



# The Changing Concept of HEROES

Anne Morrow Lindbergh

*THIS ARTICLE is a slightly edited version of the talk Anne Morrow Lindbergh gave as noon luncheon speaker at the 130th Minnesota Historical Society annual meeting and history conference held Saturday, October 27, 1979, at the Downtown Holiday Inn in Minneapolis. (The business meeting was held October 26 at the State Capitol.) Mrs. Lindbergh, a celebrated author and widow of famed aviator-author-conservationist-scientist Charles A. Lindbergh, Jr., who grew up in Little Falls, Minnesota, spoke to an enthusiastic, overflow crowd of 850 people. She also "fielded" questions afterward, and some of her answers (and one by her daughter, Reeve Lindbergh Brown) are included in the following pages.*

*Mrs. Lindbergh was introduced by her longtime friend, Russell W. Fridley. He had been surprised a few moments earlier when former Governor Elmer L. Andersen made a presentation to mark Fridley's twenty-fifth year as director of the Minnesota Historical Society.*

— Ed.

I AM VERY HAPPY to be with you here today at this history conference. I feel closer to my husband in such a setting, surrounded by family and friends in my husband's home state. Minnesota meant a great deal to my husband, not only in his childhood and youth. The Min-

nesota background upheld him all his life — its natural beauty, its tradition of pioneering courage, and its adventurous spirit toward the future. Through him Minnesota came to mean something special to me, and I always feel invigorated when I return. My feeling about Minnesota has deepened since my husband's death and since I have been studying, reading, and writing about his life.

I am not a historian, and I was somewhat appalled to realize that, if I spoke at this luncheon, I would be facing 500 or 600 historians, or history professors, and scholars. However, I *am* interested in history itself, and I have been working on one small area of the field these past years. I have been preparing for publication my diaries and letters written during the most active years of our life together, and I have come to agree with Henry James's statement, "It takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature." The fifth, and last, volume, which I finished this summer, will be published next year. It covers the prewar and war years in the United States from 1939 to 1944.<sup>1</sup>

It was very important to study the books written about this period before writing my introduction. A full review of the background was necessary, because many of the facts, and certainly the atmosphere, of this prewar period have faded in our minds. No one is hazy about the Second World War, even those who were not born then, and the casual opinion is that we had waged a just war against evil forces and that we won. Most people can agree on some such conclusion, but the period just before the war is dim in our memory. It was a short episode in our history that has been eclipsed by the magnitude of the war that followed. For the general public, and anyone under forty years old, it is almost a lost era — but not, of course, for historians. Who remembers today what was called "the great debate" on whether or not the United States should participate in World War II? Who remembers the arguments of the isolationists or the in-

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<sup>1</sup>The first volume of Anne Morrow Lindbergh's series based on her diaries and letters was *Bring Me a Unicorn* (New York, 1972), which covered the 1922–1928 period. It was followed by *Hour of Gold, Hour of Lead* (1973), covering 1929–1932; *Locked Rooms and Open Doors* (1974), covering 1933–1935; and *The Flower and the Nettle* (1976), covering 1936–1939. For the Henry James quote, see his *Hawthorne* (1879), a biography of the American novelist.

*AT LEFT is a portrait bust of Charles A. Lindbergh, Jr., dated "New York, 1940–41," by sculptor Paul Fjelde. The picture is from the MHS audio-visual library.*

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terventionists? In fact, it might be difficult for many people to recall the name of any isolationist besides Charles Lindbergh. He was, as this audience will remember, against our participation in World War II.

It is irrelevant to go back into those old arguments today. Some of his prophecies were correct, and some were not. What interests me is the tenacity with which he fought for what he believed and the courage with which he withstood attacks and abuse because of his stand. The label, "isolationist," is still a derogatory term. The best definition I have ever heard of isolationist came from an ardent interventionist. I found it in a series of lectures given by Walter Lippmann on isolation and alliances. Lippmann was trying to explain to a British audience the roots of isolation in our country. He said: "The term isolationists, and the mythology which has grown up around it, suggest passivity and lethargy. The word isolationist conceals the dynamic and expansionist energy of the American nation. . . . Those whom we now call isolationists are the true believers in the foreign policy of the men who conquered and settled the American continental domain."<sup>2</sup>

