here from entering the fraught whisky vs. beer vs. latte debates that arose during the 2008
Democratic presidential primary between the Clinton and Obama camps (Parsons and McCormick 2008).

Even if the public recognition and elevation of heroes is on balance desirable in a democracy, however, the evidence that I shared at the beginning of Part II suggests that heroes can no longer help us achieve all of these aims. Heroes may still be sufficiently comprehensible and salient to American citizens that they can fulfill some of the civic functions listed above. But they definitely cannot fulfill all. This brings us, therefore, to Part III of this paper, in which I explore the implications of heroes' theoretical civic uses (Part I) and contemporary practical demise (Part II) for civic education.

PART III: Heroes in Contemporary Civic Education

The survey, interview, and other data presented in Part II suggest that heroes—especially heroes such as civic leaders or activists, in contrast to movie stars or athletes—may no longer speak much to young people. But there is little in these data to suggest that the majority of young people are actively *opposed* to heroes, i.e. that teaching about heroes for a particular purpose would inevitably backfire. Furthermore, many extraordinary individuals are still *known* to young people, as the example of Martin Luther King, Jr., demonstrated in the introduction to this article. Given this, I think that examples of extraordinary individuals (whether defined explicitly as "heroes" or not) could effectively be used to promote civic aims that are based upon passive admiration and/or identity formation as opposed to active emulation. Specifically, it is possible that civic education about heroes could: impart and reinforce common civic values and norms (I.2); establish touchstones for the qualities citizens should expect of elected officials and other civic leaders (I.3); inspire patriotism (I.5); unify the country via establishment and reinforcement of symbolic, inclusive membership (I.7); and symbolize human possibility (I.10). I do not think that any of these would come about easily, nor even that education about heroes is

33

necessarily the best way to achieve these goals. But I also see no reason that teaching about

heroes would be actively detrimental to these aims.

To the extent that we aim to inspire active *emulation*, however, then I think the evidence

is quite clear that ordinary role models instead of extraordinary heroes should lie at the heart of

civic education. There is already some empirical evidence of the promise of this approach. In

their study of ten effective civic education programs, for example, Joseph Kahne and Joel

Westheimer found that:

> [S]several students emphasized that exposure to 'ordinary' rather than 'famous'
> individuals often had the greatest impact. In contrast to the ubiquitous school programs
> that hold up Martin Luther King, Jr., as a hero to be respected (but not necessarily
> emulated), these programs offered role models who appeared to be ordinary people—not
> unlike the students. Encountering such people spurred students to imagine themselves as
> civic actors formulating and pursuing their own civic goals. (Kahne and Westheimer
> 2003: 64)

What would this look like in practice?

Based on my own teaching experience, I am inclined to think that there are four

important steps to this process. First, educators need to select and introduce students to civically

efficacious people who share some range of characteristics (racial, ethnic, cultural, religious,

national origin, residence, and/or class-related) with the students themselves in order to increase

the chance that students will actually see them as role models—i.e. people mostly like

themselves who inspire emulation. Second, students need to have the opportunity truly to get to

know and feel a connection with these people, just as they feel intimately connected with the

family members and friends they most often identify as their role models. Third, students need

to learn *how* the ordinary, everyday acts taken by these people make significant differences to

their communities. If they don't learn this, students have little to be inspired about or to think is

worthy of emulation. Fourth, educators need to help students identify and practice the key skills

deployed by these ordinary role models as a means of becoming efficacious, engaged civic and

political actors themselves.

One year when I was teaching eighth grade, for example, we hosted Sam Yoon as a guest

speaker. Yoon was then working for the Asian Community Development Corporation and

running to be Boston's first Asian American city councilor. (He won.) After his presentation,

students easily picked out such generic attributes as getting an education, caring about others,

and working hard as keys to his success. But students' mouthing of these platitudes is hardly

civically empowering—nor even a proof of learning, since students could equally easily have

lauded such attributes before Yoon's presentation. Instead, therefore, I goaded students to

examine the specifics of his efforts for social change: how he tried to use the media's interest in

his personal story as the first Asian American candidate for citywide office in order to focus

attention on the issues he cared about, such as affordable housing. Students were inspired to

learn about how to communicate with the media, present themselves publicly, and use their own

personal stories to direct others' attention to issues such as neighborhood violence and lack of

job opportunities for youth. They developed valuable communication and presentation skills

while incorporating their own backgrounds, interests, and concerns. The fact that students

actually met and talked with Yoon—one student saw him in a neighborhood diner a few days

later, and another ran into him on the bus—helped keep them energized and fostered their sense

that learning these skills might enable them to make a difference.

