

## **PATRIOTISM: A NEGATIVE ASSESSMENT**

by Edward Jayne

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Patriotism is usually considered a healthy blend of national identity and social responsibility. Some go so far as to link it with religion on the dubious assumption that their country enjoys special status in the eyes of God. Unfortunately, patriotism also encourages warfare, guaranteeing heightened loyalty during periods of military confrontation. Such dedication can be a major asset, but as long as the public can be counted on for its unexamined allegiance, those in power are able stretch their aggressiveness as much as they please without fully exploring alternative possibilities, most obviously through diplomacy toward an acceptable compromise. Since World War II this refusal to make concessions seems to have typified the policy of the United States, which has engaged in more combat (in Korea, Panama, Grenada, the Gulf War, the Dominican Republic, etc.) than have all other advanced industrial nations combined. Significantly, our total annual military budget now matches that of the rest of the world combined.

As a rule of thumb, patriotism thrives during “good” wars such as World War II, which turn out to be (a) justified, (b) successful, (c) relatively quick, and/or any combination of the above. However, patriotism poses difficulties during messy and less attractive wars such as in Vietnam and now Iraq. Dissidents can be expected to vent their indignation, and in response unswerving loyalists tend to make patriotism itself the primary issue regardless of the merits of the conflict in progress. One’s pure and undiluted support of “our boys abroad” takes precedence over what they are doing, to whom, and for what genuine bottom-line reason(s) such as regional hegemony and the control of oil resources. Hence the growing sense among many that patriotism can be taken too far, whatever its benefits on a moderate scale.

Gathered here in light of this dilemma are some of the more critical assessments of patriotism over the past three centuries.

Never was a patriot yet, but was a fool.

-- John Dryden

Patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel.

-- Samuel Johnson

In Dr. Johnson's famous dictionary, patriotism is defined as the last resort of a scoundrel. With all due respect to an enlightened but inferior lexicographer, I beg to submit that it is the first.

-- Ambrose Bierce

Many studies have discovered a close link between prejudice and "patriotism" . . . Extreme bigots are almost always super-patriots.

-- Gordon Allport

It is lamentable that to be a good patriot one must become the enemy of the rest of mankind.

-- Voltaire

Every miserable fool who has nothing at all of which he can be proud, adopts, as a last resource, pride in the nation to which he belongs; he is ready and glad to defend all its faults and follies tooth and nail, thus reimbursing himself for his own inferiority.

-- Arthur Schopenhauer

The soul and substance of what customarily ranks as patriotism is moral cowardice -- and always has been.

-- Mark Twain

It seems like the less a statesman amounts to, the more he loves the flag.

-- Elbert Hubbard

That pernicious sentiment, "'Our country, right or wrong.'

-- James Russell Lowell

"My country right or wrong" is a thing that no patriot would think of saying except in a desperate case. It is like saying, "My mother drunk or sober."

-- G.K. Chesterton

Patriotism which has the quality of intoxication is a danger not only to its native land but to the world, and “My country never wrong” is an even more dangerous maxim than “My country, right or wrong.”

-- Bertrand Russell

Patriotism is your conviction that this country is superior to all other countries because you were born in it.

-- George Bernard Shaw

You'll never have a quiet world till you knock the patriotism out of the human race.

-- George Bernard Shaw

Patriotism is the virtue of the vicious.

-- George Bernard Shaw

One of the great attractions of patriotism--it fulfills our worst wishes. In the person of our nation we are able, vicariously, to bully and cheat. Bully and cheat, what's more, with a feeling that we are profoundly virtuous.

-- Aldous Huxley

Patriotism varies, from a noble devotion to a moral lunacy.

-- William Inge

Just as love for one individual which excludes the love for others is not love, love for one's country which is not part of one's love for humanity is not love, but idolatrous worship.

-- Erich Fromm

Patriotism today is the cruel tradition of an outlived period, which exists not merely by its inertia, but because the governments and ruling classes, aware that not their power only, but their very existence, depends upon it, persistently excite and maintain it among the people, both by cunning and violence.

-- Leo Tolstoy

If people would only speak what they think, and not what they do not think, all the superstitions emanating from patriotism would at once drop away with the cruel feelings and violence founded upon it. The hatred and animosity between nations and peoples, fanned by their governments, would cease . . .

-- Leo Tolstoy

Patriotism is slavery.

-- Leo Tolstoy

The standardization of mass-production carries with it a tendency to standardize a mass-mind, producing a willing conformity, not merely to common ways of living, but to common ways of thinking and common valuations. The worst defect of patriotism is its tendency to foster and impose this common mind, and so to stifle the innumerable germs of liberty.

-- J.A. Hobson

Patriotism corrupts history.

-- Goethe

The Athenian democracy suffered much from that narrowness of patriotism which is the ruin of all nations.

