



Critical Patriotism

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Abstract

In this chapter, the author develops a pragmatic defense of critical patriotism, one that recognizes the many personal and social benefits of patriotic sentiment yet which is also infused with a passion for justice. Though the argument is pragmatic given the ubiquity of patriotic sentiment, the author argues that critical patriotism is able to reconcile a love of one's country with an ardent determination to reform and improve it.

Keywords

Patriotism · Loyal patriotism · Critical patriotism · Moral cosmopolitanism · American patriotism

Precisely at the point where you begin to develop a conscience you must find yourself at war with your society. It is your responsibility to change society if you think of yourself as an educated person.

James Baldwin

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Don't allow your thinking to be done for you by any party or faction, however high-minded. Distrust any speaker who talks confidently about 'we', or speaks in the name of 'us'. Distrust yourself if you hear these tones creeping into your own style. The search for security and majority is not always the same as solidarity; it can be another name for consensus and tyranny and tribalism.

Christopher Hitchens

Compare, if you will, two scenarios. On the morning of November 16, 2015, 2 days after a terrorist plot had left more than 120 dead in various locations scattered throughout Paris, the French Parliament opened to a special session. The entire chamber, normally divided sharply along ideological lines, solemnly sang in unison *Le Marseillaise*, the national anthem. Invoking the core principles of the French Republic – *liberté, fraternité, égalité* – socialist president Francois Hollande declared that France was “at war.” By the time his speech had been penned, French bombers were already flying over Syria, hitting strategic ISIS targets. It was a familiar scene. Terrorist attacks in New York (2001), Madrid (2004), London (2005), Paris and Nice (2015), and finally Brussels and Berlin in 2016: each predictably led to a militarist response laced with patriotic rhetoric. Both security measures and immigration quotas would be tightened. Surveillance requiring the tapping of phones and access to email would be mandated. Certain neighborhoods would be patrolled. These and many other procedures are easily pushed through the typically sluggish decision-making machinery of government, and the reasons offered could be easily specified: clear and present danger. European populists eager to close borders and stop immigration now speak of a “patriotic spring” (See, for example, Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders’ speech: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WYAS4y_da-o).

In the summer of 2016, coinciding with a tense period of time involving multiple police shootings of black men, San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick began refusing to stand for the singing of the national anthem at the start of each football game. When asked about his actions, he unapologetically offered, I will not stand up to show pride “in a flag for a country that oppresses black people [...] To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look the other way.” Kaepernick would be widely criticized by fans and the media alike, even receiving a number of death threats. Meanwhile, the 49ers team management voiced no objections; President Obama, too, lent his tepid support. While Kaepernick did not label his actions “patriotic,” sport legend, author, and social critic Kareem Abdul-Jabbar vigorously defended Kaepernick’s right to protest as a patriotism consistent with the best strains of American liberalism. Perhaps most significantly, a large number of military veterans openly supported his actions, and within weeks, thousands of other professional, college, and even high school athletes had begun kneeling in protest across the country against the actions of their nation’s law enforcement.

Though in very different yet recognizable ways, I submit that both cases illustrate ways of being patriotic. In the first case, and through understandable fear of arbitrary terror, patriotic emotions were exploited to again confer new powers on the state for surveillance, police stop-and-search, and even for amending immigration law. In the

second case, a ritual that occurs thousands of times each day across the United States was seized upon by an athlete with a conscience who took the opportunity to draw attention to systemic injustices being disproportionately applied to black men by the police and a criminal justice system. Although Kaepernick openly flouted the patriotic ritual, in my view, his actions are consistent with patriotic dissent. And thus inspired by Kaepernick and a long line of dissenting patriots, in this chapter, I will take up the question of whether patriotism can be critical, i.e., whether persons can feel deep attachment to their country, even pride of some sort, while remaining fiercely critical. My answer is not only that patriotism can be critical but also that it must.

I will begin by defining patriotism, parsing what I believe to be a few of its core elements. I follow this by acknowledging the many worries about patriotism and the potential harms it can do. I then briefly consider an alternative to patriotism – moral cosmopolitanism – but argue that patriotism can be motivated by moral cosmopolitan concerns. I then use an illustration of what I call “loyal patriotism” and examine and criticize its normativity in American public schools. I argue that *loyal patriotism* as it currently operates in American schools more often than not produces (a) a distorted understanding of one’s country and its historical deeds, (b) a coerced – versus freely given – emotional attachment to one’s country, and (c) an unhealthy attitude of national superiority. Finally, I develop a pragmatic defense of *critical patriotism*, one that recognizes the many personal and social benefits of patriotic sentiment yet which is also infused with a passion for justice. Though my argument is pragmatic given the ubiquity of patriotic sentiment, I argue that critical patriotism is able to reconcile a love of one’s country with an ardent determination to reform and improve it.

