

What does patriotism mean to you?

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Word Count: 656

Former Governor of Illinois Adlai Stevenson II once said, “Patriotism is not frenzied outbursts of emotion but [the] tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime.” This quote represents an idea of what patriotism means holistically. Patriotism doesn’t mean backing your country simply in times of need or grandstanding its prowess online, but more. While it is a duty to be patriotic during international and domestic turmoil, it is also necessary during peace and everyday life. Beyond that, patriotism is different for every citizen of every country; to some, it may mean serving in the military; to others, it is voting and completing essential civic duties. To me, patriotism means several things. As a Russian-American, patriotism means understanding one’s country and being a good civic citizen.

I was born in the Russian Federation, and even though I didn’t have control over my origin of birth, I believe I have a duty as a citizen and patriot to understand my country’s history and current events. In the past, Russian patriotism can be seen starkly through its successes and failures. One example of this is the country’s most prominent war, the Great Patriotic War (Wikipedia contributors, 2023). While western nations and textbooks refer to this war as World War II, the Soviet Union saw it as its first global conflict and a fight by its patriotic citizens to control the spread of Nazism. Understanding my country’s history and its views on patriotism allows me to also assume that mantle. In addition, understanding the current events in my country is a sign of patriotism. Though one must defend their country, a patriot must also be willing to condemn actions by a government that acts against the wellbeing of the people and the world. To me, patriotism means following your people rather than the government; one must understand the importance of government, and a patriot must also stand against it when it is in the wrong, both legally and morally. By doing this, I can condemn the current crimes of Russia’s government

(Ukraine: Apparent War Crimes in Russia-Controlled Areas, 2022) while still calling myself a patriot of my homeland.

As a citizen of the United States who has lived in this country for over 17 years, patriotism means simply being a good civic citizen. Going to the streets and declaring your love and loyalty to the US demonstrates one aspect of patriotism, but keeping your country running through your duties as a citizen is another. Returning to the example of World War II, the United States saw just as much effort from its citizens on the Homefront as it did on the front lines, all for the greater good. President Roosevelt called on the American people to buy war bonds and donate to charities that supported the war effort, and millions obliged (Institution, n.d.). These citizens demonstrated how patriotism through civic duties led to benefits in the country and the world. In present times, when our nation is not directly in armed conflict, citizens can contribute domestically. Voting in elections, paying taxes, meeting with elected representatives, staying informed, and helping the community are all duties of a citizen who acts patriotically (USAHello, 2022). Rather than only speaking love for a nation, patriotism means doing the work that creates the backbone of a country. By doing this, I demonstrate what patriotism means to me.

In conclusion, patriotism is an idea that is expressed differently depending on the person. To me, patriotism is understanding my country and fulfilling the duties of a citizen. Though I gave examples with the United States and my homeland of Russia, I believe these ideas can be generalized to any country, as can patriotism. If one chooses to move to another country for whatever reason, they can still be a patriot of their new nation and their country of origin. Paraphrasing what Adlai Stevenson II said, the dedication of a lifetime defines patriotism, rather than the outbursts.

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