

Psychologist Dr Philip Zimbardo is famous for the controversial Stanford prison experiment. He also set up The Heroic Imagination Project in San Francisco in 2010 and is the author of over 50 books

If I Ruled the World

Philip Zimbardo

I'd eliminate poverty and hunger everywhere in the world. The gap between rich and poor is bigger than ever. The question is, how do we get the rich to give more to improve the lives of those without? Where poverty and hunger exist, extremism and war follows.

Education would be accessible and free for every person who wants it. You can't force education on people, but it should be seen as lifelong pursuit. In countries where women are educated, the quality of life improves and the gross national product rises.

I'd reduce prejudice and discrimination while promoting appreciation and valuing of diversity. We're seeing huge migrations of people, but countries aren't handling the tensions adequately. Each nation should have a Department of Assimilation. We must teach our children to value diversity. Imagine how dull the world would be if we were all the same!



People would challenge unjust authority. Every society emphasises the importance of kids obeying their parents, teachers, priests, etc. That's fine if the authority is well meaning, but we should oppose those who preach that only one religion is valid and other ways of life are inferior.

I would stop slave labour and sex trafficking. The UN has recently highlighted the increase in slave labour and documented evidence to show that sex trafficking has become the most profitable business in the world. This should be prosecuted in the same way as drug trafficking.

I'd oppose the evil of inaction in failing to combat climate change. Without huge changes, it may be too late to save the environment. I just came back from French Polynesia, where the islands will vanish within five years from rising sea levels. Evidence shows the destruction is happening faster than we imagined.

Every young person would be valued as an agent of social change. They'd be ready and willing to stand up, speak out and take effective action as Everyday Heroes-in-training. I started the Heroic Imagination Project to find ways to educate young people around the globe to become heroes. Heroes are ordinary people willing to take extraordinary action to help others or to stand up for a moral cause.

Boys would feel empowered to be actively engaged in the social life of their community. Many young men are disconnected because the alternative reality they get through video games and online pornography seems more exciting. I'm sounding the alarm about this in my new book as so many young men are failing in school, failing to make relationships and failing to find happiness.

I'd have whipped cream with everything bland. I grew up really poor, so it was a special treat. When I was a student, I'd go to a soda fountain for a sundae and extra whipped cream. Eventually I confessed I didn't like ice cream, so the waitress would just shoot whipped cream into my mouth. Obviously that was a little disgusting...

I'd make ageing a crime, punishable by staying youthful always. At my age, 82, it's the inevitability of ageing that gets to you. I've had knee surgery, three hip replacements and if I walk more than a couple of streets I need my cane. But I try to stay fit—I've just come from my Zumba dance class—and to make time for all the important things in life; friends, family, nature and romance. ■

As told to Caroline Hutton

Dr Philip Zimbardo's new book, *Man (Dis)connected—How Technology has Sabotaged What it Means to be Male*, is published by Rider and is out now.