

# Free essay on zeitoun

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Heroism, which can be always observed in an American movie, depicts persons going beyond their powers, capabilities, and commands to achieve greatness on behalf a community, tribe, or group. Abdulrahman Zeitoun is a real person who suffered through hurricane Katrina in many ways. Despite the suffering, he travels the city of New Orleans in his own canoe to rescue people and animals. As fate would have it sometimes, Zeitoun gets arrested and tortured without charges, representation, and a phone call, all because he was suspected as a terrorist. Through his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell narrates the psychological developments in Zeitoun through a combination of drama, myth, religious ritual, and a unique style of storytelling. In an objective view and analysis, Zeitoun can be thought as a hero from three stages: Departure, Initiation, and Return.

The first phase, Abdulrahman's life before his adventure, takes place in the ordinary world. Abdulrahman Zeitoun, emigrated from Syria, lived in New Orleans with his wife running a painting company. He is hardworking and responsible to all his customers. In addition, he is a fair and loving parent. Initially, he was separated from his normal lifestyle and family by hurricane Katrina. Nonetheless, Zeitoun chooses to stay in New Orleans. What a pity that Zeitoun does not realize how a bigger and nastier disaster would be coming. As in *The Call to Adventure* narrates the impending disaster as: "A blunder—apparently the merest chance—reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood" (Campbell, 45).

This serves as phase one of separation and indicates the coming storm and subsequent arrest. A hero always goes through a series of challenging

events that will make him earn the title. His personality and character emerges through the challenges to shape the perception of the society at the end.

When the hurricane came with heavy rains, powerful storms, overflowing dams and levies, and raging floods, Zeitoun could have stayed in his house safely and waited to be rescued. He did not do so. In fact, he ventured into the city in his canoe to check damage of his customers' houses and tried to help other people who did not evacuate. The Katrina hurricane not only posed a danger to his family but also to his community as well. Thus, he felt the urge to risk his life and assist in the rescue mission of saving those who were stuck during the hurricane. His efforts are referred to as supernatural aid by Joseph Campbell in his book by saying,

“ For those who have not refused the call, the first encounter of the hero journey is with a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass” (Campbell, 63).

In Abdulrahman's adventure, the most risky part was when he rescued an old woman stuck on her bookshelf because the flood had surged into her house. Abdulrahman had to dive under the water to help the old woman get out of her house. The narrations below captures the essence of the risky rescue effort.

“ As she put weight on the ladder, Zeitoun positioned his shoulders under it and pushed up. The motion was akin to a shoulder-press machine he'd once used at a gym. He straightened his legs, and as he did, the ladder rose from the water until he saw light breaking the surface, until he felt the air on his

face and was finally able to exhale” (Eggers, 194).

Abdulrahman was presented to the world sympathetically as a hero. This was in accordance to his acts of heroism during Katrina hurricane where he rose in front of all odds and rescued victims of the hurricane.

After the rescue mission, Abdulrahman went back his office and tried to make phone call to his wife. Subsequently, he was arrested by charges of breaking into the military and was taken into incarceration. In confinement, he was confused and unaware of the threats that he was to face. Following the arrest and incarceration, Abdulrahman cannot contact the outside world and he was not even allowed to use the restroom. He was imprisoned in a cage with no bed. During this period, Abdulrahman was tortured and treated inhumanly under circumstances that he failed to understand. This is in relation to Joseph’s phase of heroism, where the hero appears to be uneasy, uncomfortable, and unaware of his status. All the elements of heroism and super human effort are depicted very well in the following words.

“ Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials. This is a favorite phase of the myth adventure. It has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals. The hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into this region. Or it may be that he here discovers for the first time that there is a benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage” (Campbell, 89).

Thus, the hero is introduced to the audience in a sympathetic manner and they can relate to the hero’s situation or dilemma. His community and the

society viewed him as strong willed person who overcame the situation at hand and was brave.

These years, some people doubted Zeitoun's violence against his wife surfaced after the hurricane. The hero receives a call of distress that can be either an inner feeling, or external pressure within our environment. This can arise from either a direct or an indirect threat to safety of his or her family or something that threatens peace and tranquility. In the book *Zeitoun*, after Abdulrahman was released, he meets the soldier who had arrested him in the restaurant. The recall of events on the day of his arrest are:

“ Zeitoun spent the day reliving his arrest and the weeks afterward. It wasn't every day that the arrest came to him, but late at night it was sometimes difficult to send away his anger”(Eggers, 576).

Abdulrahman was faced with a change of events that disrupted his normal way of life and comfort. He is engulfed with fear and confusion. Joseph advocates that a hero at this time needs to be guided and that his or her advisor should offer advice that strengthen the hero's spirit and dismiss doubts and fear. The following words pinpoint Joseph's thinking on being a hero.

“ Many failures attest to the difficulties of this life-affirmative threshold. The first problem of the returning hero is to accept as real, after an experience of the soul-satisfying vision of fulfillment, the passing joys and sorrows, banalities and noisy obscenities of life” (Campbell, 204).

This phase can be explained in regards to the aftermath occurrences in the life of Abdulrahman. He experienced sorrow due to the torture and anguish in the hands of the government, which perceived him as a terrorist. The

period of detention changed Abdulrahman's way of thinking and mentally terrorized him. He became a different person who lived in constant fear with his family.

In conclusion, Dave Eggers described Abdulrahman Zeitoun, a Syrian immigrant, successful businessperson, and an American citizen vividly from his life and the change before and after the hurricane Katrina. Joseph Campbell would perceive Abdulrahman Zeitoun as a hero and his character evidently supports the narratives by Joseph describing him as a hero. Therefore, Joseph Campbell would indeed acknowledge that Abdulrahman is a hero in his own way and specification.