This active, relationship-oriented, and experiential approach contrasts significantly with

the well-intentioned but, I think, fatally flawed approach to ordinary role models promoted in

contemporary civics textbooks. Contemporary civics textbooks do an admirable job of at least

gesturing toward the importance of ordinary role models. In reviewing five of the most popular

civics books from this decade, I discovered they all placed significant emphasis on ordinary people doing great things, under the various headings of "Teens in Action" and "American Biographies" (Glencoe/McGraw-Hill 2005), "The Power of One" (Wolfson 2005), "Young Citizens in Action" and "Biography" (Hartley and Vincent 2005), "Students Make a Difference: The Active Citizen" and "Citizen Profiles" (Davis et al. 2005), and "You Can Make a Difference" (McClenaghan 2003). Each of these textbooks promotes a much more active, engaged, and "ordinary" vision of effective citizenship than did comparable civics books from the 1950s that I reviewed—including 1950s editions of some of these same textbooks—which had no such "profiles" or resources. Remember *Youth Faces American Citizenship* from 1956, for example, which as I noted in I.4 emphasizes the civic importance of developing a "pleasing personality" and a good smile, and teaches students how to be good dates (Alilunas and Sayre 1956). [See photo #2 at end.]

Despite the textbook publishers' evident good intentions, however, there are at least three enormous problems with textbook-based, one-paragraph "young citizens in action" approach. First, given standardized curriculum and especially standardized testing mandates, teachers have no incentive—in fact, they have a negative incentive—to use these textbook resources. By definition, "ordinary," unknown people will not be included in state curriculum frameworks or national content standards. When I taught eighth grade, therefore, I skipped over almost every one of the sidebars, insets, and pages emphasizing active citizenship because they did not fit into the curriculum calendar or district "pacing guide." It is hard to see how and why teachers might be led to make a different choice. This is a significant problem as well, of course, for teachers' more significant incorporation of ordinary role models into their classrooms and curricula as I describe above. But paradoxically, the greater effort, resources, and allocation of curricular time

required for experiential education incorporating meaningful role models may actually increase its potential for implementation in comparison to the relatively minor cost of reading a paragraph about "teens in action." In the latter case, no one in charge of developing state curriculum frameworks or finalizing the district pacing guide, say, will explicitly set aside time to incorporate these various examples of civic engagement. The assumption would be that these examples would naturally be woven in—but the curriculum is inevitably already so overstuffed, and assessments are frequently so high-stakes, that these sidebars become an obvious candidate for automatic elimination by the teacher. In the former case, by contrast, no one could or would assume that teachers will simply "find the time." If it is agreed that students should be learning about, developing relationships with, and practicing the skills or strategies of local, ordinary role models, then it would also be agreed that time must be set aside in the curriculum for teachers to help facilitate this. If time is not set aside, then it is clear to everyone that this is not a priority. If time is set aside, then teachers get the clear message that this is a priority and, with appropriate professional support, it is more likely that they will do it.

A second and even more significant fatal flaw with these paragraph-long snapshots of "young people making a difference" in textbooks is that they are inevitably superficial, even *pro forma*. How much are students actually going to learn or get inspired by reading a paragraph about what some other teenager did? A single paragraph cannot teach students actual techniques or strategies for civic empowerment. In fact, four to five sentences cannot actually achieve *any* of the civic purposes discussed in Part I. They may be nicely symbolic of the importance of individual citizens' contributions to public life, but a snippet of this length cannot be anything more than symbolic.

Third, these references in textbooks to ordinary people whom no student actually knows utterly misunderstand the source and nature of role models. As we saw in Part II, role models are people with whom students actually feel a direct connection, usually because they know them personally. Four or five, even ten, sentences about a random teenager in a textbook are not going to promote the kind of personal identification and change in behavior that we hope for from young people who are inspired to emulate actual role models. Thus, the "ordinary role model" approach when mediated by textbooks may end up being the worst of both worlds. Young people neither learn about extraordinary heroes who help them envision the expanse of human possibility, say, nor do they identify true role models (usually people they know personally, not just people like them like random teenagers in a textbook) in order to learn to emulate them.

