

What It Means To Be A Minority And A Patriot In 2017

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Over the past decade — as America’s political lines-in-the-sand have deepened into uncrossable chasms — the meaning of the word “patriotism” has shifted. It’s become part of the right wing’s core brand message, with conservatives rallying around classic American iconography and liberals lining up to mock it. Oddly, [for a nation founded on rebellion](#), the connotation is that patriotism is somehow synonymous with blind loyalty, as if to “fight the power” is an implicit rejection of our nationhood.

But the suggestion that dissent is somehow anti-patriotic is embedded with logical flaws. Anyone who’s ever had friends, family, or romantic partners knows that “day-to-day satisfaction” and “abiding love” are not always aligned. [True patriotism ought not be afraid of this nuanced complexity](#). It should recognize our country’s shortcomings, call them out, and strive to improve them. It should be able to say, “America, I love you, but you have issues.”

On the eve of July 4th, we asked three writers to share their thoughts on what it means to be a “minority and a patriot in 2017.” Here are their answers:

Delenda Joseph

My relationship with America has always been a weird one. That’s not to say I’m not “[proud to be an American, where at least I know I’m free](#) (conditions may apply),” it’s just... *complicated*.

While born and raised in these United States of America, I grew up in a Haitian household where Haitian Kreyol, not English, was my first language. I ate Haitian food seven days a week, 365 days out of the year and attended Haitian mass. My parents played Haitian music, and I had Haitian friends. The only time I felt like an American was when I went to Haiti and people would call me “The Foreigner.” That would’ve been a cool ass name if I was a deadly assassin and not just someone trying to visit my family.

Not even in school did I feel American, despite having to pledge allegiance to the flag every morning. I didn’t feel too patriotic when kids called me a “Haitian Booty Scratcher” or said I had “HBO (Haitian Body Odor).” Another fond memory is being told the mild eczema on my face was actually AIDS. The bullying for being Haitian-American was, of course, during peak “Haitians have AIDS” era of the ’90s. It was hard to wave the flag on those days, when I felt like “the other.”

With a common enemy in terror, 9/11 was supposed to unite us all. “We stand united,” they wrote on signs. “United we stand, divided we fall!” they shouted. But I never got on the red, white and blue post-9/11 wave. I wasn’t decked out in patriotic gear. I didn’t go to McDonald’s, demanding an order of Freedom Fries wrapped in bacon served to me by a majestic bald eagle. On the upside, I also didn’t go harassing anyone who looked like they might be from the middle east.

I understood what happened was the most devastating shit I probably will ever see in my lifetime, but I still didn’t feel the kind of fiery anger most Americans felt at the time. I sympathized, but I didn’t feel like *my* country was under attack. I feel that now, though, but for Black America. I feel under attack because police officers sworn to protect and serve are killing black people with impunity. This country also elected a president who openly appeals to racists. A president who quickly appointed a man who allegedly has white supremacist ties as the top law enforcement officer of the land. I’m also a black *woman* in America — which means being silenced, overlooked, belittled, abused, disrespected, killed and ignored.

So while I’ve never thought about it, I guess I’ve always felt Haitian first then a black woman then American. Or maybe black woman first then Haitian then American? Either way, American comes last.

Do I love this country, sweet land of liberty? Sure. And I *do* shout “USA! USA! USA!” at the World Cup and during the Olympics. But only when matches are between Germany, Russia, England, Etc. Even with all its flaws, this country is my home and has afforded me many great opportunities I probably wouldn’t get anywhere else. I think if I was going to move somewhere else, after watching countless House Hunters International, I’d have done it already.