Patriotism

Taken from its Latin root *amor patria*, at its most basic, patriotism describes the idea that one’s nation – though not necessarily one’s country – is an object of affection, pride, and even loyalty. (Tribes and other minority groups usually feel attached to nations (e.g., Tibet, Catalonia, Nez Perce) or national identities, rather than to the countries in which their nations may be situated.) But the roots of patriotism go deeper than this; indeed, patriotisms stem from an involuntary associational membership similar to that of one’s family or culture. Each is involuntary because we generally do not choose these memberships; rather we are born and socialized into them. And while some of us may come to repudiate this membership, or the ideas and customs into which we were socialized, in a majority of cases, these memberships imperceptibly shape our identities and attachments to others with whom we share important histories, languages, and cultures. Hence, perhaps at its most basic, our attachments arise from that which is *familiar*. Yet out of this familiarity arises a profound sense of belonging that importantly contributes to our flourishing.

Yet these descriptive observations can segue into a normative stance, for when identification leads to a special regard that we have for some more than others,

partiality describes this orientation. Consider how partiality works in the family. Though not in every case, much of the time family life produces a morally justifiable kind of partiality necessary for fostering intimate bonds appropriate to certain kinds of relationships in the private sphere. From these bonds of intimacy and love develop other bonds and virtues that, as Aristotle believed, may serve as the foundation for the cultivation of civic virtue. Civic virtue describes dispositions and actions that promote the good of the community. The cultivation of civic virtue ought to incline persons to care for others who share the same civic space, and it arguably is the operating principle behind any welfare state. But civic virtue also corresponds to our shared identities, and the more we identify with someone else, the more we might expect to see what Samuel Scheffler (1997: 196–198) has called “presumptively decisive reasons for action” owing to the quality of the relationship one has with the other.

Families are of course not the only relationships in which this occurs: in terms of importance, for many people, friendships and romantic relationships often replace those of their family in terms of importance. Participants in these bonds of affection demonstrate concern for one another in ways that are special. When there is an absence of affection or loyalty or when the participants in the special relationship fail in some way, the intensity of the disappointment, frustration, and even moral outrage is felt most intensely, given that the bonds of intimacy and trust in some way have been violated. Yet while friendships may dissolve and individuals may grow apart, family members do not cease *being* family members even when there is estrangement or acrimony. Certain identities constitute who we are, and family membership for most of us is one of the most rudimentary. Thus even when family relations may be marked by estrangement and even acrimony, family members ordinarily understand that this membership incurs certain responsibilities, e.g., to care for one another in times of need.

Analogously, empirically speaking, the patriot also feels partiality for her nation for many of the same reasons, i.e., given how persons have come to see themselves in relation to their nation and fellow citizens. Moreover, whether tested by natural calamities or other kinds of threats, compatriots often feel morally obligated to one another owing to a circumscribed identity that importantly identifies one *as* Finnish, Dominican, or South Korean. Though there is doubtless something morally arbitrary about partiality given the tendency to show favoritism to some and not others, relationships defined by partiality will usually be those with “socially salient connections,” i.e., those with whom we share a common bloodline, language, culture, religion, or citizenship, though not necessarily in that order (cf. Mason 1997). This sense of connectedness and the concomitant attachment one may have to her fellow citizens is one that most of us feel at one time or another.

But of course the analogy concerning partiality between family members and partiality among compatriots quickly breaks down. Surely one reason for this is that while loyalty generally is taken to be a virtue, left to itself in most domains, it can quickly go off the rails. Indeed, outside of the family, most of us would find it strange to say that one ought to be loyal to some person or object simply because it is hers, no matter what. This smacks of the kind of loyalty that would cut *against* morality, not support it. The abused spouse, the bully’s loyal companion, the corporate vice-

president, and the political party member: each of these assumes a kind of loyalty that we associate not with virtue but with *vice* (cf. Keller 2007).

Second, *intimacy* is rarely an emotion used to describe the relationship between compatriots. The partiality most parents display toward their own children, and vice versa, is not motivated by loyalty but rather by *unconditional love*, even if or when family members may not particularly *like* one another. Indeed principled reasons can be given for showing preferential treatment to members of one's own family – and young children in particular – given how uniquely positioned we are to them, given how duty born of love compels us, and given that the young and elderly arguably are best cared for by family who know them well and want what is best for them. That is far from obvious as it concerns one's compatriots. Third, citizens viewed by their governments in the way that parents view their young children – helpless, defenseless, and incompetent to think and choose for themselves – implies a moral hierarchy that would threaten to undermine the basic principle of equal respect for (adult) persons. The basic point is that although there are some similarities between the partialities demonstrated within the private sphere and the public sphere, the dangers that attend loyalties in the public sphere far outweigh their benefits. To see how, we need to appreciate what the perils of patriotism are.

