

HONORABLE MENTION

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What is Courage Today?

What is courage of the past and courage of today? What is the difference? When we think of courage of the past, we often think of fighting on the frontlines of a war, fighting for racial equality, or fighting for gender related rights. These examples are still fought for today; however, the courage in these actions is implied. Instead of looking solely at the action as a symbol of courage, we look at what is the driving force behind the action. We see people standing up for what they believe in and taking the risk to express that belief. We see people fighting when the odds are not in their favor. We see people rising up when nobody is on their side and taking control of the situation. We see courage as doing what is right, not because it is cool or popular or optimum or impressive, but because it is right.

The first example of courage today is Pat Tillman. Patrick Tillman was a football player in the NFL. He was drafted in 1998 to the Arizona Cardinals and started ten out of sixteen games his rookie season. In 2002—after the attacks on September 11th, 2001—he turned down a 3.6 million dollar contract with the Saint Louis Rams to enlist in the United States Army. After serving several tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, Pat Tillman was killed in 2004 at the age of 27. In the past, what would have been looked at as courageous was the fact that he joined the fight and helped his country in the war. Today it is not only the fact that he joined the fight, but it is also the fact that he was following what he believed in. It is not to say that soldiers in the past were not doing what they thought was right, but in the past their thoughts were affected by the need of men to fight on the frontlines: the fighting itself was what was applauded as courageous. He only had one concern—his beliefs. He expressed his beliefs and his fidelity towards his country by involving himself in the fight over seas and died doing what he believed was right.

Another epitome of courage today is Malala Yousafzai. Malala is a young girl who fights for educational opportunities for girls in Pakistan. When she was 14, the Taliban issued a death threat against her as revenge for her speaking out against them. Instead of giving up, she continued to speak out. On October 9th, 2012 a gunman boarded her bus and shot her in the head. Fortunately, she survived the shooting. Now she is working with the United Nations to outlaw discrimination against girls and ensure that all out-of-school children are in school by 2015. Malala, like Pat Tillman, stood up for what she believed in and is still standing up for that today. In the past, education was not viewed the same way it is today. People were often uninterested and focused on work. It was not thought to be as valuable, and an act, such as this, would have been under appreciated. What she is fighting for along with why she is fighting are both examples of how courage has changed. Facing the jurisdiction of the Taliban, she conjured the courage to support her beliefs and help children around the world. Through her

battle for education for every child, she displays courage that would not have been recognized had it been in the past.

Some people make the argument that courage has not changed from the past to today. That what was viewed as courageous is still thought of in the same way today. I agree that there are instances in which this is true, for example firemen and police officers are groups of people who have demonstrated peerless amounts of courage from the beginning of their existence. However, this is not true of all people. Jackie Robinson is a sublime example. He fought for what he believed was right and he broke the color barrier in baseball and proceeded to pave the way for African American athletes in all sports. He is highly regarded as one of the most courageous American athletes ever. His courage and desire to fight for what he believed was right in preceding times allows African American athletes and athletes of other races to not have to be courageous to play the sport that they love today. That is how courage has changed. A situation, which once required courage in the past, no longer needs it today.

People being courageous enough to do what is right because it is right is what it takes to keep this country and this planet moving forward. As time continues to move forward, acts of courage will continue to evolve. We previously focused on the action itself, now we focus on the reasons behind the actions, and maybe in the future there will not be a need for courageous acts. But what will bring us to that culmination are the effects of courageous acts of today.