

Defining our Heroes

The word hero is associated with a person who is admired for their achievement(s), noble qualities or great courage shown. A hero is known for demonstrating qualities of bravery, conviction, courage, determination, helpfulness, honesty, inspirational, and integrity. It is to be known that being kind, having self-esteem, and being selfless, are the three most important traits of a hero. Basically a hero is to be credited for putting others before oneself. An important factor which stands out, is that a true hero is said to be an individual who offers voluntary service. Along with this, it is to be underscored that putting others before oneself, makes the difference when considering and honouring an individual as a hero. What is also known, is the fact that heroes protect others by saving others, helping others, acting against danger or injustice, acting when others do not, and acting on behalf of vulnerable individuals or groups.

Individuals who are acknowledged for their courage, outstanding achievements, and noble qualities, can easily be identified as a hero. When it comes to the identifying an individual who may qualify to be designated as a national hero as against that of just being recognized as a hero, a distinction can be made on the grounds that the individual has made significant positive contributions to the growth and development of society. This is tied to the fact that the work and actions were done in the interest of the populace. In some cases, there are those qualify to be called national heroes because of the fact that they make the ultimate sacrifice of giving their life for the cause of protecting and defending the interest of the people. These are called martyrs. Such persons tend to stand in defence of a principle or to defend the cause of freedom.

In this contemporary age, the names and legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the noted civil rights leader in the United States of America, Nelson Mandela, the legend who championed the cause against apartheid in South Africa and Rosa Parks, the American activist in the civil rights movement best known for her pivotal role in the Montgomery bus boycott, are examples of who are true heroes. With respect to Rosa Parks, (1913- 2005), she will long be remembered for having initiated the civil rights movement in the United States of America, when she refused to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery bus. History recalls that the yearlong protest that ensued that and lead by the Rev. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., ended only when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that bus segregation was unconstitutional. It is this outcome that accounted for the decision of the Congress of the United States Congress to honour Rosa Parks as "the first lady of civil rights" and "the mother of the freedom movement.

The work of these noted persons was rooted in activism. Out of this comes a clear demonstration of what constitutes selfness, bravery, conviction, courage, determination, helpfulness, honesty, inspirational, and integrity. The feats of these distinguished persons, should help to shape the criteria which applies in the appointment of a national hero. Colour, race, class, creed, religion, social and financial standing ought not be considerations. Added to this, there is no place for any politically driven appointment of a national hero. To put this into perspective, it would be a travesty if President Donald Trump were to be named a national hero over President Barrack Obama, President John F. Kennedy and President Jimmy Carter.

In the Caribbean, there is a practice where past politicians are elevated to be named as a national hero. Through their service and contributions, it has to be concluded that the designation earned is merited. In returning back to the thought that a true hero is said to be an individual who offers voluntary service, a legitimate question can be raised as to whether elected politicians who served as servants of the state, should be given prominence in the nomination and selection of a national hero. While this contention may appear to be contemptuous, it cannot be refuted that elected politicians receive a monthly salary and allowances from the state. In addition, they qualify for a pension after having completed a determined number of years' service. This clearly does not meet the criteria of voluntary service. However, if it is that prior to their election to political office, they were actively involved in activism through their participation in civil society organizations, including that of trade unions, then the question of their eligibility becomes a moot point.

It is for the people of the nation to understand the importance of moving beyond the personality and charisma of the individual when deciding on a national hero. More so, the value of the contribution of any recommended national hero in bringing about change, is to be taken into account.