The Perils of Patriotism

Perhaps only religion is able to rival patriotism in its efficacy to kindle the emotions with respect to membership/nonmembership. Perhaps, too, only religion can rival patriotism in its ability to stoke and nourish the allegiance of millions with a view to achieving a set of loyalist aims. Yet, as John Kleinig (2014: 5) has observed, “Patriotic and religious loyalties, for all their soul-stirring qualities, are frequently jingoistic, exclusionary, and even terroristic.” And to the extent that persons uncritically identify with a nation, its ideals, history, institutions, and leaders, the patriot has a cultivated disposition to act, to defend, to attack, and even to deem outsiders as having inherently less value. It is these darker attributes of patriotism that we ought to find alarming. Strike up a particular anthem, invoke a folksy or vacuous epigram (“support the troops”), or wave the colors of one's flag in any size or fabric and the crass tools of patriotism have the ability to render otherwise thinking individuals blindly loyal and obedient, willing to slavishly support and defend policies and actions that would just as quickly be condemned as odious had they been enacted by a foreign government. Little wonder that Samuel Johnson famously regarded patriotism as the last refuge of the scoundrel.

Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr (1932: 92–92) certainly was too well aware of the perils of patriotism:

The nation possesses in its organs of government, in the panoply and ritual of the state, in the impressive display of its fighting services, and, very frequently, in the splendors of a royal house, the symbols of unity and greatness, which inspire awe and reverence in the citizen. Furthermore the love and pious attachment of a man to his countryside, to familiar scenes,

sights, and experiences, around which the memories of youth have cast a halo of sanctity, all this flows into the sentiment of patriotism; for a simple imagination transmutes the universal beneficences of nature into symbols of the peculiar blessings which a benevolent nation bestows upon its citizens. Thus the sentiment achieves a potency in the modern soul, so unqualified, that the nation is given *carte blanche* to use the power, compounded of the devotion of individuals, for any purpose it desires.

In the twenty-first century, many others have followed Niebuhr's prescient lead. Christopher Hitchens (2001: 138), for instance, opines that "the worst crimes are still committed in the name of the old traditional rubbish: of loyalty to nation or 'order' or leadership or tribe or faith." Paul Gomberg (2000: 92) cogently argues that the "popularization of national identity has made it possible for capitalist governments to mobilise their populations for the most brutal wars of imperialist conquest – and mobilise them unthinkingly as their patriotic duty." More recently, Pulitzer prize winning journalist Chris Hedges (2010: 26) writes that the "uniformity of opinion, molded by the media is reinforced through the skillfully orchestrated mass emotions of nationalism and patriotism, which paint all dissidents as 'soft' or 'unpatriotic'." The "patriotic citizen," he continues, "plagued by fear of job losses and possible terrorist attacks, unflinchingly supports widespread surveillance and the militarized state."

Taking matters further, George Kateb complains that a defense of patriotism, given its disposition to disregard reason and morality, is nothing less than "an attack on the Enlightenment." That might be bad enough, but Kateb continues:

[Patriotism] is a readiness to die and to kill for an abstraction: nothing you can see all of, or feel as you feel the presence of another person, or comprehend. Patriotism, then, is a readiness to die and to kill for what is largely a figment of the imagination. [there is a] necessary connection between patriotism and militarized death [...] it is group narcissism without any self-restraint except for a frequently unreliable prudence, and carried to death-dealing lengths. Patriotism is one of the more radical forms of group-thinking, or group identity and affiliation. Being armed is what makes it radical [...] it is a jealous and exclusive loyalty. (Kateb 2000: 907–10)

For critics such as Hitchens, Gomberg, Hedges, and Kateb, all patriotism is a menace, issuing from the same insidiously undifferentiated thread. I think this portrayal of patriotism is much too facile an assessment. Indeed I believe it is not only possible to differentiate various articulations of patriotism; in my view, it is also imperative that we not relinquish patriotism to conservative forces.