What can be done, then, in the context of a traditional, textbook-oriented, even coverage-driven civic education class that cannot or will not take on the more ambitious agenda I outlined above? In this case—and in fact, in every case, I believe—students should learn about collective action as an essential lever of power in civic life. Ordinary role models and even extraordinary heroes are rarely lone actors. Collective action by scores, hundreds, thousands, even millions of people frequently underlie the success of an apparently individual civic actor. Julian Bond makes this point in a compelling way with respect to Martin Luther King:

> Americans long for single, heroic leadership, the lone figure delivering salvation. King became that figure, but he came from a movement that was group-centered, representing democracy at its best. He did not march from Selma to Montgomery by himself. He did not speak to an empty field at the March on Washington. There were thousands marching with him and before him, and thousands more who one by one and two by two did the work that preceded the triumphal march. Black Americans did not just march to freedom; we worked our way to civil rights through the difficult business of organizing. Registering voters one by one. Building a solid organization, block by block. Building interracial coalitions, state by state. (Bond 1993)

In this respect, teaching about Martin Luther King *requires* that one simultaneously teach about the thousands of ordinary Americans who sustained the civil rights movement and actually ensured its victories. It is simply factually inaccurate—and civically disempowering—to teach in any other way.

This kind of curricular change could at least in theory be made fairly easily by reframing history and civics textbooks' civic narratives. Right now, they tend to focus relentlessly on the individual, neglecting the collective action lying at the heart of individuals' achievements. Sam Wineburg and Chauncey Monte-Sano thus complain with respect to Rosa Parks:

> Instead of a story about a mass-organizing movement—a narrative of empowerment and agency among ordinary people who in a single weekend printed 52,500 leaflets (enough, and then some, for every member of Montgomery's black community) and distributed them to churches while organizing phone trees and Monday morning car pools so that no one would have to walk to work—we meet the singular figure of Mrs. Parks. Together with King, she sets out on her civil rights walkabout, only to return to lead a passive and faceless people in their struggle for racial equality. (Wineburg and Monte-Sano 2008: 1201-1202)

This is a tragedy, but it is totally unnecessary. Textbooks could tell Rosa Parks' story as clearly, in the same amount of space, and much more accurately, by framing her actions as part of a "mass-organizing movement" of essentially ordinary people. Herb Kohl actually provides a model of how to do this in an essay that attempts to recover the collective action narrative by rewriting the story traditionally told about Rosa Parks' action.

> The revised version is still about Rosa Parks, but it is also about the African American people of Montgomery, Alabama. It takes the usual, individualized version of the Rosa Parks tale and puts it in the context of a coherent, community-based social struggle. This does not diminish Rosa Parks in any way. It places her, however, in the midst of a consciously planned movement for social change. (Kohl 1995: 46)

Howard Zinn has similarly and famously done this for all of American history in his best-selling *People's History of the United States* (Zinn 1980). *The Covenant Curriculum: A Study of Black Democratic Action*, a recent civic curriculum initiative supported by Tavis Smiley and Cornell

West, also promotes this historical civic understanding of the power of the collective.

Assignment #2 in the curriculum, for example, states:

> Black Democratic Action requires individual courage and collective organization. Therefore all of our work for human dignity and freedom must be informed by the extraordinary efforts of ordinary men and women who served and sacrificed for the precious ideals of democracy. You are charged to find and interview a person in your family or community who was a part of the black freedom movements of the 1960s and 1970s. (West and Glaude 2006)

In sum, I believe that extraordinary heroes and ordinary role models can be used in concert to promote the civic purposes listed in Part I. This is in part because each can find their own place and serve their own set of purposes in the curriculum, but even more because they can actually reinforce each other by helping young people (and in fact all citizens) come to understand that even the most profound civic changes, led by the greatest and most extraordinary of human beings, are usually brought about by the collective work of "ordinary" people working together. Churchill commented about scientific heroes that "The throne is occupied; but by a throng" (Churchill 1925). I think this is terrific. The throne *should* be occupied by a throng—not just in science, but in all human endeavor—because it is in fact the throng that has the greatest capacity to bring about and sustain change in a democratic society. In this respect, as in so many others, it will be fascinating to see how President Obama and his team continue to mobilize and empower the "throngs" who swept him into office. If the almost-daily e-mails I receive from David Plouffe are any indication—including the most recent ones urging me to attend a house meeting so supporters can "plan on how they can bring change to both Washington and their own communities" (Obama for America 2008b)—this vision of cooperation and even codependence between an individual leader and the democratic masses may be encountering a renaissance. How this will affect civic education in schools, of course, is another conundrum indeed.

