

How Unpatriotic is Donald Trump?

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Samuel Johnson famously considered patriotism “the last refuge of a scoundrel.” His biographer James Boswell, who passed along that judgment, clarified that Johnson “did not mean a real and generous love for our country, but that pretended patriotism which so many, in all ages and countries, have made a cloak for self-interest.”

This could be describing Donald Trump. And yet the Wall Street Journal’s Peggy Noonan theorized in an April 2016 column that Trump’s major appeal to Republican voters came not from his adherence to any political ideology, but rather from his radiant patriotism which has, in her view, been absent from the political status quo. “What Trump supporters believe, what they perceive as they watch him,” she wrote, “is that he is on America’s side.”

There is little in Trump’s rambling off-the-cuff speeches and media interviews, or in his reactionary stream-of-conscious tweets, that demonstrate his understanding of patriotism. Trump is a snake oil salesman, and he is arguably in the midst of his greatest pitch to date. Smart consumers should do their research to find out the truth about the “product” they are being sold by Mr. Trump.

Here are some examples of where the real estate plutocrat comes up short on patriotism.

*Peeved by The Washington Post’s coverage of his presidential campaign and their investigation of the details surrounding his grand claims, Trump has revoked the paper’s press credentials for attending his rallies and political events. He has also banned reporters from Politico, Univision, Mother Jones, The Daily Beast, The Huffington Post and others. What’s patriotic about muffling the free press when you are running for the highest office in the land?

*Despite lofty rhetoric about “bringing jobs home,” Trump has used cheap foreign production in China and Bangladesh for his signature clothing brands. “They don’t even make this stuff here,” the ever-defensive Trump told ABC News’ George Stephanopoulos when questioned about it. Stephanopoulos informed Trump that Brooks Brothers clothing does, does, in fact, “make this stuff” here. What’s patriotic about making profits on the backs of poorly paid foreign workers who are often suffering under dictatorial rule?

*Big talker Trump has claimed to have given millions of dollars to many different charities over the years. According to a recent Washington Post investigation, he's given far, far less than he's boasted and far less than other billionaires of his (alleged) comparable wealth. Most of his donations have come through the Trump Foundation, to which he has donated little of his own fortune. All in all, over the past seven years, the Post reports that Trump has personally given less than \$10,000 to charities. What's patriotic about lying about your own philanthropy?

*One of Trump's more preposterous statements has been calling for a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States." Drawing much justified criticism, Trump has been pressured into clarifying and restating his position. He now claims that only immigration from "terrorist countries" would fall under his proposed ban. He also stated last fall that he was "open" to the idea of creating an Orwellian database of all Muslims living in the United States. Is accusatory language of ethnic stereotyping reflective of our patriotic traditions? The inscription on the Statue of Liberty is: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free." Is repudiating Lady Liberty patriotic?

*Donald Trump's bid for the presidency has been based upon the supposed strength of his talent and judgment as a businessman and dealmaker. These skills, however, are not totally verifiable, since Trump refuses to release his tax returns. Trump has managed to avoid any severe blows to his personal wealth by strategically insulating himself from failed corporate business endeavors. He has bragged that he "used, brilliantly," corporate bankruptcy as a competitive advantage. When Trump fails, only the little guys suffer. Not exactly reflecting the last words of the pledge of allegiance?"with liberty and justice for all."

*Last year, Donald Trump shamefully criticized Senator John McCain who spent over five years as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam. The ever-brash Trump dismissed McCain's extraordinary ordeal, claiming: "He's not a war hero." Trump continued, "He was a war hero because he was captured. I like people who weren't captured." Is degrading the suffering of an American veteran patriotic?

Unlike McCain, Trump did not serve in the Vietnam War. He has gone on the record, however, for making a different kind of sacrifice. Trump described his romantic escapades in the 1980's as his "personal Vietnam" due to how he put himself at risk of sexually transmitted diseases. He told Howard Stern that this made him feel "like a great and very brave soldier."

*"I believe that Trump University was a fraudulent scheme," Ronald Schnackenberg, a former employee of the unaccredited Trump University, stated in testimony, "and that it preyed upon the elderly and uneducated to separate them from their money." Indeed, much of the information that has come to light about Donald Trump's "university" reveals that it was little more than a scam meant to drain people of their money while promising them success. Cornered by the allegations, Trump resorted to accusing Judge Gonzalo P. Curiel, who is scheduled to hear the class action suit in November, of being "a hater" of his due to his Mexican ethnicity. Are these the words of man who loves America or those of a con man caught with his hand in the cookie jar?

*Since starting his bid for the presidency, Donald Trump has produced a veritable Trump Tower of outrageously false statements. According to the nonpartisan Politifact, nearly 80% of the statements made by Donald Trump fall under the categories of Mostly False, False, or "Pants on Fire." His campaign won the distinction of 2015 Politifact Lie of the Year for its entire spider web of deceptions. What's patriotic about chronically lying when you're running for the presidency of the United States?

So what does it truly mean to be patriotic? My parents defined it quite simply. They taught my siblings and me that loving one's country meant working hard to make it more lovable. This means working to end poverty, discrimination, corruption, greed, cheating and other injustices that weaken the promise and potential of America.

See this video that explains how my father, an immigrant, viewed patriotism.