It was this dynamic, pioneering energy that I recognized in rereading last summer the antiwar speeches of my husband. And though there were differences in their points of view, the speeches were full of the background, the beliefs, and the virtues of his father and grandfather. Until I visited Minnesota, and until I read Bruce Larson's excellent biography of Charles Lindbergh, Sr., I did not realize what a tradition my husband was following.<sup>3</sup> His wartime addresses are full of the character and the cadence of the Old West. Although the factual content of my husband's addresses rests firmly on his technical knowledge of the air power of his day, the emotional thrust and language are those of his father and his grandfather. One recognizes the tone of those hardy immigrants who had left Europe behind them for the New World of the West. I quote from one of his speeches: "Let us carry on the American destiny of which our forefathers dreamed as they cut their farmlands from the virgin forest."<sup>4</sup>

But over and beyond the issue of war and peace, the younger Lindbergh had his ancestors' staunch belief in our representative government, an issue that he felt, and I quote again, "was even more fundamental than war itself."<sup>5</sup> With prewar public opinion polls in 1939 to 1940 showing that 80 per cent of the people opposed the United States' entry into the war, and with Congress almost solidly isolationist, he believed that his fellow citizens were being led by steps short of war into an undeclared war, without the opportunity to vote on the issue.

Those of you who have read Bruce Larson's *Lindbergh of Minnesota* will remember that the older Lindbergh, a congressman from Minnesota, had op-

posed World War I. Despite strong support from the farmer-oriented Nonpartisan League, he was overcome by the opposition. In the war fever of 1914–1918, his meetings were run out of town, he was stoned, called a friend of the Kaiser, and even hanged in effigy. The records of those days are vividly exhibited in the Little Falls interpretive center. Despite the attacks, he stood by his position until defeated for re-election in 1920.

I remember my husband once told me that people said of his father, "When Lindbergh is for you, he will stick by you till hell freezes over." This is the kind of courage and independence that went into the making of Minnesota, and I believe runs through the character of its native sons and daughters today. It was certainly there in large measure in Senator Hubert Humphrey, who crusaded for civil rights, for medicare, for arms control long before these causes became politically acceptable. I call this kind of political action heroism, just as I think Charles Lindbergh, Sr.'s career was heroic, and that of his son also, and not simply in flying the Atlantic.

My husband was not a politician like his father or like Senator Humphrey. The younger Lindbergh was not really a leader. A leader wants certain tangible results. He wants, and needs, political power, position, and followers. My husband did not want political power, or position, or followers. He had a vision, several visions, during his lifetime, and he wanted to open people's eyes to his vision. He was more of a crusader, a lone crusader, most of the time, perhaps because he was ahead of his time. That nickname he was given early of the "Lone Eagle" was prophetic. It was right. He was looking into the future, not the immediate future but the far future, and this is why his aims were often misunderstood.

THERE WERE three major crusades in his life. The first crusade was aviation. He wanted to convince people, by his deeds and also by his words, that flying was, or could be, safe, practical, and beneficial. He believed that the airplane would span continents and oceans, that it would advance communication and understanding between peoples. His first crusade, when he was young and idealistic, was largely successful.

His second crusade, in mid-life, was antiwar. He was against the United States' involvement in World War II in Europe. He foresaw the destruction that the new weapon of air power and saturation bombing would bring to the world. In this crusade he was not successful. But men learn from their failures as well as from their successes. Great men grow through their setbacks. When

<sup>2</sup>Walter Lippmann, *Isolation and Alliances: An American Speaks to the British*, 10–11 (Boston, 1952).

<sup>3</sup>Bruce L. Larson, *Lindbergh of Minnesota: A Political Biography* (New York, 1973).

<sup>4</sup>Speech made in Chicago on August 4, 1940.

<sup>5</sup>Speech made in Cleveland, Ohio, August 9, 1941.

the war came, he fought for his country, flying in fifty combat missions in the Pacific with men half his age. At the end of the war he was sent on a naval mission to Europe to investigate rocket installations in Germany. On this mission he witnessed the misery and destruction that war brings. He saw with his own eyes the degradation and horror in the remains of German concentration camps. He expressed his reactions, his postwar convictions, in a small book, *Of Flight and Life*. I quote: "I have seen the science I worshipped, and the aircraft I loved, destroying the civilization I expected them to serve."<sup>6</sup>

His third, and last, crusade was to enhance the quality of life on earth, "the life of plants and animals as well as that of man." The last twenty years of his life he devoted to his efforts to preserve endangered species of animals, to protect, initiate, and expand national parks and wilderness areas, and to safeguard the minorities occupying these areas.

