

What Is a Patriot?

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The death of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg has brought to mind what a real patriot is. We also know what is isn't: the bully in the White House whose notion of patriotism is physically hugging a flag while smirking at his fans and trashing its institutions.

Patriotism walks on a tightrope. It can mean "my country right or wrong" or "making this a more perfect union." President Lincoln reminded us that we should listen to our "better angels" if we love our country. Real patriotism is loving our country's possibilities, admiring its progress, and working to give its gifts of freedom (and responsibility) to more and more people over time.

Justice Ginsberg believed the positive aspects of patriotism to be her life's work. She believed in the Constitution's evolution, expanding freedoms and participation from the small group of property-owning White Founding Fathers to all White men, all Black men (imperfectly implemented), to all women (Black women benefiting least). She saw the progress, but knew what was still missing: equality of all.

When her career began, she was one of a small group of women in Law School, reluctantly accepted although she was a woman, Jewish (there were still quotas then), and a wife and mother. Despite her obvious brilliance, she was refused a job in every law firm to which she applied. Fortunately, she embarked on a different road: working for a nonprofit civil rights organization. She changed America then.

Through a succession of cases she defended ultimately before the all-male Supreme Court, she convinced the justices that women should not be a "protected class," but should be "Persons equal under the law," as the Constitution declared after slavery was abolished. She made the case of not assuming anything different about male or female competence, ability, and needs. Men can nurture children and women can be military commanders.

A patriot loves our country, but wants better justice for all. An elected patriot serves his or her constituents, all of them, regardless of whether they are from the same party as the official. A real patriot does not take away benefits that were voted previously. A real patriot cares about available medical care for all "persons," whether a citizen or not, because citizenship does not protect us from diseases of the uncovered. An undocumented field worker serving us by growing our food or working in meat packing should not have to work through sickness because those viruses can infect us all.

A real patriot will not tolerate liars in the government, and will not tolerate the demolition of our protective institutions. A real patriot will not tolerate an elected official who cares only for stacking the courts with one-sided ideologues and tax breaks that benefit themselves. Patriots do not want to endanger their constituents by undoing their rights to decisions over their own bodies. Male patriots should not want only men to have rights but women not to have the same rights. Patriots do not permit Viagra for men and forbid birth control for women.

A real patriot will not tolerate unfair treatment to certain citizens because of their race, gender, or religion. Real patriots do not boast about their "superior genes" (Trump recently). Real patriots do not boast at all.

As we approach the upcoming election, we must have patriotism, real love of country, as a priority. We must do the essential duty of voters, to be informed of the issues before voting, and to always keep in mind: will our vote make a more perfect union or will it benefit only those with money in the stock market? Will our religious faith be better served by depriving others of their different beliefs? Will a real patriot force others to believe as he or she does?

And finally, if we are real patriots, will we vote for a president who embodies patriotic virtues: honesty, empathy, sense of duty, and service to others. Patriots must support a return to the best values of this country, values that have been a beacon to the world to emulate.

The choice is not difficult. VOTE.

680 words

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