

Leaving a Legacy: The Power of History on the Hearts of Boys

Read Time: 3 Minutes 36 Seconds

Until recently, boys grew up emulating real-life heroes who seemed larger than life. Coonskin caps and six-shooters were the uniforms of boyhood. Boys were enthralled with tales about Daniel Boone, John Glenn and Davy Crockett.

Flannelgraph images taught us about the courage of Noah, the faith of Moses and the collapse of a giant at the hands of a young shepherd boy. We celebrated in the heroic deeds of George Washington, Paul Revere, Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. We reveled in stories about the Sons of Liberty, the Green Mountain Boys, the Rough Riders and the Texas Rangers.

At Thanksgiving, we heard the stories of Squanto and Massasoit, William Bradford and William Brewster, and we learned about the daring pilgrims who risked all for religious freedom.

Today, rather than exalting men for their significant contributions, our culture is dismissing the heroism of fathers and forefathers and choosing instead to emphasize their shortcomings. Statues of men are disappearing as history is rewritten to cater to sanitized non-toxic definitions of masculinity. In a world void of strong, courageous heroes and sterilized of risk, boys are disappearing into fantasy. Superheroes replace real-life role-models and virtual video games become substitutes for real-life challenges.

Theodore Roosevelt understood the importance of history and identity. He wrote, "It is a base untruth to say that happy is

the nation that has no history. Thrice happy is the nation that has a glorious history. Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat. . . Freedom from effort in the present merely means that there has been stored up effort in the God for the iron in the blood of our fathers."

Our concept of democracy is rooted in courage and character. It was nurtured through common vision, servant leadership, risk and adventure. The Pilgrims were characterized by their determination to throw off shackles, secure religious freedom and create a new way of life. Pioneering American families banded together to explore the new world.

They lived on boats and survived in shelters until they could construct new homes, craft a new civilization and cultivate a new government. As the nation grew, families crossed over the mountains, camped across prairies and hewed communities out of the wilderness.

The words written into the Constitution and the Bill of Rights express the ideals and accomplishments of life as the founders themselves experienced it. These are not documents of intangible ideas, but the results of pragmatism and hard work put into words that express a revolutionary concept of democratic living.

Where do boys engage with these founding experiences that made our country great? Where can they encounter men who embody this courage, risk and innovative thinking?

As leaders of boys, we should embrace the heroism that built this nation and be dedicated to encouraging godly young men full of character and leadership potential. If we erase our history in an attempt to get rid of the shortcomings of our

forefathers, we invariably lose the legacy of their greatness.

Part of what makes scripture so inspiring is that great heroes like David, Moses, Abraham, Elijah, Samson, Noah, Jonah and Peter were both heroic and flawed. They failed, stood up, brushed themselves off and failed again—and they achieved great things. The good news is that we have a history of men “filled with grace and power” who “through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength.”

These are the stories boys need to hear. Boys need risk and reward, and they languish where there is a lack of physical, mental and spiritual challenge. As the country gathers to reflect during this holiday season, let us use this time of thankfulness to be grateful to those who dared to dream big, enact change and build this great nation.

Let us tell stories and honor our history for the boys of America so that they will learn from and adopt the positive defining attributes of our ancestors that made our nation great.

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