His final vision was to see "that the goal of man is man himself." His aim was "to seek a balance between nature's wisdom and our scientific knowledge and the technical forces we have let loose."<sup>7</sup> His last vision was larger than the more limited ones of his first crusade for aviation or of his second crusade against participation in World War II. And in his final crusade one cannot call him an isolationist in the narrow sense of the word. His point of view was global. In the sixties and seventies, he had no reluctance in working with British, French, Swiss, Scandinavians, Dutch, Spanish, South Americans, Russians, Japanese, Asians, and Africans on the protection of endangered species, the conservation of our resources, and the prevention of a polluted environment. He was one of the first to realize that one cannot be an isolationist in the preservation of our planet. This crusade is still unfinished. It also was pioneering, and it was not popular or understood when he began. A nation-wide magazine refused an article he wrote on the protection of the dwindling whale population. The editor rejected it, saying: "I am afraid the American people are not much interested in whales." They are now. The role of the pioneer, or the reformer, or the hero is to look ahead of his time.

If we are talking about heroes at this conference, and I think we are, we should admit that the concept of hero changes with each era. A hero, or an outstanding public figure, rises, I believe, not only from the traditions and

ideals of the past but also from the needs of the present, the time and place into which he was born. He springs also from the aspirations and dreams of the future; that is, the seeds of the future that lie hidden in the present, so that he is at the same time a reflection of the past, a focus of the present, and a kind of periscope into the future.

THIS IS WHERE the role of the historian is important. He is there to study, to analyze, to clarify the components of past, present, and future in historic characters. He can discover the debt the hero owes to the past, the symbol that he is of the present, and the influence such a man, or woman, may have on the future. The balanced judgment of the historian is particularly valuable today when we are overwhelmed by an abundance of public media constantly creating images of public figures. In our present-day culture the image of a hero is sometimes blown up overnight and often torn down a few months later. The historian, as I see it, attempts to cut through the myths of legend, propaganda, and gossip. He tries to test the image of the public man and find out, if possible, what is false and what is true, or what is probable and what is improbable, and what is relevant to the history of mankind.

There are people today who assert that the hero is an anachronism. In a recent biography of T. E. Lawrence by John E. Mack, which you may have read, I found this thesis quoted: "Ours is an age in which hero and heroic acts are anachronisms. . . the hero is 'out of joint' with our pragmatic world."<sup>8</sup> He implies that we know too much. We are too sophisticated. We have seen too many heroes debunked to believe in their existence. The biographer of Lawrence also makes the excellent point that, in our troubled times when masses of ordinary men and women have experienced the horrors of war, torture, and exile, the individual hero or heroine is hardly distinguishable. The threats that loom over all mankind are so inhuman, depersonalized, and completely out of the individual's control that it seems futile to look to a hero for salvation.

I am not entirely convinced by these arguments. Through the ages men have always needed and found heroes to embody their aspirations, to compensate for their failures, and to inspire them to explore new paths for mankind. I think we still need, and will continue to find, them. We should admit, however, that our concept of a hero has changed. The Homeric hero is outdated. The Biblical hero of the David and Goliath story, beautiful as it is, is hard to imagine today. The romantic heroes of the Middle Ages, the Richard Coeur de Lions, seem theatrical and unrealistic. But a new hero image is emerging, one that we can actively co-operate with rather than passively idolize. The contemporary hero, to quote again the biographer of T. E. Lawrence, "seems to

<sup>6</sup>Charles A. Lindbergh, *Of Flight and Life*, 51 (New York, 1948).

<sup>7</sup>Both quotations are from Charles Lindbergh, "Lessons from the Primitive," in *Reader's Digest*, November, 1972.

