

WHO GETS TO BE CALLED A HERO?

Cheering on fictional freedom fighters has long been accepted, but cheering on flesh and blood people who impact our world? That's a bit murkier, Lyla Miklos writes.

By Lyla Miklos

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Mark Hamill, left, Carrie Fisher and Harrison Ford in the 1977 film "Star Wars." They were terrorists modeled on the Viet Cong and Darth Vader's Galactic Empire is a stand-in for the United States of America, Lyla Miklos writes. The Canadian Press file photo

Film makers George Lucas ("Star Wars") and James Cameron ("Terminator") had a revealing conversation in the 2018 AMC-plus documentary series "[James Cameron's Story of Science Fiction](#)".

Cameron observed, "You did something very interesting with "Star Wars", if you think about it the good guys are the rebels. They're using asymmetric warfare

against a highly organized empire. I think we call those guys terrorists today. We call them Mujahedin. We call them Al-Qaeda.”

Lucas replied, “When I did it, they were Viet Cong.”

“You look at the situation now where America’s so proud of being the biggest economy, the most powerful military force on the planet, it’s become the empire from the perspective of a lot of people around the world,” reflected Cameron.

Lucas revealed, “It was the empire during the Vietnam War but we never learned, you know, from England or Rome or you know a dozen other empires that went on for hundreds or sometimes thousands of years.”

“Empires fall,” [Cameron concluded](#).

Luke, Leia, Han and Chewie were terrorists modelled on the Viet Cong and Darth Vader’s Galactic Empire is a stand in for the United States of America.

Mind. Officially. Blown.

Reframing the protagonists from “Star Wars” this way recontextualizes not only them as heroes, but the heroes of so many beloved pop culture franchises. From Katniss Everdeen in “[The Hunger Games](#)” to Neo in “[The Matrix](#)”. We love seeing them fight against authoritarian fascist regimes and become revolutionary symbols for their people’s uprisings.

Cheering on fictional freedom fighters in the mass media we consume has long been accepted, but cheering on flesh and blood people who impact our far too real world? Their heroism becomes a bit murkier.

In 1990, thousands of people attended a Town Hall in New York City with world renown anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela. Mandela had only been released from his South African prison a few months prior. A member of the audience questioned Mandela’s many meetings with then Palestinian Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat. They went on to ask if Mandela wanted a Gaddafi (then leader of Libya), Arafat or Castro (then leader of Cuba) to be a future President of South Africa.

Mandela responded, “One of the mistakes which some political analysts make is to think that their enemies should be our enemies.”

The audience broke into thunderous applause.

“Our attitude towards any country is determined by the attitude of that country to our struggle. Yasser Arafat, Colonel Gaddafi and Fidel Castro support our struggle to the hilt ... They do not support it only in rhetoric. They are placing resources at our disposal for us to win the struggle,” said [Mandela](#) while civil rights activists Harry Belafonte and Jesse Jackson sat behind him arms firmly crossed in displeasure.

Shortly after Israel declared war on Hamas my [TikTok feed was flooded](#) with videos of Irish Soccer fans in stadiums waving Palestine flags while singing “You’ll Never Walk Alone”. The people of Ireland have a deep affinity and solidarity with the people of Palestine. Ireland having a long legacy of violent struggle for freedom against an Empire.

An Empire Lucas and Cameron referenced in their profound “Star Wars” discussion.

United States revolutionary activist Angela Davis in a recent interview on Aljazeera’s “UpFront” talked about the interconnections between the Black and Palestinian liberation movements. Davis [shared a quote](#) from late poet June Jordan: “Palestine is a moral litmus test for the world.”

She also invoked the words of Mandela, who said, “South Africa would not be free until Palestine is free.” Mandela, who co-won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993, but stayed on the U.S. Terrorist Watch List until 2008. Mandela passed away in 2013. In 2016, [Palestinians unveiled a statue of Mandela](#) in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

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