Still, we might ask: given the many abuses carried out under the banner of patriotism, why encourage it at all? And in any case, why cultivate civic virtues whose expression more often than not arbitrarily stops at the border of one's own country? Why not, for instance, opt for a "cosmopolitan" virtue, the cultivation of which might manage to sidestep patriotism's many pitfalls? Framed as an educational corrective to ethnocentrism and prejudice more generally, the goal of a cosmopolitan education, then, might be to show why it is dangerous to assume that one is correct merely because a set of beliefs and values is familiar or shared by his compatriots. Indeed, a cosmopolitan moral education might fruitfully turn its

attention to the cultivation of moral dispositions as well as our moral responsibilities to others not on the basis of common citizenship but rather on the basis of our *common humanity*. Persons would therefore be seen as moral ends-in-themselves, thus possessing equal value, irrespective of their history, language, religion, or political identity. Cosmopolitan moral education might go beyond ordinary moral education not, as Merry and De Ruyter (2011) argue, “by denying the importance of partiality or ‘borders’ but by showing that moral responsibility renders them contingent and oftentimes irrelevant.”

Attractive as this alternative is, it has been noted that one of the difficulties is that “cosmopolitanism” often fails to inspire attachments needed for commitment and action (Cafaro 2010; Miller 1995; Cottingham 1986). As I argued above, our loyalties and affections derive first and foremost from affections and attachments closer to home, viz., from communities that provide a “unifying focus to the moral life” (Walzer 1988: 126). Consequently politics, Martha Nussbaum (1997: 13) opines, “like childcare, will operate more effectively (and certainly, in most cases, with greater sensitivity) if there are favored spheres or attachments.” Even Kateb (2000: 912–913), whose vehement criticisms of patriotism we noted earlier, concedes that patriotism “may on occasion be tactically useful for a high, moral cause [...] if patriotism is ever good, it is only instrumentally good, never good in itself.”

I think these intuitions about our circumscribed attachments are basically correct. Yet in no way does this diminish the significance of moral cosmopolitanism. For instance, moral cosmopolitanism can remind us that civic virtue is too restricted in its meaning and application; indeed, patriotism can be motivated by *normative cosmopolitan concerns*. But there also are legitimate pragmatic reasons for harnessing and steering patriotic sentiment toward more critical and moral ends than simply wishing in vain for its demise. Before I develop those arguments, however, consider two different ways of thinking about patriotism. The binary is somewhat regrettable, but the basic distinction, I think, is important.

As the French parliament example at the beginning of the essay illustrates, *loyal patriotism* (LP) is undoubtedly the dominant expression of patriotism. While loyal patriotism arguably has some innocuous expressions – notably the World Cup or the Olympic Games – it is virtually synonymous with *nationalism*, i.e., the uncritical belief that one’s nation is exceptional, even superior, to other nations. Countries around the world promiscuously encourage it – undoubtedly some more than others – and in my view, it is the rightful target of the critics of patriotism. (To give but one recent and striking example: with the blessing of Prime Minister Modi Bharatiya of the Janata Party, the Indian Supreme Court has now ordered that the national anthem be played before all cinema films, and all attending must stand and honor the anthem. See <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/30/indian-court-orders-cinemas-to-play-national-anthem-before-films>.) LP closes ranks; it appeals to the basest instincts. It unifies the majority around its concerns at the expense of more vulnerable citizens and foreigners, and it succeeds in shutting down discourses that do not move in lockstep with the powers that be. (As I use it here, “majority” need not refer to a numerical majority; it may describe a dominant group or even a powerful minority, whose political influence is disproportionate to the “minority.”) LP

functions like a bad reflex; it defends both a false construction of what a national identity is, but moreover does so *no matter what*.

Conversely, what I shall call *critical patriotism* (CP) takes something that is morally neutral – our involuntary attachments that shape our identities and influence what we have reason to care about – and invests its energies in improving upon the present state of affairs. Here *amor patria* is galvanized by a deep passion to root out injustice. Accordingly it repudiates the moral complacency that derives from the sense that one’s country has succeeded in living up to its ideals. Rather CP shows itself capable of moral outrage when the nation’s best ideals are betrayed, when they are used to oppress fellow citizens, but also when they are used to justify hatred and aggression against other nations. (I put aside the relevant question concerning whether or not all nations possess ideals worth pursuing.) As such, CP is fiercely patriotic and cosmopolitan at the same time. Before I elucidate the features of CP, I will first illustrate the problems one often encounters in LP by examining a specific case.

American Patriotism: A Cautionary Tale

In hundreds of thousands of state or public schools across the United States, each morning children are expected (though not required) to stand, face the American flag, and recite the Pledge of Allegiance, essentially an oath of loyalty to the Nation. All schools fly American flags on their school grounds, and most classrooms also have flags and pictures of American presidents on the walls. In addition to these, all public schools are expected to have competitive sports programs, crucial for fostering “school spirit,” where flags also hang and where national anthems are sung. While not explicitly political in nature, the forms school spirit takes are strikingly patriotic in expression and coincide well with LP. Pep rallies, school newspapers, banners, and advertising of various kinds all promote intense loyalties to one’s *own* school in much the same way that patriotism generally promotes loyal attachment to one’s nation. American schools also promote patriotism through various kinds of media: Weekly Readers, Internet sites that usually provide a pro-American point of view, and in many schools corporate media with a decidedly pro-American bias such as CNN cable television news.