-- H.G. Wells

I am not an Athenian or a Greek, but a citizen of the world.

-- Diogenes

I have no country to fight for; my country is the earth, and I am a citizen of the world.

-- Eugene Debs

When a whole nation is roaring patriotism at the top of its voice, I am fain [prone] to explore the cleanness of its hands and purity of its heart.

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

## **2. PATRIOTISM AND WAR:**

Patriotism is the willingness to kill and be killed for trivial reasons.

-- Bertrand Russell

At the bottom of all patriotism is war: that is why I am no patriot.

-- Jules Renard

No other factor in history, not even religion, has produced so many wars as has the clash of national egotisms sanctified by the name of patriotism.

-- Preserved Smith

The dangerous patriot . . . is a defender of militarism and its ideals of war and glory.

-- Colonel James A. Donovan

Patriotism assumes that our globe is divided into little spots, each one surrounded by an iron gate. Those who have had the fortune of being born on some particular spot, consider themselves better, nobler, grander, more intelligent than the living beings inhabiting any other spot. It is, therefore, the duty of everyone living on that chosen spot to fight, kill, and die in the attempt to impose his superiority upon all the others.

-- Emma Goldman

Naturally the common people don't want war . . . Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders . . . All you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism.

--- Herman Goering

That worst outcrop of herd life, the military system, which I abhor . . . This plague-spot of civilization ought to be abolished with all possible speed. Heroism on command, senseless violence, and all the loathsome nonsense that goes by the name of patriotism--how passionately I hate them!

-- Albert Einstein

### 3. PATRIOTISM AND RELIGION:

Patriotism is a kind of religion; it is the egg from which wars are hatched.

-- Guy de Maupassant

God and Country are an unbeatable team; they break all records for oppression and bloodshed.

-- Luis Buñuel

To be patriotic, hate all nations but your own; to be religious, all sects but your own; to be moral, all pretenses but your own.

-- Lionel Strachey

When a dog barks at the moon, then it is religion; but when he barks at strangers, it is patriotism!

-- David Starr Jordan

### 4. THE AMERICAN SYNDROME:

There can be no fifty-fifty Americanism in this country. There is room here for only hundred percent Americanism, only for those who are Americans and nothing else.

-- Teddy Roosevelt

The 100 percent American is 99 percent an idiot.

-- George Bernard Shaw

How much longer are we going to think it necessary to be "American" before (or in contradistinction to) being cultivated, being enlightened, being humane, & having the same intellectual discipline as other civilized countries? It is really too easy a disguise for our shortcomings to dress them up as a form of patriotism.

-- Edith Wharton

If you have a weak candidate and a weak platform, wrap yourself up in the American flag and talk about the Constitution.

-- Matt Quay

If Tyranny and Oppression come to this land, it will be in the guise of fighting a foreign enemy.

-- James Madison

When fascism comes to America, it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross.

-- Sinclair Lewis

Treason is in the air around us everywhere. It goes by the name of patriotism.

-- Thomas Corwin

## **5. TOWARD A BALANCED ASSESSMENT:**

Patriotism is supporting your country all the time, and your government when it deserves it.

-- Mark Twain

Each man must for himself alone decide what is right and what is wrong, which course is patriotic and which isn't.

-- Mark Twain

My Country! When right keep it right; when wrong, set it right!

-- Carl Schurz

A patriot is somebody who protects his country from his government. Or better yet: who has the guts to protect his country from its government.

-- Piotyr Dirk

Our country is not the only thing to which we owe our allegiance. It is also owed to justice and to humanity. Patriotism consists not in waving the flag, but in striving that our country shall be righteous as well as strong.

-- James Bryce

The voice of protest, of warning, of appeal is never more needed than when the clamor of fife and drum, echoed by the press and too often by the pulpit, is bidding all men to fall in and keep step and obey in silence the tyrannous word of command. Then, more than ever, it is the duty of the good citizen not to be silent.

-- Charles Eliot Norton

Guard against the impostures of pretended patriotism.

-- George Washington

Dissent is the highest form of patriotism.

-- Thomas Jefferson

Sources for these quotes include Jon Winokur's *Portable Curmudgeon*, Rudolf Flesch's *The New Book of Unusual Quotations*, Laurence Peter's *Peter's Quotations: Ideas for Our Time*, Leonard Frayns' *Quotationary*, Robert Andrews' *The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations*, George Seldes' *The Great Quotations*, H.L. Mencken's *A New Dictionary of Quotations*, Evan Esar's *Dictionary of Humorous Quotations*, *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, Joseph Conlin, *The Morrow Book of Quotations in American History*, and Bertrand Russell, *Dictionary of the Mind, Matter and Morals*, ed by Lester Denonn. Many of the quotations can also be referenced on Google.

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