<sup>8</sup>John E. Mack, *A Prince of Our Disorder: The Life of T. E. Lawrence*, 217 (Boston, 1976). Mack quoted from James Notopoulos, "The Tragic and the Epic in T. E. Lawrence," in *Yale Review* (Spring, 1965).



be a kind of political-spiritual figure, such as Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, or Dag Hammarskjöld, whose examples are of peace, nonviolence and renunciation.”<sup>9</sup> I would add Albert Schweitzer, with his reverence for life, and Mother Teresa of India, with her compassionate dedication to the sick and the poor. There are many others.

The Lawrence biographer also quotes a new and thought-provoking definition of the modern hero which I want to leave with you. This one comes from an essay of Irving Howe: “The hero as he appears in the tangle of modern life is a man struggling with a vision he can neither realize nor abandon, ‘a man with a load on his mind.’”<sup>10</sup> I think this is a marvelous definition of the contemporary hero or heroine, although I would alter it to read: “A man or a woman with a load on the heart” — a definition which I think applies to both of the public men we are here to celebrate. My personal suggestion in answer to the question on the program — as how best to memorialize historic personages — is to lighten their load by going forward carrying their burden on our own shoulders.



ANNE MORROW LINDBERGH responded to questions at the Minnesota Historical Society's history conference in Minneapolis after giving her prepared talk. Harry Webb photo

IN THE question-answer period following her talk, Anne Morrow Lindbergh made several interesting responses on such subjects as her writing, various aspects of her husband's career and beliefs, and additional thoughts on heroes and heroines. Some of her answers follow. — Ed.

**Q:** What is the name of your new book?

**A:** It is called *War Within and Without*, because I had great conflicts at that time. My sympathies were very greatly with England and France, where I had been living, and I didn't want them to go down.

**Q:** Why is the next volume the final one?

**A:** When you finish a series that has taken seven years, you never want to write again. But that doesn't last very long. I have just gotten the galleys off to the publisher.

**Q:** How many years have you been writing?

**A:** Oh, I started writing a diary, I think, when I was ten or eleven, maybe earlier, but I suppressed it. It is good practice, though, and I recommend it to all of you who are ten or eleven.

**Q:** How did you arrive at the decision to publish your diaries?

**A:** That was because of my husband, who was a strong-minded man. He felt there were so many false stories about us, so many rumors, and silly things said, that the diaries would be a living record — at least of the way we felt in those days. So he was a prime mover of the project.

**Q:** Would you give some opinions of what Lindbergh, who was antiwar before World War II, thought of protest groups against the war in Vietnam?

**A:** [By Reeve Lindbergh Brown, at her mother's request]: In regard to Vietnam protesting, that was my era. My father and I spoke a lot about the war, and he felt very sympathetic toward young people who had antiwar views. He did not feel it was a war we should have gotten into, but he felt that young people at that time had no conception of what it was like to be the person in charge of either running the war or getting out of the war. He thought that the protests, while he was sympathetic to them, were facile, simplistic solutions of many of the younger people, including myself, who were antiwar. He felt that we really did not know enough to protest, as if there were any very simple solution. His sympathies were right there, but his attitude was: "It's easy for you at eighteen to say, 'O.K., we are all going to get out right now.'" He was able to see the other person's point of view, but I do not think he was wholeheartedly sympathetic.

Mrs. Lindbergh added: My husband did say to one young man, "Well, I fought in a war that I did not believe in." Which he did. He was sympathetic to their objections, but he also felt that when your country is in a bad situation, you have to be there.

**Q:** How did your husband feel about nuclear reactors?

**A:** I do not know. He died five years ago, and I doubt that there were enough nuclear reactors for him to express an opinion. I remember that he was worried about the supersonic jet. He thought it should be developed, but he felt that, before it would go into practical com-

<sup>9</sup> Mack, *Lawrence*, 218.

<sup>10</sup> Mack, *Lawrence*, 219. The title of the Irving Howe essay quoted is "T. E. Lawrence: The Problem of Heroism," which appears in Howe's *A World More Attractive*, 20. The quotation, "A man with a load on his mind," is from Herbert Read's review of Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* that appeared in *The Bibliophile's Almanack* for 1928, p. 39.

mercial use, it should be very thoroughly investigated. I assume he would have the same response to nuclear reactors. [Mrs. Lindbergh asked the opinion of other family members present, and they indicated they thought she was right in her answer.]

