

Being a patriot means much more than just loving your country or waving the flag at parades. For me, as a 16-year-old African American male, patriotism is about standing up for the ideals that this country is supposed to represent, even when it feels like those ideals aren't fully realized for everyone. It's about seeing the potential of America and fighting to make it a better place for all people, not just a few.

When you think about the history of African Americans in this country, it's clear that my ancestors showed the ultimate form of patriotism. They built this nation through sweat, tears, and struggle, often without being seen as fully human. Yet, they believed in the promise of freedom and justice, even when it wasn't their reality. To me, *that* is the heart of being a

patriot—believing in what your country \*can\* be, and working toward that vision, even when it's hard.

## What Does Patriotism Look Like Today?

Today, being a patriot isn't just about saying "I love my country"—it's about asking how we can make this country better for everyone. It's about understanding that true patriotism is being willing to hold America accountable to its values.

As an African American, I show patriotism by engaging with issues that matter in my community. I ask tough questions, like why there's a lack of resources in certain schools, or why police violence is a problem for people who look like me. I recognize that loving your country means

wanting it to do better by all of its citizens.

## Showing Patriotism in My Community

In my own community, I show patriotism in different ways. One way is by volunteering at local events or food banks, where I can help others who are struggling. To me, patriotism means giving back, because a strong community makes a stronger nation. When we help one another, we're building the country up, piece by piece.

Another way I show patriotism is by using my voice. As a young Black man, I know my experiences are different from others, but that doesn't make them less valid.

Speaking up about injustice and inequality is how I show my love for America—it's how I fight to make it the place it *says* it is. Whether it's through social media,

conversations with friends, or participating in peaceful protests, I use my voice to push for positive change. That's what patriotism looks like in 2024: standing for justice, equality, and the rights of all people, not just for those who look like me.

## Patriotism is a Responsibility

To me, patriotism is about responsibility. It's not just about enjoying the rights and privileges of living in this country, but about fighting to make sure those rights apply to everyone. It's not enough to love your country; you have to love it enough to make it better. You have to recognize that America isn't perfect, but that it *\*can be\**.

When I think about what it means to be a patriot, I think about the strength it takes to continue believing in the dream of

America, especially when it doesn't always feel like that dream includes you. I think about my ancestors, who fought for freedoms they never fully experienced, yet still believed in this country's potential. And I think about the future, where I hope to see an America that lives up to the promises in its Constitution.

That's what it means to be a patriot: not just celebrating the good, but working to fix what's broken. And in my community, I'll keep doing my part—by showing up, speaking out, and giving back—because I believe in the power of what this country can become.

