

America: Built on Ideals

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In the 1940s, “passive patriotism” did not exist. World War II was in full swing, and all Americans were needed for the war effort. Every citizen, no matter their age or race or gender, made a difference by working in a factory or growing their own vegetables. The whole country worked together to win the war.

America today is very different. We’re in a war, but we’re not working together. We’re hardly together at all; 77% of Americans think the country is divided¹. In this day and age, do Americans really need to be actively patriotic?

The answer, I argue, is yes. We don’t need a big war or a universally-adored president to be patriotic. Those influences spur patriotism, but they do not spark it. Patriotism isn’t about cheering America on just because we’re supposed to.

Patriotism is standing up for our values. America is and has always remained a great country because its people stand up for what they believe. America is defined by fundamental values like freedom, opportunity, and justice. To be American is to uphold those virtues, implement them in daily life, and protect them for future generations. These goals are not achieved without effort. These values do not persist without people to support them. Thus to truly be American, to truly be a patriot, one must always fight for what is right.

Fighting for the integrity of America doesn’t look like it did during World War II. We do not become patriots by canning, manufacturing ammunition, or buying war bonds. Our contributions today are much more subtle--but still important. We support

¹ Jones, Jeffrey M. “Record-High 77% of Americans Perceive Nation as Divided.” *Gallup*, 21 November 2016.

our country and ensure its endurance by voting in the leaders we believe will serve us best, by upholding our founding documents, by arguing for justice in capitol buildings and city halls. We teach children what makes America profoundly wonderful and take time to remind ourselves how blessed we are.

If we don't do this, then America as we know it now will fade away. If we fail to show up at the polls, stop caring whether legislation is fair, and forget what the Constitution says, America will die. The land and its people will live on, but it won't be America. The United States thrives on people who care about doing the right thing, and without those people taking an active role in their daily lives to continue the legacy of this country, America would cease to be a launchpad for creative minds and hard workers, a haven for seekers of peace and freedom, a home for all who believe in what this country was founded upon.

We can't be passive patriots. America wouldn't be America if we didn't fight for it daily. So we look back in reverence at our founding fathers, at our ancestors who fought abroad and at home in the World Wars. We take on their burden and continue their legacy. Our patriotism doesn't look like theirs, but it's necessary for America to continue as a truly great nation.