

We hear the word “hero” thrown around every day. The fire fighters rushing into the Twin Towers on 9/11 were heroes. Peyton Manning and Drew Brees are heroes. Soldiers fighting for our freedoms are heroes. Our parents, siblings, friends are heroes. What is it that makes these people heroes? Where do we get our definition of hero?

The ancients had their ideas of what constituted a hero. Their heroes were, in many ways, very different from the people we now consider heroes. However, there are a number of commonalities between the ancient definition and modern perceptions of what makes a hero.

For this assignment, you will write a 3-5 page paper analyzing the concept of “heroism.”

Requirements

1) Analyze the ancient and modern definitions of a “hero.”

Analyze does not just mean present the definition. Analysis requires you to take a position on the subject... in this case, the idea of a “hero.” What are the merits of the ancient definition of a hero? What are the limitations of such a definition? Same for the modern definition. Is one definition better than the other?

2) Choose and analyze the “heroism” of two heroes: one ancient and one modern.

For this part of the paper, you will need to provide a background of each of the heroes you select. What did each accomplish during his/her life? Apply each definition (ancient AND modern) to each of the heroes you have selected. Would the ancients consider Jackie Robinson a hero? Should modern society view Achilles as a hero?

3) Describe what we can learn about modern and ancient societies from their definitions of a hero and the myth with which he/she is associated. This part asks you to use your own ideas more than the other parts of the paper. What does it tell us about modern society that many worship John Elway as a demigod for his heroic exploits. What should we take away about the ancients when Hercules is one of their most celebrated heroes?

You will have three days in the library to research this paper. I expect you to use the time provided. The librarians and I are more than happy to help you locate materials to assist your research. On the back a list of people considered “heroes” by the ancients. The modern example, I leave to your discretion, though I would be happy to help you make a choice. Likewise, if you have an ancient hero in mind that is NOT on the list, come talk to me about him/her and we will try to make it work!

Potential Ancient Heroes

Hercules

Achilles

Theseus

Perseus

Hektor

Bellerophon

Atalanta

Judith

David

Aeneas

Julius Caesar

Horatii

Pompey the Great

Themistocles

Leonidas

Cyrus the Great

Alexander the Great

Cincinnatus

Brutus

Horatius

Tiberius Gracchus

Spartacus

Hannibal

Gilgamesh