THOMAS JEFFERSON

These students in the Jefferson Memorial, Washington, D. C., find inspiration from one of our greatest patriots. Jefferson believed that all men were created equal, that men should make their governments, and that men should enjoy freedom of speech, of the press, and of religion. In his sixty years of public service, Jefferson stamped his personality and ideals indelibly upon our country.

Ewing Galloway

A sincere and friendly smile will make the whole world a brighter place in which to live. Have you practiced your smile in front of the mirror?

(Alilunas and Sayre 1956: 53)

(McClenaghan 1953: 23)

Bibliography

Addis, Adeno (1996). "Role Models and the Politics of Recognition." University of Pennsylvania Law Review **144**(4): 1377-1468.

Alilunas, Leo J. and J. Woodrow Sayre (1956). Youth Faces American Citizenship. Chicago, J. B. Lippincott Company.

Anderson, Kristin J. and Donna Cavallaro (2002). "Parents of Pop Culture? Children's Heroes and Role Models." Childhood Education **78**: 161-168.

Averett, Joy (1985). "Facets: Today's Kids and Hero Worship, Who Can They Look Up To?" The English Journal **74**(5): 23.

Axthelm, Pete (1979). Where Have All the Heroes Gone? Newsweek.

Bond, Julian (1993) "Remember the man and the hero, not just half the dream." The Seattle Times, April 4, 1993, DOI: Retrieved August 21, 2008. http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/special/mlk/perspectives/reflections/bond.html.

Boorstin, Daniel (1968 [1962]). "From Hero to Celebrity: Human Pseudo-Event." Heroes and Anti-Heroes: A Reader in Depth. Harold Lubin, Ed. San Francisco, Chandler Publishing Company**:** 325-340.

Bricheno, Patricia and Mary Thornton (2007). "Role Model, Hero, or Champion? Children's Views Concerning Role Models." Educational Research **49**(4): 383-396.

Browne, Ray B. and Marshall W. Fishwick (1983). The Hero in Transition. Bowling Green, OH, Bowling Green University Press.

Bucher, Anton A. (1997). "The Influence of Models in Forming Moral Identity." International Journal of Educational Research **27**(7): 619-627.

Carlyle, Thomas (1893). On Heroes, Hero-Worship and The Heroic in History. New York, Frederick A. Stokes Company.

Carlyle, Thomas (1918 [1843]). Past and Present. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.

Churchill, Winston (1925). "Mass Effects in Modern Life." Retrieved August 16, 2008, 2008. http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?documentprint=1032.

Clark, Nadine I., James B. Edmonson and Arthur Dondineau (1954). Civics for Americans. New York, Macmillan.

CNN (2008, February 21, 2008 5:07 p.m. EST). "CNN Heroes: A note to educators." Retrieved August 16, 2008, 2008. http://www.cnn.com/2008/LIVING/studentnews/02/08/heroes.educator.note/index.html.

Cowen, Tyler (2000) "The New Heroes and Role Models." Reason, May 2000, DOI: Retrieved August 15, 2008. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1568/is_1_32/ai_62162015/pg_1?tag=artBody;col1.

Davis, James E., Phyllis Fernlund and Peter Woll (2005). Civics: Government and Economics in Action. Upper Saddle River, NJ, Prentice Hall.

Dimond, Stanley E. and Elmer F. Pflieger (1974). Civics for Citizens: Annotated Edition. Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Company.

Edelstein, Alan (1996). Everybody Is Sitting on the Curb: How and Why America's Heroes Disappeared. New York, Praeger Publishers.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo (1907). Representative Men: Seven Lectures. Leipzig, Bernhard Tauchnitz.

Farrell, Austen (2008). Who does Harvard call a hero? The Harvard Community Resource. Cambridge, MA. **42(11):** 1, 4. 42(11).

Fishwick, Marshall William (1969). The hero, American style. New York,, D. McKay Co.

Gallup and Linda Lyons (2002). No Heroes in the Beltway Gallup. Washington, D.C., Gallup. Retrieved August 18, 2008. http://www.gallup.com/poll/6487/Heroes-Beltway.aspx.

Gallup Organization (1949). "Survey by Gallup Organization, December 2-December 7, 1949." Retrieved December 5, 2008. http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/ipoll.html.