Further, American public schools and the history and social studies textbooks that they use aid in the cultivation of an uncritical, and hence problematically loyal, patriotic disposition (Raphael 2004; Nash et al. 2000; Fullinwider 1996; Loewen 1995). However, the patriotism in these books is not always easy to detect. In order to encourage readers to identify with the United States, the patriotic tendency often is as subtle as the use of pronouns such as “we” or “us” (Raphael 2004). More obvious problems, however, entail a moralizing history, one that commends an array of national “heroes,” “achievements,” and “victories.” Those (e.g., Galston 1991) who would defend this patriotic kind of mythmaking argue that children need to be inspired by its nation’s past, its ideals, and the examples offered up by its leaders. Accordingly, except in the worst instances, the nation’s leaders should be described

as possessing nobler qualities of human character. (On this point there are clear parallels to Plato's *Republic*, where character flaws or serious moral failing exist these should be downplayed or edited out in order to minimize the deleterious effect on young minds.)

Many reasons can be given to explain why the teaching of history has often been used to cultivate patriotism. One reason is surely because historians themselves cannot escape the cultural frame through which much of their own experience and education has taken place. That is, even where historians aim to distance themselves from explicit nationalist or patriotic agendas, the lens through which they filter their knowledge is already constructed by narratives that irrevocably color their point of view. But many historians make no attempt whatsoever to distance themselves from an agenda; to the contrary, their telling of history *consciously* aims to advance a particular point of view. It is well known, for instance, that different histories were written for schools in the American North than those written in the American South in the century following Reconstruction. Hence, revisionist histories of the American Civil War would inevitably reflect the interests of different constituencies.

Northern histories sketched abolitionism as a widely shared sentiment (though it was not) and extolled the rise of industry. For their part, Southern historians sketched a glorious narrative of resistance to "northern aggression" of which southern whites could be proud, invoking "states' rights" as a smoke screen for a way of life inextricable from the dehumanization and oppression of black people. A mythology of gallant war heroes quickly supplanted the shame of an ignominious defeat and a ruined economy; Confederate memorials by the hundreds proliferated throughout the South and remain unto this day. Both Northern and Southern historical perspectives in their own way were complicit in the same institutional racism. W.E.B. Du Bois would come to characterize this type of historical writing as "lies agreed upon."

While the official creed of the United States is the magnanimous *e pluribus unum*, a unity born out of diversity, its recorded history too often has offered us the perspective of a powerful few. What too often continues to dominate the narrative, then, is a hegemonic record of white Protestant European superiority, christened by the state, its public schools, and the textbooks they use. Accordingly, historians should be held to account for their shameless distortions and their conscious or unconscious selective truth telling. Where public education is concerned, textbook authors have been notoriously slow to correct this record, and this can partly be explained by the role that private textbook companies play in managing content. In the United States, for instance, history textbooks come courtesy of for-profit companies; and precisely because they are for-profit, these companies are keen to placate the majority constituencies – often beginning in Texas – that adopt and purchase their products (Delfattore 1999). Textbooks have played no small role in perpetuating half-truths and misrepresentations that clearly favor an American "good guy" approach to domestic, but especially foreign, policy. Here is James Loewen (1995: 210–211):

High school American history textbooks do not, of course, adopt or even hint at the American colossus view. Unfortunately, they also omit the *realpolitik* approach. Instead, they take a strikingly different tack. They see [American] policies as part of a morality play

in which the United States typically acts on behalf of human rights, democracy, and ‘the American way’. When Americans have done wrong, according to this view, it has been because others misunderstood us, or perhaps because we misunderstood the situation. But always our motives were good. This approach might be called the ‘international good guy’ view.

To be sure, American history textbooks have more *content* than ever before, and more – previously marginalized – stories are certainly being told: of indigenous peoples, of women, of religious minorities, but also of gross injustices sanctioned by the American government. Even so, these errors are routinely depicted as anomalous rather than consistent with the logic of a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant supremacy. And notwithstanding more accurate content, textbook companies, anxious to minimize risk, make very few changes that may raise the ire of conservative parents and local school boards. David Tyack (2003: 60) explains:

It has been easier to add those ubiquitous sidebars to the master narrative than to rethink it, easier to incorporate new content into a safe and profitable formula than to create new accounts. American history textbooks are enormous – 888 pages, on average – in part because publishers seek to neutralize or anticipate criticisms by adding topics. The result is often not comprehensive coverage but a bloated book devoid of style or coherence.

