

## Why are there no statespeople any more?

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I had an email from an old friend this morning who said:

*I'm increasingly disillusioned with politicians, why are there no statesmen anymore?*

That reminded me of a conversation with my eldest son at the weekend, who asked me who my idol was when I was his age. Not being quite sure what he meant I asked him who his was, and Nelson Mandela was the answer. The idol he was referring to was the person who might inspire him to pursue a good life.

First I was relieved that we weren't about to discuss pop stars.

Second, I explained that when I was his age I was not aware of Nelson Mandela or others like him. That was because he is 13 and Soweto was what really awakened awareness of South Africa for me and I was 18 at the time. But, more important than that, I also explained that either my concern was more parochial in the 70s or there were plenty enough people to inspire me here in the UK. Politics was full of very big characters who I found inspiring. I remember watching the party conferences for pleasure as a teenager and being motivated by people of vision and, I think, integrity, and I reeled off a long list of names, all unfamiliar to my son, of course.

Where did the statespeople go?