

WHERE I FIND MY HEROES by Oliver Stone
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Oliver Stone became a movie director after serving in the Vietnam War. His films have explored historical subjects, such as the Vietnam War and President Kennedy's assassination.



It's not true that there are no heroes anymore—but it is true that my own concept of heroism has changed radically over time. When I was young and I read the Random House biographies, my heroes were always people like George Washington and General Custer and Abraham Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt. Men, generally, and doers. Women—with the exception of Clara Barton, Florence Nightingale, and Joan of Arc—got short shrift. Most history was oriented toward male heroes.

But as I've gotten older, and since I've been to war, I've been forced to reexamine the nature of life and of heroism. What is true? Where are the myths?

The simple acts of heroism are often overlooked—that's very clear to me not only in war but in peace. I'm not debunking all of history: Crossing the Delaware was a magnificent action. But I am saying that I think the meaning of heroism has a lot to do with evolving into a higher human being. I came into contact with it when I worked with Ron Kovic, the paraplegic Vietnam vet, on *Born on the Fourth of July*. I was impressed by his life change, from a patriotic and strong-willed athlete to someone who had to deal with the total surrender of his body, who grew into a nonviolent and peaceful advocate of change in the Martin Luther King, Jr., and Gandhi tradition. So heroism is tied to an evolution of consciousness,....

Since the war, I've had children, and I'm wrestling now with the everyday problems of trying to share my knowledge with them without overwhelming them. It's difficult to be a father, to be a mother, and I think that to be a kind and loving parent is an act of heroism. So there you go—heroes are everyday, common people. Most of what they do goes unheralded, unappreciated. And that, ironically, is heroism: not to be recognized.

Who is heroic? Scientists who spend years of their lives trying to find cures for diseases. The teenager who says no to crack. The inner-city kid who works at McDonald's instead of selling drugs. The kid who stands alone instead of joining a gang, which would give him an instant identity. The celebrity who remains modest and treats others with respect, or who uses his position to help society. The student who defers the immediate pleasure of making money and finishes college or high school. People who take risks despite fears. People in wheelchairs who don't give up....

We have a lot of corruption in our society. But we mustn't assume that everything is always basely motivated. We should allow for the heroic impulse—which is to be greater than oneself, to try to find another version of oneself, to grow. That's where virtue comes from. And we must allow our young generation to strive for virtue, instead of ridiculing it.