

White Nationalism and American Patriotism

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“Unity in Diversity” is an American slogan that reflects the ideal of national level commitment to equality for all law abiding, adult citizens. All have equal legal standing as citizens. All share the same basic rights. All participate in electing their representatives. All support the same laws that are to be applied to all equally in a fair and just manner. The commitment of Americans to the ideal of equality has to contend with the fact that diversity is inherently a divider. And in America diversity is extensive: ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, level of wealth, level of education, occupational status, region of the country, immigrant-citizen status, conservative – liberal political alignment, and rural-urban-suburban conditions and lifestyles. Given this diversity, it is no surprise that there are many tensions among American subgroups as defined by various combinations of these characteristics. Recognizing these tensions, it is fair to say that the announced American ideal of equality is more aspirational than real. But then, most ideals are worthy aspirations motivating efforts to attain them.

The claim of patriotism is made at both the ideal national level and the real subgroup level. Any group can claim to be composed of “true patriots,” and from within the perspective of their own groups, they may believe themselves to be patriot qualified. But, in spite of the aspirational aspect of our national level ideals, I suggest that the greater the distance between these national ideals and the ideals and goals of real subgroups, the weaker is their claim of patriotism.

The following variables can help in assessing this “distance:”

- 1) How representative of the diverse national population is the group’s membership?
- 2) What is the territorial scope of the group’s basis – local, regional, national?
- 3) How many members belong to the group – hundreds, thousands, millions?
- 4) Are the goals and ideals of the group consistent with announced national goals and ideals?
- 5) Are the processes that the group supports to achieve its goals consistent with approved and revered national level processes?

Let’s examine one American subgroup – composed of many independent groups – that has gained prominence in recent years. The members of this subgroup tend to be vigorous flag wavers claiming full standing as national patriots: white, Christian, middle/working class, middle aged, American males – with leaders often having military and/or law enforcement backgrounds.

The evaluation of this subgroup's claim of patriotism – keyed to numbers above:

#1 This subgroup's "whites only" position is by definition highly exclusive and therefore not representative of the diversity of citizens in the national population. So, the subgroup is weak in terms of patriotism on this variable.

#2 This subgroup is present in different iterations in all regions of the nation. So, it is fully national in geographical scope and strong on this variable.

#3 This subgroup includes at least thousands of members with a vast number of non-member supporters and sympathizers. So, it is nationally substantial and strong on this patriotism variable.

#4 This subgroup tends to be very conservative politically, it supports leadership and elevated control status for white Christian citizens, it denies the citizenship legitimacy of all other population subgroups, it is anti-immigrant, and it vigorously supports an extreme interpretation of the 2nd amendment and the rights to protest and form independent militias. This subgroup's goals and ideals are so limited and extreme in comparison to national ideals that it receives a low patriotism grade on this variable. Indeed, some authorities regard the active members in this subgroup as participating in domestic terrorist organizations.

#5 This subgroup is focused on displays of force represented by carrying various weapons – often of military grade together with military gear. It engages in events of public intimidation, it often occupies government grounds and facilities, it seeks confrontation in anti-protests, and it is prone to instigate violence. It associates itself with the military and law enforcement and recruits from these ranks. It makes a very limited effort to solicit support for its goals through the standard political process. The orientation of this subgroup to processes relying on force assigns it a low patriotism grade on this variable.

Conclusion: In spite of its geographical scope and considerable number of supporters, this American subgroup's exclusivity, narrow goals and ideals, and force oriented processes result in it receiving a weak patriotism grade. Its overall claim of patriotic status is not valid by this assessment.

If patriotism is not what is legitimately motivating this subgroup of Americans, what is really going on? Why is this group so intent on degrading and disenfranchising non-white, non-Christian, non-European immigrant American citizens? The stated reason is usually that white Christians founded America for white Christians of European origin with all others being slaves or non-citizen servants. It follows that all non-whites, non-Christians, and non-European immigrants are not "real" Americans. They are outsiders and do not belong. Of course these white patriots conveniently forget that they are foreign immigrants so far as Native Americans are concerned. But then these "deserving" white males feel free to ignore this inconvenient fact since Native Americans really never "qualified" to possess a country as magnificent as America.

