

The Attribute of a Patriot
Speech at President Harrison Wreath Laying Ceremony at Crown Hill
17 August 2013

We in the National Society Sons of the American Revolution describe our ancestors who were involved in the struggle for independence as Patriots. Webster Dictionary defines a Patriot as a person who loves, supports, and defends their country and its interests with devotion. John Adams once said: “Our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives.” I want us to consider Patriotism as our obligations to our country in the very human sentiments of duty, honor, compassion, and pride.

The reality of becoming a patriot involves much more than claiming the title due to ones’ general beliefs and so called commitment to their country. The true patriot understands not only the history of their country and the sacrifices that have been made to establish the way of life enjoyed, but also they understand the sacrifices that men and women must make in order to preserve that way of life and defend it at all cost.

The other day a good friend of mine and I were on our way to Sandusky, Ohio, to go sailing. We were having a discussion about Patriotism, since I knew I would be giving this talk. He posited that what a person does defines them as a Patriot.

Thus, a true patriot understands that power lies in their hands (or pens or keyboards or voice). Journalists report the truth rather than accept the offerings of political or corporate spin-doctors. A truly independent press reduces the power of partisan screamers on the left and right. True patriots ask questions that make politicians squirm and reveal facts. True patriots bravely step forward not only to bring forth unbiased news, but also to speak out when this country’s course needs to be altered for the benefit of all of its citizens.

When the country is polarized by petty arguments and resentments between political parties, true patriots look at the big picture. They see that social issues may never be agreed upon, and when argued endlessly between the left and the right, nothing to further our country's best interests is achieved. True patriots know that the solutions require bipartisan effort and honest and straightforward politicians. True patriots also know that it is their responsibility to hold their politicians accountable—to keep the government a valid representation of the people. They communicate with them.

When true patriots witness our own American citizens homeless or living in the slums of our cities, they do not turn their heads the other way—they accept responsibility for the common good. True patriots recognize that the well-being of these Americans is the responsibility and duty of every citizen capable of lending a hand. And they act on it. It is not solely the responsibility of government welfare programs. Here I am reminded of Mitch Albom and his work at restoration in the Brightmoor Neighborhood of Detroit.

While true patriots are proud to celebrate what is great about America, they will never yield to blind sentiment or shirk from reporting truth about a war, a governmental decision or an injustice being done just because their patriotism is questioned.

The true patriots of our history are people who greatly loved their country and found that the best way to show this love was to fix and transform and inspire it into something better than it was. In the words of the Patriot whose birthday we celebrate today: "Let those who would die for the flag on the field of battle give a better proof of their patriotism and a higher glory to their country by promoting fraternity and justice." Or as another famous President in our generation said "ask not what your county can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."