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### **Reimagining Patriotism and its Value in Education**

A liberal arts education should include lessons on patriotism in its curriculum. Such lessons would foster national solidarity, and by extension, generate a societal concern for the welfare of fellow citizens. Most importantly, these lessons would facilitate greater participation and cooperation in the social and political sphere in an increasingly divisive political climate in the United States. Of course, the very idea of patriotism needs a fundamental rework. It must evolve past historic definitions that alienate many individuals from diverse backgrounds. The idea of patriotism must be remolded along much more inclusive lines to celebrate the strength of a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural United States. In this way, people of vastly different backgrounds can better appreciate both the complexity and diversity of the contemporary social sphere and begin to look beyond their limited perspectives in order to broaden societal cooperation and national solidarity. Finally, an appreciation of patriotism would enhance the overall mission of a liberal arts education by challenging the student to critically examine the complexities of a diverse society, and how societal policy or attitudes can be altered at a foundational level for continued societal and political progress.

Patriotism is often associated with nationalistic groups which harbor xenophobic sentiments against ‘outsiders’ not part of the majority demographic and the majority’s shared history or culture. Thus, patriotism in the U.S. is often defined as being predominantly White, Christian, and immensely loyal to the principles found in the Bill of Rights and Constitution. Consequently, people of minority or diverse backgrounds often become disassociated, or in some cases, disillusioned with society and its institutions because of their lack of shared history and culture with the majority demographic. These feelings of alienation are especially compounded as nationalistic groups attempt to implement strategies which prevent more comprehensive

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participation by minorities through acts such as restrictive immigration policy or the encouragement of a 'pure' ethnographic state. Therefore, a major tension can develop between majority and minority populations, with both becoming resentful of policies they perceive that do not represent or protect their interests. These resentful attitudes lead to further factionalism represented by divisive politics which continually endorse more extreme positions to appeal to their desired electorate. Such divisiveness in the social and political sphere is immensely damaging to society and the political process, with cooperation and mutually beneficial agreements becoming less frequent or feasible. A possible solution to this problem of divisiveness is to redefine the meaning of patriotism in a modern society. Through education, especially in liberal arts curriculums, individuals of *all* backgrounds can better appreciate the intricacies and strength of a multi-ethnic and cultural state. Additionally, 'patriotic' liberal arts students can directly apply their unique understanding of American citizenship, moving past more archaic understandings of patriotism, in practicing tolerance and more seriously considering a variety of perspectives and approaches in their burgeoning professional careers.

Redefining patriotism to mean an intense pride in the immense diversity and cultural pluralism of the U.S. would begin a process of building national solidarity amongst citizens of vastly different backgrounds. Historic precedent has continually demonstrated how a strong and united people can flourish and even overcome adversity. Despite the many challenges presented during the Great Depression and World War Two, Americans maintained a patriotic outlook unique to that time period, and upheld national solidarity to overcome two monumental and challenging events. Thus, as accomplished in the past, Americans must adapt and utilize a redefined idea of patriotism to foster an interest in the success of the nation, rather than a specific party or faction in a divisive political climate. A liberal arts curriculum can begin a process of

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reinventing patriotism and crafting it to become a defining characteristic of societal progression.

A liberal arts curriculum that promotes this redefined patriotism will help students to embrace a pluralistic society and utilize the plethora of perspectives presented by various backgrounds to benefit society. Instead of being restricted by a selective perspective or view, the liberal arts students can cooperate and influence policy through a much more comprehensive perspective which represents a diverse U.S. Not only would this strategy be more inclusive and representative of society, but it would also promote policies to bind and encourage cooperation and interest in the welfare of society. Therefore, patriotism would not be limited to pride in historical institutions or ethno-centric nationalism, but societal progress influenced by inclusion and expression of various perspectives presented by diverse peoples all seeking national advancement and improvement.

The reinvention of patriotism and national identity cannot be accomplished in the short term. However, a liberal arts education can act as the crucial foundation needed to remold patriotism along much more inclusive lines. As defined by the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Letters and Science department's mission statement, a liberal arts education seeks to: "...nurture and support groundbreaking research across the spectrum of disciplines, encouraging faculty and graduate students to push boundaries and devise new pathways to knowledge."<sup>1</sup> Thus, the students and faculty involved in a liberal arts are in an excellent position to undertake the mission of redefining patriotism under a more progressive influence. Moreover, through the research and creative actions of liberal arts students and faculty, a thorough curriculum can be

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<sup>1</sup> "L&S Mission." L&S Mission | College of Letters & Science, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Accessed March 15, 2020. <https://ls.wisc.edu/about/mission>.

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developed and act as a foundation for future generations of students and citizens to endorse a neo-patriotism celebrating the diversity and progression of society.

Although patriotism is currently associated and utilized to promote more radically conservative agendas, patriotisms still has its merits. Through a comprehensive educational effort to redesign and appreciate the implications of a neo-patriotism, society can begin the arduous task of mending a divided U.S. and develop an identity that celebrates both the historic and contemporary accomplishments of the U.S. Thus, patriotism and nationalism are not inherently racist or prejudiced, but two concepts or ideas that should evolve with society. It is the duty of not only students and educators, but American society to find common interest amidst dissention and craft a national identity that seeks to progress all *Americans*.