Gallup Organization (1955). "Survey by Gallup Organization, December 8-December 13, 1955." Retrieved December 5, 2008. http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/ipoll.html.

Gallup Organization (1966). "Survey by Gallup Organization, December 8-December 13, 1966." Retrieved December 5, 2008. http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/ipoll.html.

Gallup Organization (1977). "Survey by Gallup Organization, December 9-December 12, 1977." Retrieved December 5, 2008. http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/ipoll.html.

Gallup Organization (2006). "Survey by Gallup Organization, December 11-December 14, 2006." Retrieved December 5, 2008. http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/ipoll.html.

Gibbon, Peter H. (2002). A Call to Heroism: Renewing America's Vision of Greatness. New York, Atlantic Monthly Press.

Giraffe Heroes Project (2008a). "Kids Page -- Guided Tour Stop 1." Retrieved December 5, 2008. http://www.giraffe.org/guidedtour1_text.html.

Giraffe Heroes Project (2008b). "Kids Page -- Guided Tour Stop 2." Retrieved December 5, 2008. http://www.giraffe.org/guidedtour2_text.html.

Glencoe/McGraw-Hill (2005). Civics Today: Citizenship, Economics, and You. New York, Glencoe.

Glicksberg, Charles I. (1968). "The Tragic Hero." Heroes and Anti-Heroes: A Reader in Depth. Harold Lubin, Ed. Scranton, PA, Chandler Publishing Company**:** 356-366.

Gomes, Peter (2002). "Foreword." A Call to Heroism: Renewing America's Vision of Greatness. Peter H. Gibbon, Ed. New York, Atlantic Monthly Press**:** xi-xix.

Hanson, Christopher (1996). "Where Have All the Heroes Gone?" Columbia Journalism Review **34**(6): 45-48.

Hartley, William H. and William S. Vincent (2005). Holt American Civics. New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Hook, Sidney (1943). The Hero in History: A Study in Limitation and Possibility. New York, John Day.

Kahne, Joseph and Joel Westheimer (2003). "Teaching Democracy: What Schools Need to Do." Phi Delta Kappan **85**(1): 34-40, 57-66.

Kammen, Michael G. (1991). Mystic chords of memory : the transformation of tradition in American culture. New York, Knopf.

Kanner, Elisabeth (2007). Day care report re: MLK. Meira Levinson. Boston.

Kelly, Christopher (1997). "Rousseau's Case for and Against Heroes." Polity **30**(2): 347-366.

Kelly, Christopher (2003). Rousseau as Author: Consecrating One's Life to the Truth. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Kemper, Theodore D. (1968). "Reference Groups, Socialization, and Achievement." American Sociological Review **33**: 31-45.

Klapp, Orrin E. (1949). "Hero Worship in America." American Sociological Review **14**(1): 53-62.

Kohl, Herbert (1995). Should We Burn Babar? Essays on Children's Literature and the Power of Stories. New York, The New Press.

Levinson, Meira (2007) "The Civic Achievement Gap." CIRCLE Working Paper **51**, DOI: Retrieved September 17, 2008, 51. http://civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP51Levinson.pdf.

Lockwood, Penelope and Ziva Kunda (1997). "Superstars and Me: Predicting the Impact of Role Models on the Self." Journal of Personality and Social Psychology **73**(1): 91-103.

Lockwood, Penelope and Ziva Kunda (2000). "Outstanding Role Models: Do They Inspire or Demoralize Us?" Psychological Perspectives on Self and Identity. Abraham Tesser et al., Eds. Washington, D.C., American Psychological Association**:** 147-171.

Loewen, James W. (1995). Lies my teacher told me : everything your American history textbook got wrong. New York, New Press : Distributed by Norton.

Lyons, Linda (2008). Fax of Results for Teens, Ages 13-17, Most Admired Men + Women. Meira Levinson. Princeton, Gallup Organization.

Marr, Andrew (1998). Where Have All of the Heroes Gone? New Statesman**:** 25-26.

McClenaghan, William A. (1953). Magruder's American Government. Boston, Allyn and Bacon.

McClenaghan, William A. (2003). Magruder's American Government. Upper Saddle River, NJ, Prentice Hall.

McDorman, Todd F., et al. (2006). "Where Have All the Heroes Gone?" Journal of Sport and Social Issues **30**(2): 197-218.