Thus when conservative censors expend vast amounts of energy attempting to prevent depictions of the United States or its leaders in anything but a positive light, or similarly when they support the belief that American invasions and occupations should be understood to mean whatever the Pentagon or the State Department say they mean, public schools and the history textbooks they use fail in their responsibility to educate young people. (Stanley Milgram (1974) warned us about the dangers of societies where deference to authority is the norm. “A substantial proportion of people,” he wrote, “do what they are told to do, irrespective of the content of the act and without limitations of conscience, so long as they perceive that the command comes from a legitimate authority.”) Instead, they continue to offer a distorted understanding of one’s country and its historical deeds; moreover, the methods they often use – such as the common rituals I described earlier – are more likely to emotionally coerce, rather than intelligently inform, young people. (This state-controlled, conscious aim to promote unquestioning loyalty to one’s own country John Stuart Mill (1978: 105) would have described as a “mere contrivance for molding people to be exactly like one another, [as a] despotism of the mind.”) The result is not only that the status quo is entrenched but also that an unhealthy attitude of national superiority prevails.

All of this is extremely worrying. And still, the LP approach depicted in the foregoing paragraphs can be mitigated, I believe, by at least two things. First, teachers and students of history are not merely passive dupes in this process. Many are both aware and skeptical about these one-sided representations. Because there are no studies on this topic, I cannot argue with any confidence that this is a majority of teachers, but there are reasons to believe that it is a critical minority, not only among those who have read history more widely but also teachers and pupils

whose experiences do not match the dominant narrative. Second, since the dramatic cultural and political shifts of the 1960s, textbook depictions of American atrocities (e.g., Japanese American internment camps, Jim Crow segregation, the displacement and genocide of Native American tribes, the Vietnam and Iraq Wars, etc.) have become both more accurate and more prominently featured in school textbooks. Here, too, one may be cautiously optimistic. Of course, many of the critical examinations now appearing in these texts are restricted to the past, but this is not an insignificant development.

Either way, it will neither do to simply resign ourselves to the status quo nor to say that things are better than they were a generation or two ago. For the fact is that the American public school's complicity in promoting LP is, as I have demonstrated, morally indefensible given that it conflicts with the legitimate aims of education. I haven't the space here to examine each of those aims here, but with respect to patriotism, suffice it to say that these aims ought to include *the acquisition of epistemological competences necessary to honestly assess historical truth*. Not only does LP work decidedly against the acquisition of these epistemological competences, which must include the knowledge and skills necessary for research and debate but also courage to dissent from popular opinion; it also violates a child's interest in being well educated.

Yet notwithstanding all of the problems we can associate with patriotic sentiment, to denounce patriotism simpliciter as incapable of producing anything good is not only counterproductive; I believe it is also false. In the following section, I argue that rather than surrendering patriotism to rogues and conservative forces or hoping that it will slowly diminish over time, it is possible that we press patriotism toward more justice-serving ends.

The Possibility of a Critical Patriotism

Let me offer a number of pragmatic reasons why I think that a more critical variant of patriotism is defensible. As I argued earlier in this essay, *amor patria* not only will capture affinities we have for others of similar background or aid in the flourishing of individual lives; it also can facilitate the cultivation of civic virtue. However, the problem we have seen with civic virtue is its tendency to focus exclusively on compatriots and oftentimes a narrower subset of fellow citizens, for example, one excluding Muslim immigrants.

Now as I suggested earlier, history can be put to use for different purposes. First, however, it is important that a truthful account be given. A truthful account will not escape bias inasmuch as the sifting of details and retelling of the history cannot avoid selection and interpretation. However, if the study of history has a singular aim, it is to recount the events of the past as truthfully and accurately as one can. This is important because one of the core aims of education, as David Archard (1999: 166) reminds us, "is surely truth, its regulative ideals those of critical reason." Thus, as a matter of principle, education ought to correct the tendency of resorting to half-truths, distortions, and unnecessary bias by aiming for truth.

Second, we will want to learn from history both the immediate causes and effects pertinent to the account rendered but also the effects of those views on our own time and place insofar as these connections can reliably be discerned. In other words, we should learn to view our own contemporary historical reality more critically by comparing it to the beliefs and behaviors of the past. For example, what are the *historical reasons* that might explain the continued incarceration of black men in the United States at rates disproportionate to their white counterparts? Or this: what are the *historical reasons* that might explain the distrust toward state authorities among the Sioux tribes at the Standing Rock Reservation in late 2016? I would suggest that the evidence would have us confront the deeply rooted convictions of white Protestant supremacy that lie at the heart of the European conquest of the Americas. In any event, education can make a crucial difference as it concerns not only *what* is taught but also *how* it is taught.

