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**A Few Thoughts on Patriotism  
By Joe Navarro  
BlackCommentator.com Guest Commentator**

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Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus defines patriotism as "zealous love of one's country." As we approach the Fourth of July, a national holiday, I have been contemplating the idea of patriotism as defined here and instinctively reject the idea of having "zealous love" for this country.

Even as a child I felt that the national symbols and hymns were forced upon me in school and did not really mean anything to me. I learned to mechanically remember the pledge of allegiance, national anthem and the symbols of this country so that I would not get in trouble or ridiculed in my classroom.

As I grew older, phrases like, "liberty and justice for all," were disconnected from my own experiences in my community. As my comprehension of national and world events expanded, I learned that the words of major doctrines, such as the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, were meant for wealthy white men, but not everyone else.

Patriotism assumes that our society is homogenous, and is devoid of any recognition of class, racial, ethnic and gender differences. U.S. imperialist aggression in Southeast Asia, Latin America and the Middle East are invigorated by a sense of blind patriotism,

where Americans uncritically support whatever the U.S. government wants. Patriotism is a combination of vague ideals and selective amnesia, which is rooted in ignorance. In schools, from the media and press, and official government reports we are fed a distorted history, lies and heavy doses of propaganda.

During the current invasion and occupation of Iraq, people finally started to make the connection between the overwhelming propaganda to justify an unjust invasion on the one hand and U.S. corporate interests to control petroleum, and sack Iraq's economy by hiring wealthy corporations to rebuild Iraq on the other.

This questioning of the real interests of the Iraq invasion has caused the Bush Administration to restrict democratic rights of U.S. citizens and non-citizens. Eavesdropping on people's email and phone calls, to increasing suspicion of immigrants, to denying people due-process under the law, based on ethnicity are all threats to democracy in America.

In my lifetime, the U.S. military and CIA have been involved in invading Southeast Asia, Nicaragua, Panama, supported a successful military coup in Chile, an unsuccessful coup in Venezuela (to name a few) and countless other military actions in the world.

Domestically, there is a long tradition of the U.S. military attacking people for the benefit of the wealthy elite. In addition to the enslavement of Africans, genocide against Native Americans, theft of Mexican territories, occupation of the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico and other people's lands; the U.S. government has attacked workers of all nationalities who fought for better working conditions and the right to unionize; has kept women's status economically and politically below men; has maintained a system of hatred and bigotry against gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered persons; and people of color still are treated as second class citizens culturally, politically and economically.

Historically, every step of progress of this nation has benefited the smallest, most elite sector of this society. Oil barons, industrialists, investment bankers, real estate giants, agribusiness, Wall Street traders, corporate CEOs, weapons manufacturers are the silent partners of this nation, who through their wealth and influence, benefit from oppression and wars.

How can one demonstrate "zealous love" for this tradition? As an American citizen, who is also a Native American and Chicano, I prefer to celebrate the heroes who have resisted and opposed oppression domestically and internationally.

Instead, I honor African slaves who rebelled against slavery, and white abolitionists who dedicated their lives to end the barbarism; I celebrate the original people of this land who fought and resisted genocide and the Mexicans who battled against a mighty military force to defend their lands from a brutal annexation; I admire the women who have tirelessly fought for women's rights to vote, for reproductive choice and for equality; I honor Chinese, Japanese and other Asian immigrants who have survived and resisted severe racism, ostracism and unlawful incarceration; I celebrate civil rights and human rights activists who marched, protested and fought for equality in education, employment, housing and healthcare, and expanded democracy; I honor people who strive to uncover the truth about this nation and peace activists who protest in the streets to let the world know that imperialist aggression is not supported by everyone.

So, on the Fourth of July, I will not be a blindfolded flag waving patriot. I will honor and celebrate all the people who have fought (and died) to defend people from oppression and who worked to expand democracy in America.

**BlackCommentator.com** Guest Commentator, Joe Navarro, is a 21st century Chicano activist teacher and poet. His website is [http://www.geocities.com/poetajoe/Joe\\_Navarro.html](http://www.geocities.com/poetajoe/Joe_Navarro.html). Click here to contact Mr. Navarro.

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