Moreau, Joseph (2003). Schoolbook Nation: Conflicts over American History Textbooks from the Civil War to the Present. Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press.

Newport, Frank (2006) "Martin Luther King Jr.: Revered More After Death Than Before." Gallup News Service, July 16, 2006, DOI: Retrieved August 18, 2008. http://www.gallup.com/poll/20920/Martin-Luther-King-Jr-Revered-More-After-Death-Than-Before.aspx.

Obama, Barack (2008). Remarks of Senator Barack Obama: Super Tuesday. Chicago. Retrieved December 8, 2008. http://www.barackobama.com/2008/02/05/remarks_of_senator_barack_obam_46.php.

Obama for America (2008a). "Barack Obama and Joe Biden: The Change We Need (Obama's campaign home page)."   Retrieved December 7, 2008. www.barackobama.com.

Obama for America (2008b). "Barack Obama, Change We Need, Change Is Coming." Retrieved December 10, 2008. http://my.barackobama.com/page/content/changeiscoming/.

Pangle, Lorraine Smith and Thomas L. Pangle (2000). "What the American Founders Have to Teach Us Abotu Schooling for Democratic Citizenship." Rediscovering the Democratic Purposes of Education. Lorraine M. McDonnell et al., Eds. Lawrence, Kansas, University Press of Kansas**:** 21-46.

Parsons, Christi and John McCormick (2008). "Blue-Collar Vote Tough for Obama: Group More Likely to Give Clinton Edge." Chicago Tribune: February 10, 2008.

Pomper, Gerald M. (2004). Ordinary Heroes and American Democracy. New Haven, Yale University Press.

Porpora, Douglas V. (1996). "Personal Heroes, Religion, and Transcendental Metanarratives." Sociological Forum **11**(2): 209-229.

Rawls, John (1971). A Theory of Justice. Cambridge, MA, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Robison, Jennifer (2003) "Teens Search for Role Models Close to Home." Gallup, Inc., June 10, 2003, DOI: Retrieved August 17, 2008. http://www.gallup.com/poll/8584/Teens-Search-Role-Models-Close-Home.aspx.

Schlesinger Jr., Arthur M. (1968 [1958]). "The Decline of Heroes." Heroes and Anti-Heroes: A Reader in Depth. Harold Lubin, Ed. San Francisco, Chandler Publishing Company.

Schwartz, Barry (1990). "The Reconstruction of Abraham Lincoln." Collective Remembering. David Middleton and Derek Edwards, Eds. London, Sage Publications**:** 81-107.

Silverman, William M. (2003). "Where Have All the Heroes Gone?" Journal of the American Osteopathic Association **103**(1): 27-28.

Speizer, Jeanne J. (1981). "Role Models, Mentors, and Sponsors: The Elusive Concepts." Signs **6**(4): 692-712.

Truchard, James (2005) "Where Have All the Heroes Gone?" Control Engineering **2005**, 3 (March 1), DOI: Retrieved December 4, 2008, 2005. http://www.controleng.com/article/CA509812.html.

Tyack, David (2001). "School for Citizens: The Politics of Civic Education from 1790 to 1990." E Pluribus Unum? Contemporary and Historical Perspectives on Immigrant Political Incorporation. Gary Gerstle and John Mollenkopf, Eds. New York, Russell Sage Foundation**:** 331-370.

Wecter, Dixon (1941). The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero-Worship. New York, Charles Scribner's Sons.

West, Cornel and Eddie S. Glaude, Jr. (2006). "Standard Covenant Curriculum: A Study of Black Democratic Action." Retrieved December 10, 2008. http://www.covenantwithblackamerica.com/resources/covenant_StandardCovenantCurriculum.doc.

Wineburg, Sam and Chauncey Monte-Sano (2008). ""Famous Americans": The Changing Pantheon of American Heroes." Journal of American History **94**(4): 1186-1202.

Wolfson, Steven C. (2005). Civics for Today: Participation and Citizenship, Revised Edition. New York, Amsco School Publications, Inc.

Yancy, Antronette, Judith M. Siegel and Kimberly L. McDaniel (2002). "Role models, ethnic identity, and health-risk behaviors in urban adolescents." Archives in Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine **156**(1): 55-61.

Zimmerman, Jonathan (2002). Whose America? Culture Wars in the Public Schools. Cambridge, Mass.,, Harvard University Press.

Zinn, Howard (1980). A people's history of the United States. New York, Harper & Row.