Third, students of their nation's history need to become aware of the ways in which historical knowledge is gathered, edited, and presented to a reading public. Facts about events that happened are important, but students can come to understand that the account of history that they read is both incomplete and subject to revision. Indeed the history one reads too often tells us more about the authors writing it – and their biases – than the history its authors endeavor to describe. Hence, we should want to know not only the facts but also whose story these facts relate and, conversely, whose they do not. This requires that students cultivate the epistemological competences necessary for examining the available evidence and testimony, but also guarding against bias.

Fourth, it is possible for *amor patria* to be consistent with both moral and intellectual humility; loving one's nation need not entail feelings of superiority. For the critical patriot, as a matter of principle, the love of country can and must be wedded to a passion for justice. Frederick Douglass knew this when he wrote: "he is a lover of his country who rebukes and does not excuse its sins." A former slave who would eventually rise to even counsel an ambivalent President Lincoln, in 1852, Douglass did not flinch from bitterly rebuking the United States and the hypocrisies of its patriotic traditions:

What to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, are, to Him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy – a thin veil to cover up the crimson which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States, at this very hour. (For the entire speech, see <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/what-to-the-slave-is-the-fourth-of-july/>.)

The moral outrage of a critical patriot couldn't be any clearer. (Boxill (2009) argues that Douglass loved his country, even when it had denied him citizenship and indeed

even when it had denied him his humanity.) Some 70 years later, at the peak of the Civil Rights Movement, fellow critical patriot James Baldwin (1955: 9) was to echo the sentiment, albeit in a different register: “I love America more than any other country in the world,” he wrote, “and exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually.” As both Baldwin’s and Douglass’ remarks suggest, the fact that having special attachments to one’s nation, or for one’s fellow compatriots, need not spoil one’s capacity to think critically about those attachments. Indeed, the testimony of both men suggests that *amor patria* can serve as a powerful motivator to chastise, but also to reform, in particular for those whose lives are more vulnerable: the worker, the immigrant, the stigmatized, the homeless, and the unemployed.

Thus whereas LP purveys complacent acceptance of the status quo, CP demands that we seek the correction of injustice, particularly in the country with which we identify. As both Douglass and Baldwin show, our efforts to correct injustice arise from the fact that the injustice of a country with which we identify causes us particular pain, even greater pain caused by injustices done by countries with which we do not identify. And, as I have suggested, a principled approach to studying history holds out the possibility that young people can be educated to think more critically about what it means to love their country, just as they can learn how to think critically in a more general sense.

Ultimately, however, the case for CP is a pragmatic one because, as the previous section concerning American schools suggests, we are unlikely to see a thinning of patriotic sentiment any time soon. Nor, incidentally, are we likely to see it diminish in most other countries. For better or for worse, *amor patria* is here to stay. As we have already seen, with or without schools that promote patriotism, attachments to our homelands run deep; even long after immigrating to another country for work or to escape war, disease, and famine, most persons feel intense affinities for their countries of origin. These affinities carry both meaning and significance, contributing to individual flourishing. They also can provide the civic virtue necessary for solidarity with our compatriots.

How to Promote Critical Patriotism

As the example of American schools suggest, our education systems are often a part of the problem rather than the solution. Of course schools are not the only state institution complicit in the patriotic enterprise, but they are uniquely responsible in many ways for instilling uncritical dispositions – patriotic loyalties – in young people. Indeed it would not be an exaggeration to say that the LP promoted in schools is largely responsible for its uncritical acceptance in other public arenas, such as sporting events, holiday celebrations, and parades. Hence, the most logical place to endeavor a different approach would be to attempt the cultivation of CP in the school. And while there will be different ways to get at this, I submit that the subject matter best suited to an education conducive to CP is history.

Consider a departure from the standard historical approach, where the pursuit of truth is taken seriously and the critical patriot does not shy away from unflattering

portrayals of a nation's leaders. This is what some have called a "warts and all" history, one that chronicles the nation's myriad wayward moments and unflinchingly gazes upon its ignoble past. Published in multiple editions over many years and long used by a number of high school teachers and college instructors as supplementary material, Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* (Zinn 2004) is illustrative of such a historical approach. Beginning with the earliest European conquests in the New World, Zinn systematically examines American history from the underside. Thus rather than chronicling the sanitized history of Columbus, as has been the custom, Zinn draws upon the writings of contemporary Bartolome de las Casas so that we might learn of the genocidal devastation visited upon the native Arawak peoples by the Italian "explorer" and his fellow Spaniards and moreover from the point of view of the victims. In subsequent chapters, he examines various historical episodes from the perspectives of women, of factory workers, and of recent immigrants made to feel unwelcome in their new country.

