

THE BEST IN MEMPHIS HISTORY

Heroes in our history?

By John E. Harkins, Ph.D.
SPECIAL TO THE BEST TIMES

Among the perquisites of teaching at Memphis University School, is enjoying the quality and variety of assembly programs. Spasmodically, our speakers are personalities of national or even international stature. Some of these come in for annual, endowed lecture series like our Metcalf Symposium. Others



Harkins

are serendipitous opportunities that arise through our faculty's collegial connections. The latter was the case when, at the behest of history teacher Eric Berman, Dr. Peter H. Gibbon came in late January to speak to the MUS community (and several other Memphis schools). His topic was "Heroes in America."

Following an impressive career in academics and school admin-



Dr. Peter H. Gibbon

faculty, analyzing and exploring the many facets of what is heroic and why. He notes that since the 1960s we have been living in an anti-heroic age, one awash with cynicism, obsessive attention to sex and celebrities, and disdain for political and military figures. Noting further that America has "come to define the person by the flaw," individuals like Christopher Columbus, Thomas Jefferson and Albert Einstein, have been booted out of America's



A CALL TO HEROISM

Renewing America's Vision of Greatness

FOREWORD BY PETER J. GOMIS

on their personal heroes, past and present. Most of us seem to agree that heroes are persons who have overcome adversity in some extraordinary way. Whether through a single act of courage like Tom Lee saving survivors of a capsized Mississippi riverboat or the sustained activities of Mother Teresa ministering to the lepers of Calcutta, as in other areas, we usually recognize the real thing

wood Cemetery and Shiloh National Military Park before leaving our area. He was impressed with what he found here and he hopes to return soon, to bring his message to additional local schools and to learn more about Memphis-area heroes.

MUS students responded enthusiastically to Gibbon's lecture. More important, many of them gave up free class periods later that day to participate in one or more of his hour-long student forums. Attendance was even strong during the last period of the week, during which students who do not have classes or lab work are permitted to leave campus. The following Monday, students in each of my classes wanted to resume Friday's discussions. Gibbon's riveting, Socratic exchanges with our young men struck a chord with them. His work with them epitomizes some of the best elements that a traditional liberal arts education should provide. Observing the quality of our students' interaction proved a joy to Gibbon and

istration, Gibbon spent 10 years researching and writing "A Call to Heroism: Renewing America's Vision of Greatness." Since his book's publication, Gibbon has been touring our nation and doing precisely what the subtitle of his book advocates. He lectures on heroism, and then holds discussions with students and

pantheon of heroes. In fact, the very concept of heroism has become intellectually and socially unfashionable, perhaps even taboo in some circles.

Admitting that consensus on what defines a "hero" is difficult to reach and subjectivity will always have its role, Gibbon encourages his audiences to reflect

when we encounter it.

Gibbon had done some homework before coming to Memphis. He knew of Ida B. Wells' work to stop lynching here, and of the city's controversy over keeping the names of its Confederate motif public parks. He visited the Civil Rights Museum, and planned to tour Historic Elm-

to MUS teachers. It exemplified the nobility of our profession.

Well done, Peter Gibbon! Thank you for your gift to America's youth and to their teachers.

Go online to www.heroesinamerica.org to learn more about Peter Gibbon and the importance of heroism in our history, or to contact Gibbon.



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