

Achilles: The Not-So-Noble Hero

You are the General of the U.S. Army and you have just killed Osama bin Laden. This is a great feat, as he is close to the top of the FBI's Top Ten Most Wanted Fugitives list (FBI Ten Most Wanted Fugitives). Once you have killed him, you tie his corpse to the back of your Humvee and drive him around Afghanistan's capital city of Kabul three times everyday (Afghanistan). At first your country praises you for killing him, but once they find out what you are doing to his dead body, they aren't so pleased. It is pretty sick, and your country doesn't consider you much of a hero anymore. However, back when Achilles was a Greek war hero, you would have been praised for this sort of thing. Achilles was the leader of the Greek army in the Trojan War. He had all of the Trojans scared out of their minds when he fought. Eventually he killed their leader, Hector. To show his enemies who was boss, Achilles decided to drag the corpse of the Trojan prince around the city of Troy three times every morning at dawn. Priam, Hector's father, wanted his son's body, but Achilles was reluctant to hand it over. He finally agreed to trade it for its weight in gold (Pontikis, Achilles). As you can see, Achilles did quite a few things that would show signs of power back then. Many of the things that Greek gods and war heroes did wouldn't be honorable or right in today's society.

Achilles did things as leader of the Greek army that you couldn't do in a war today without punishment. If you were to drag the corpse of a dead soldier around their home city three times every morning, you would not be praised like Achilles (Pontikis, Achilles). Back then, killing and disgracing someone was a heroic act. It showed that you were powerful. In today's world, it is just sick. After Achilles had dragged the corpse around Troy for a few days, Hector's father practically got on his knees and begged Achilles for his son's body back so he could properly bury it. Achilles refused but finally agreed to exchange it for Hector's weight in gold. Today you couldn't do something like that (Pontikis, Achilles). You would be thought of as power hungry, inhuman, and only in it for the glory. Achilles was eventually punished though, which was probably for the better. Apollo was disgusted with some of the things that Achilles did, and had Paris (although some say that it was Apollo disguised as Paris) shoot an arrow at his right heel. This was Achilles' only spot that wasn't immortal. This fatal shot marked the end of the great war hero (Pontikis, Achilles). Even though he did some not-so-noble things, Achilles wasn't the only Greek hero to ever do something disgraceful.

Theseus is another example of a Greek hero that you could say wouldn't have been so great. Theseus took the law into his own hands. Instead of catching a murderer and turning them over to the proper authorities, he would kill the criminal in a way that they had killed other people. If you went around killing people by flinging them with pine trees (in Sinis's case), Theseus would take care of you in the same way (Pontikis, Theseus). When he made it to Athens, he had killed many bandits this way, including

Sciron and Procrustes (Thompson). He was praised for this because the people didn't have to deal with these criminals anymore. However, if this happened today, Theseus would not have been praised the same as he was back then. People probably would have been happy that the bandits had been caught, but he would still be put on trial for his actions. In Greek mythology, heroes weren't the only ones to commit these kinds of acts. The King of the Gods also did some disgraceful things as well.

Zeus, the King of Olympus himself was known to do some things that would be pretty bad today. He was the ruler of all the gods. He was known for his wisdom, and came to be called the "noblest one of all". If he lived today, he probably would not have been given that title. He cheated on his wife, Rhea, with many other mortals and goddesses. He was never looked down upon for his actions like you would be in modern society. However, the kids he had with the other women were punished by Rhea. An example of this would be Hercules. Rhea was upset with Zeus for cheating on her, so he constantly tormented Hercules. This later drove him insane, and he killed his family. Hercules was punished and had to complete the twelve Labors. So as you can see, not even the head honcho of the Greek gods would be considered so noble or great today.

Greek heroes and gods did a lot of things that would make you a criminal today. Achilles was a great war hero, but a lot of the things he did would get him thrown in prison if he were alive now. Theseus was also a hero to the Greeks, but today would be in jail with the rest of the people that he killed. Zeus, the ruler of the gods, cheated on his wife. This was dishonorable to himself and to Rhea. There are quite a few things that are the same about today's society and ancient Greece, but there are still many things that have changed. As you can see, standards to be considered a hero or noble is one thing that has changed quite a bit.

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