

# The Echo

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## WHAT DO YOU MEAN—PATRIOTISM?

In these days when the casualties of one war are sharing hospital wards with those of another, there is a great deal of talk about "patriotism". The word is used haphazardly by many, cautiously by others, even derisively by a few, until the serious-minded person wonders if any of us really know what it means.

If you have the feeling, you know that down inside you patriotism is a very real thing; so deep and stirring as to be truly inexpressible.

It's that way with most of us, and always has been. In order to have a way to tell the world how we feel about democracy, people a long time ago began to employ symbols—things that *can* be expressed—which represent our feelings of patriotism. With us Americans, the foremost of these symbols from the very first has been our flag.

To understand how the flag works as a symbol, think of—or remember—yourself as being in a foreign land, or captured by the enemy. Think of yourself as despairing of all hope—and suddenly on the horizon you see the Stars and Stripes. At that moment, the flag symbolizes everything that America and the American people stand for.

Of course all of us understand that the important thing really is not the flag—as such—but what it stands for. There is a story about a soldier, the flag-bearer for his company, who faced the enemy's most withering fire to advance the flag up a steep hill against an enemy stronghold, and

planted the banner at the very top. After the position was secured, the flag-bearer saw that one of his buddies was badly wounded and bleeding profusely. He tried to dress the wounds as best he could, but he had no bandages and even his tattered clothes were of no use. In desperation, and contrary to all the rules, he tore down the flag, ripped it into shreds and made bandages with which he was able to stop the bleeding and save the life of a heroic soldier.

This is a simple example of distinguishing between the symbol and the thing symbolized. It is less simple with other less obvious symbols. For instance, cheering and celebrations themselves are not patriotism. A Communist spy can shoot off firecrackers. Celebrations are symbolic of the way we feel about our patriotism.

The same is true of another well-known symbol of our belief in America: pride. We are *proud to be proud* that we are Americans. Yet how could we do more *harm* to our country than by letting our pride blind us to our faults, to our intolerance, to our shortsightedness at times?

So you ask, "What do you mean—Patriotism?" and the answer: "Patriotism is not a thing to be defined—it is a thing to be lived. Only those whose lives are devoted to making this nation worthy of the praise and glory heaped on it by the orators can ever know the true meaning of patriotism."