**Q:** *The centennial of another of our heroes, Will Rogers, is upon us. Would you share any memories you have of him?*

**A:** He was a wonderful man. One of the things I recall was a characteristic he shared with my father. He always had baggy trousers. But that was a physical thing. He was very courageous, as well as humorous. He was not the kind of witty man you were afraid to be with. His wit never hurt anybody.

**Q:** *Do you think the hero shapes the times or the times shape the hero?*

**A:** That's a very good question. I think both. I think the hero springs from the times, and then he affects the times ahead.

**Q:** *Will the hero of the future represent the attributes of the hero of today or of the past? Which qualities will change?*

**A:** They have already changed tremendously. In John Mack's book about T. E. Lawrence, which has a marvelous chapter on "The Heroic Legend and the Hero," he analyzes this extremely well and says that the hero springs from his times. But he also defines a new kind of hero, and he feels that T. E. Lawrence — Lawrence of Arabia — was a halfway mark between the warrior-hero of the Middle Ages, the individual who fought and conquered for his country, and the spiritual-moral hero of today — men like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, whom I mentioned. I would think that this process is going to continue and enlarge. I believe we are going to have more heroes of the moral and spiritual type.

So far I have not mentioned the heroines. There are many heroines — but not as many listed in history. I think this is partly because they were given a minor role in current events and also because men wrote history. That is, up until today, when we have the Barbara Tuchmans and other very fine women historians. An interesting point, now that we are on the subject, is that church history has been very fair to women. There is a really august list of women saints — more saints than heroines, I think. (Perhaps a reason for this is that men prefer to see women in the role of saints. I am not saying they are more saintlike. I am saying this is the dream of men.) The church has been very fair in recognizing women saints as well as men saints. Also, women saints were recorded in art, as well as in literature and religious writings, so that they have been portrayed. They are in the cathedrals and in art galleries, so that we have a visual record of women saints.

But if you look for heroines in history, it is difficult. I was trying to do this the other night and thought of Joan

of Arc, one of history's greatest heroines, who was burned at the stake. Then I thought of American heroines. They seem to be connected with flags — Betsy Ross, who sewed on flags, and Barbara Fritchie, waving a flag out the window. There are others, and there are unsung heroines. I believe one of them was Louisa Carlin, who was my husband's grandmother. You probably all know the story, but her husband, August, who was the original Lindbergh immigrant to this country, had a terrible accident in a sawmill. He was the pioneer and built the log cabin, and she came with him. She was twenty, I think, when she came. He had an accident in the sawmill, and his left arm was severed. From that time on he had only one arm with which to do the work. A lot of the work included chopping up wood for fires, and he left his ax on the woodpile. These were the days of Indians, and a band of Indians came along. One of them picked up this ax and started to go away with it. Louisa knew that the heavy ax, which was especially built so her husband could use it with one hand, was indispensable to him. So she rushed out after the Indian. She shook her fist at him and followed him until he dropped the ax. And she got it back. Now I call that heroic.

**Q:** *We all know "Lindy" as the "Lone Eagle," and there have been heroes in the past who could perform singlehandedly. What chance is there now for an individual to accomplish great things as opposed to a committee or a group?*

**A:** In regard to the traditional role of the hero, there is not as much opportunity now for the individual to come to the rescue; yet we see examples of physical heroism all the time — in firemen, in policemen, in young men rescuing drowning companions. But I also think, and more importantly perhaps, that the moral hero is always going to be there and is always going to be needed. It is sometimes much harder to be a moral hero — to stand up for what you believe. I do not think this is ever going to be outmoded. On the whole a great crowd of people does not stand out and speak for something unpopular.

**Q:** *Did you, during your marriage to a famous hero who was in the limelight, feel that your personality was submerged?*

**A:** Sometimes, yes, but never in private, so to speak. And that is what counts. Since my husband always believed in me — believed in what I could do — and always encouraged me to speak up in company, and always gave me credit, I never felt this in my marriage. Often, when a question was asked him, he would surprise me by saying: "Now I think Anne's point of view on that is good." Thus in private I never felt submerged. Of course, in public life you get rather tired of having people shake hands with you like this [she drew laughter as she pumped her hand while looking away in the opposite direction].



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