

Heroes Among Us



By Oregon State Senator, Dennis Linthicum

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Last week, Statistica reported on a survey where, “respondents were asked how proud they are to be an American. In 2013, 57 percent of Americans stated they were extremely proud to be an American. Nine years later, in 2022, some 38 percent of survey respondents said the same, lowest share recorded in the period.”

How would you have responded to the survey?

America has more races, ethnicities, intercultural and interracial families and marriages than any other country; bar none. Our economic, social, and cultural prosperity has long been the envy of the world.

Why, then, are we witnessing the loss of American Pride?

Could it be a relentless academic, educational, fake news and social media machine that is drowning adults and our youth in a constant storm of false narratives?

My wife, Diane, and I recently re-watched the 2007 movie Rocky Balboa. I was reminded that Sylvester Stallone is an exceptional story teller. Enlisting our collective memory, the Rocky Balboa movie works to display history at a local and personal level. The movie vividly shows us how different circumstances impact the lives of ordinary people based on their personal decisions.

Stallone cuts through the glitz and gets right down to

business adding in bits of humor along with frank and straight-forward insight. There are three characters worth mentioning – Paulie, Marie, and Rocky – representing the low, middle and high-ground for personal responsibility, individualism, and valor.

The character, Paulie, is a poignant display of loneliness and sorrow. During a scene at an abandoned ice rink, Paulie, in stark contrast with Rocky, is distressed by his memories and things which he knows he did wrong. In particular, he realizes that he treated his sister Adrian, and others, quite poorly.

We don't see Paulie complaining about his housing circumstances, the extent of the local Philadelphia food desert, the cost of his healthcare, or his recent job loss. Instead, he was deeply troubled by his own, internal shortcomings. This is disturbing to the modern audience because each of us could likely review our lives with similar results. Hindsight allows each of us to recognize mistakes and broken relationships that could have been easily fixed.

The Marie character, on the other-hand, we remember from the first 1976 Rocky movie as a sassy and rebellious teen. We knew then and still know today that Rocky's advice to Marie was prudent – don't smoke, don't stay out past curfew, act like a nice girl is supposed to act. In 1976 nobody called Rocky a "hater" even though Marie responded with, "Screw you, Creepo!"

Marie is an archetypal representation of everyday people. She is grown up in this sequel and now understands life better. She is neither heroic, extraordinary, nor cowardly. Marie is fully capable of contributing to a cause when given the opportunity but, she is reluctant until someone else steps into her life and invites her to join.

The Rocky character exhibits personal vigor and a steadfast attitude that we, as ordinary everyday people, often find ourselves struggling to achieve. The movie depicts far more

than Rocky's physical prowess, it shows us his heart, how he cares about people, both the living and the dead.

Stallone uses Rocky to show us the power of common-sense and traditional values and then he successfully spurs us towards courage. Rocky does this through a willingness to challenge idle hearts, encouraging each person to try harder, and stick with it and by helping them to become heroes in their own way.

Oregon could use more heroes. The question is not, where are the heroes? I know where they are. They are at every kitchen table; they are helping the kids do their math correctly; They are the ones going to work. The question for us is, how can we each do our part to make a difference? Like Marie, many of us are regular people, willing but reluctant. The fate of our state and nation will depend on how each of us answers this question.

In Rocky's hometown, Philadelphia, some 250 years earlier, Thomas Jefferson and others were striving diligently for liberty. One Philadelphia hero, Thomas Pickering argued for preventing slavery in new states because,

"Congress once made this important declaration, 'that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'; and these truths were held to be self-evident."

Pickering was adamant, "For God's sake, then, let one more effort be made to prevent so terrible a calamity!"

Jefferson's diary records the outcome of the vote on this motion,

"There were ten states present, 6 voted unanimously for it, 3 against it, and one was divided: and seven votes being requisite to decide the proposition affirmatively, it was lost."

This was a full 75 years before our nation's civil war. The vote was not lost because it was wrong-headed or unneeded, but because of the failure of individual moral agents. Jefferson reflects on this tragedy, writing:

“The voice of a single individual of the state which was divided, or of one of those which were of the negative, would have prevented this abominable crime from spreading itself over the new country. Thus we see the fate of millions unborn hanging on the tongue of one man, and heaven was silent in that awful moment! But it is to be hoped it will not always be silent and that the friends to the rights of human nature will in the end prevail.” *

Jefferson's diary reflects a personal challenge to each of us. Today we bear the misfortune that this “one man” is missing from history's pages. This one man's failure was an abdication of his personal responsibilities and a violation of our nation's principles. Yet, our state and nation need more than one voice and we all know there are thousands willing to stand with us to make a difference.

Together, we represent a bulwark that recognizes something is wrong. We see the far-left's agenda playing out in all areas of life. We understand that we must take up the challenge in order to make a difference. We are people in every walk of life; Moms and Dads, kids, high-schoolers and college students.

Each of us, as individuals, are independent moral agents; we exist in every profession, in every wage-scale, of every race and of every ethnic background. It is time to join together in upholding truth, rather than succumbing to the false narratives of the run-away social media machine.

We will always face agenda-driven activists, socialists, Marxists, progressives and irresponsible pleasure-seekers who incessantly complain while believing more government is the

answer. However, history coupled with reality provides a clearer warning. Therefore, our Liberty requires our involvement, boldness and diligence.

Our wonderful American experiment is about self-governance for a people with individual hopes, dreams and futures while staying true and standing strong for the eternal principles of our nation, the maintenance of which is vital to the world.

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E-Mail Dennis Linthicum: d4linthicum@gmail.com