



## *July 4th is Still a Call for Action*

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Citizens by birth or choice, of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affections the name of American, which belongs to you, in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of Patriotism. – George Washington, *Farewell Address*

Today, we celebrate 245 years since the Declaration of Independence, recognizing the courage and passion of enlightened citizens who altered the course of history. A “common country” was born, in part, out of the idea that a nation of many disparate parts could come together under the banner of collectively shared values and experiences. George Washington’s common country is the treasure chest that holds our most sacred truths: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness” (Jefferson et al., 1776, para. 1). We cannot abnegate this democratic republic’s success through its growth and evolution over the last 245 years. Nor can we deny the “pride of Patriotism” — an impassioned and reasoned affection for the values based upon our most sacred truths — is warranted. Nonetheless, we also must acknowledge the precarious nature of patriotism during our present time. What does it mean to be patriotic in 21st century America?

The seed that germinates American patriotism is an individual’s special affection and personal identification with this nation and its core values. American patriotism colors national memory. In other words, what America chooses to recognize about its history and the perspectives America chooses to foreground manifests as the relationship between what is *believed* about this nation and the *reality* of who the nation really is. Moreover, efforts to define patriotism in America also illustrate the complex relationship between race, ethnicity, gender, and identity in America with the concept of oneness. We are one nation, but we are a whole composed of many disparate and complex parts. Individual freedom is a core value within American patriotism and within that context, political philosophers like Maurizio Viroli (1995/1772) have argued that to have a country means citizens must have a moral obligation to preserve the common good. He expands on this by adding, patriots have “no obligation to impose cultural, ethnic, and religious homogeneity at the expense of other peoples’ liberty, nor to deny civil and political rights to any of our fellow patriots” (p. 9). I believe we must ask ourselves, given the present state of political and social discourse, just what the common good *is* in the 21st century.

“Men can starve from a lack of self-realization as much as they can from a lack of bread,” Richard Wright (2005/1940) once wrote. For the American patriot, self-realization involves acknowledgement and acceptance of not only what has been exceptional in America, but also what has been dark and ugly. It also means coming to terms with the effects of inconvenient truths. Are we able to rise above our present political, social, and cultural challenges to forge ahead and continue this experiment in democracy?

The *Journal of Veterans Studies* will publish a special edition later this month that will introduce a scholarly conversation on the topic of American patriotism through the lens of veteran experiences. American patriotism is an intersectional space — a space occupied by dissimilar human beings who conceive of and experience the phenomenon that is American patriotism, based on individual lived experiences. I believe that out of the many we can still be one if we are rooted in the courage and humility to confront truth. Scholarly analysis through the lens of veterans’ experiences is, I feel, an important — and, albeit, relatively uncharted — pathway forward in the endeavor to

confront truth. I invite you to continue this conversation both here at the *Journal of Veteran Studies* and on my [blog](#).

### References

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- Viroli, M. (1995). *For love of country: An essay on patriotism and nationalism*. Clarendon Press. (Original work published 1772).
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