Obviously, all of this tortured self-justification is vacuous, but it still gets accepted as legitimate internally. What really underlies this exclusive, self-serving view? Since the late 1970s, these white, middle/working class, middle aged, male Americans have been living increasingly in a condition of job insecurity and a stagnant or downward trending status economically. Accordingly, they are very frustrated and looking to identify and “attack” a cause. The target emerges with the contention that foreigners are stealing their paychecks in the context of the ever more influential global economy. So, in this view, all non-whites, non-Europeans, non-Christians are competitors and should have their citizenship status degraded in order to return their America to its “proper” condition.

This white power perspective has come to resonate with and motivate many Americans. A relative few join and are active in the various white power subgroups, but a great many identify with the white anger expressed by these groups and their claims as patriots. Donald Trump owes his Presidency and his continued control of the Republican Party to his consistent and successful efforts to create a national, cult-like following by fueling this white middle/working class frustration and anger and pointing it in an aggressive direction. Trump targets Muslims, immigrants, non-whites, and the RINOs as being responsible for “your problems and mine.” Trump portrays himself as if he is an outsider “just like you” suffering and being abused inexcusably by the treatment of conniving others. “You’re Fired” [Trump, the powerful decision maker in “The Apprentice”], “Make America Great Again,” “Only I Can Fix It,” “Build the Wall,” “Knock the Crap Out of Them,” “Come to Washington; It will be Wild,” “Fight like Hell, if You Want to Reclaim Your Country,” “I’ll be There with You.” The final message: “THEY stole the election from US.” MEGA baseball caps – the headgear of the working class!

As valuable as this white power point of view has been for Trump to magnify and exploit, it unfortunately misses the real underlying cause of middle class frustration and anger. With their move to strategic locations overseas – especially in Asia – international corporations, financial institutions, and the 1% wealthy elite can magnify their economic returns because they can avoid the “losses” they “suffer” due to the more stringent American resource, pollution, and labor standards. And they get the support of the powerful WTO to restrain any national efforts to equalize these standards. At the root of it all, these “patriotic” white power males are being sacrificed to the corporate goal of maximizing profits. It is not non-white foreigners and immigrants that are to blame; it’s the prevailing agenda of American corporations and their economic brethren. And, importantly, because these middle and working class whites miss the real target, the impetus does not exist in either major party to do anything politically to

address their long term frustration. So, the anger grows, festers and feeds what is presently the anti-patriotic, autocratic cult of Trump.

Trump is just a dangerous symptom of patriotism gone wrong. The underlying cause for the negative condition of the white middle/working class does not stop with the success of international corporations in the global economy! Apart from the powerful influence of the WTO, the global corporate giants assure that their economic interests are sustained at the national level in America by using their monetary resources to support PACs that in turn “buy” majority political representation at all levels of government. These “bought” public servants then produce policy, law, and judicial appointments that promote corporate profits – ecological consequences and average citizen benefits be damned. Finally, these voracious economic interests literally support active deflection campaigns to hide their anti-egalitarian excesses. They support sham organizations to keep the targeted white power oriented citizenry fearful, to identify the fake sources for their discontent, and to keep the anger directed away from themselves! The scapegoats: non-whites, non-Christians, and non-European immigrants!

The ultimate irony: these self-proclaimed “patriotic” subgroups of frustrated, white middle/working class, male Americans are not only rejecting the American ideals of equality, representative inclusiveness, and legitimate democratic processes. They are entirely missing the real source of their anger!

Conclusion

Flag waving, middle/working class, white, male Americans who join, support, or sympathize with white power groups are in fact very weak patriots. And their groups exemplify a condition of claimed patriotism whose informing premise is false and whose consequences are dangerous. It is very important to address long term frustration and anger in a significant portion of the national citizenry, but the solutions for these problems require the use of critical thinking skills to avoid falling for the easy solution: scapegoating. If white, middle/working class, middle aged, American males want to resolve their frustration, they can form groups with the goal of eliminating the negative impact of money in American politics and do so by utilizing the legitimate political process. In adopting this course, they can assist in bringing the major American parties, international corporations, and the WTO to heel. And, very importantly, in this process they can qualify as “true” patriots by supporting two highly patriotic national ideals – equality and democracy.