

Are You a Patriot?

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Today is "Patriot Day", in memory of the terrorist attacks in the US on September 11, 2001. I'll never forget that terrible day, and I'm sure you won't either. Unfortunately, some people have twisted the meaning of the term "patriot". A patriot is "a proud supporter or defender of his or her country and its way of life". (*Encarta Dictionary*) There's more to patriotism than flying the flag and saying the right words. A patriot should know something about her/his own country's laws, principles, and customs. A patriot should behave in ways that demonstrate the nation's values.

Thirty-nine delegates, representing 12 states, signed the US Constitution on September 17, 1787. Now September 17 is called both "Constitution Day" and "Citizenship Day". September 17 – 23 is "Constitution Week", a time to reflect on the importance of the constitution and to teach its principles. The constitution is the first law of the United States of America. It created our government and describes the powers and duties of each of its three branches.

The constitution contains America's most important principles. It limits presidential powers, requires Congress to oversee government operations, and guarantees justice to all residents. All elected officials, all police officers, and many other public employees take an oath to uphold the constitution. This means that *none* of their official acts can violate constitutional principles. However, their actions often contradict that oath.

Wearing a flag lapel pin while cutting health care for wounded war veterans does not make you a patriot. It makes you a hypocrite.

Ridiculing the people who devote their lives to helping your poorest citizens in your poorest communities does not make you a patriot. It makes you a selfish, arrogant snob.

Voting for legislation that violates the constitution does not make you a patriot. It makes you a traitor.

Torturing prisoners does not make you a patriot. It makes you an animal.

America's founders spent a lot of time trying to get it just right. They neglected their homes, their families, and their work to create something that would benefit all of us – even today. It's not perfect, but it is remarkable. This is the preamble, or introduction:

We, the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

The rest of the document describes the structure of our government. The first ten amendments – The Bill of Rights – list our personal rights. These are the rules that our government is supposed to preserve, protect, and defend. You can find the entire text in many books and Web sites. I've listed some below.

I don't know why so many Americans – including most of our elected representatives – think it's acceptable to ignore these principles. We can protect America without abandoning the ideals that make us American. It's time for our elected officials to do it.



Since last week's article on the politics of distraction, I found an excellent Web site that illustrates the candidates' positions on the issues in their own words – even when they contradict themselves. It includes presidential, vice presidential, and US House and Senate candidates as well as cabinet officials, Supreme Court judges, and some governor candidates. The site compares the candidates' voting records with their public statements. It also has history and background information on dozens of important public issues. It's worth some of your time. www.ontheissues.org.

For more information, go to:

www.constitutionfacts.com

www.infoplease.com

www.usa.gov

www.ontheissues.org

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