People's History undoubtedly encourages moral outrage at America's numerous hypocrisies and failings, yet Zinn's book is not, as neoconservatives might allege, proof of his absence of patriotism. Rather, as a critical patriot, Zinn is pained at the US consistent failure to practice what it so often preaches to others. This does not make *People's History* easy reading, and Zinn's historical approach will not sit well with everyone. (And of course, "alternate histories" need not be restricted to texts such as Zinn's. Ideally, teachers would have their students read the writings of famous dissenters including Ida B. Wells, Thomas Paine, Hellen Keller, Eugene Debs, the American Indian Movement, Roger Williams, Huey Newton, Ralph Nader, and many others.) A critic might argue that his "activist" historical account fails the objectivity test expected of a historian. But this charge is weak: all information must be sifted, selected, and interpreted whether it is census data, oral testimony, church records, correspondence, or previous historical writing. Indeed, as we have seen, all historians – like all researchers – have biases, beginning with the selection of the topic to be investigated, the methods chosen for the research, and the interpretation and analysis of the data. To be biased is to be human; it is to have a "point of view." Though we may be aware of our biases or even endeavor to curb its influence, we cannot "become unbiased." The merit of Zinn's history, or any other historical account, then, must be judged not by its being "bias-free" but by its accuracy, its attention to facts, in short, its ability to render a truthful account, however selective – given the limitedness of space – a particular account may be.

But there is no point in denying that Zinn's historical project is aiming for the exact opposite of what the loyal patriot might expect to read. And what is it that the loyal patriot might expect? Loewen (1995: 32–33) reminds us: 'The authors of history textbooks have taken us on a trip of their own, away from the facts of history, into the realm of myth. They and we have been duped by an outrageous concoction of lies, half-truths, truths, and omissions.' In sharp contrast, Zinn's book offers a corrective to the fictions and distortions of American history that has paid too little attention to the patriotic significance of dissent or to the folly of believing that any criticism directed against the United States is to be "un-American." Zinn's CP also surpasses the civic virtues we associate with ordinary patriotism, for in underscoring our common

humanity, it captures what is best about cosmopolitan morality. Indeed, *People's History* illustrates the real moral hazard that is incurred when the lives of “others” are seen as expendable because their deaths merely count as collateral damage.

Some may still feel it necessary to ask: is *critical* patriotism not a contradiction in terms? My answer to this question has been to suggest that we might turn the question around and ask: *might amor patria permit a more truthful account of history, and might that more truthful account also prove instrumental in fostering justice?* Still, the skeptic's question is a fair one, viz., will such unsparing criticism not fail to inspire confidence in the noble ideals necessary for political solidarity and stability? Perhaps, Eagleton (2010: 148–149) recommends that with all revolt and reform, a delicate balance is needed:

Radicals [must] maintain a precarious balancing act here. On the one hand, they must be brutally realistic about the depth and tenacity of human corruption to date. Otherwise there can be nothing very insistent about the project of transforming our condition. Those who sentimentally indulge humanity do it no favours. On the contrary, they act as a barrier to change. On the other hand, this corruption cannot be such that transformation is out of the question. Too sanguine a reading of history leads to the belief that no thoroughgoing change is necessary, while too gloomy a view of it suggests that such change is impossible to come by.

I take Eagleton to be saying that while the reconciliation of a passion for reform – on my argument, a passion consistent with *amor patria* – with the unflinching criticism of a nation's crimes will be difficult, it is not impossible. And, in any case, it must be attempted. The failure to do so leads to all of the problems of LP on the one hand or a jaded disposition on the other.

As I have argued in this chapter, having special affinities for one's nation, or for one's compatriots, need not spoil one's capacity to think critically about those attachments, indeed to even channel them in ways that are justice-promoting. CP recognizes that to criticize is not to hate one's country, but rather to exhibit a passionate determination to reform and improve it. CP is therefore morally impartial and universalist. Its norms do not favor or discriminate against people on account of nationality or any other such identities. It is not a compromise between moral universalism and patriotic loyalty but rather *an implementation of moral universalism*. What makes it patriotic is that one's devotion to universal and impartial morality is not exhibited in an unfocused way. Rather, just as we focus on our family and friends, we also, because of inevitable attachments to a particular country because of our special relationship to it, focus on that country with which we unavoidably identify.

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