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The paradox of black patriotism: double consciousness

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the double consciousness of black American patriotism in the modern era marked by publicized police killings of blacks, widespread antiracism protests, and concern for racially motivated violence. This analysis provides timely ethnographic insights into black identities that vividly captures black voices; fuses classical and contemporary race theories and extends them into the literature on patriotism; and proposes a model for understanding how double consciousness is negotiated in personal identity construction. I conducted twenty-two in-depth interviews of black Americans. I explored three questions: (1) how they interpret patriotism; (2) whether their interpretations affirm or defy their black identity; and (3) how tensions between race and nation manifest in their patriotic identity development. Many denounced hegemonic patriotism and constructed alternative patriotic brands. These brands are situated on an "Axis of Identities", which is comprised of four profiles: the bystander, the sycophant, the subverter, and the conscious patriot.

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Patriotism; double consciousness; race; African Americans; ethnography; identities

Introduction

On 4 July 2016, America celebrated Independence Day, a national holiday featuring patriotic symbols and rituals that valorize the history, traditions, and ideals of the nation. Shortly after midnight, with fireworks bursting throughout the country, Alton Sterling, a thirty-seven-year-old black man, was forcefully tackled to the ground and shot multiple times at point-blank range by two white police officers in Baton Rouge, Louisiana (Berlinger, Valencia, and Almasy 2016; Fausset, Pérez-Peña, and Robertson2016). He died wearing a patriotic red polo shirt. Less than forty-eight hours later, on 6 July 2016, Philando Castile, a thirty-two-year-old black man, was fatally shot multiple times in front of his fiancé and four-year-old daughter by a Hispanic police officer in Minnesota (Domonoske and Chappell 2016). Both men were
allegedly killed for circumstances involving the possession of a firearm in states where citizens have the right to carry concealed firearms (Domonoske and Chappell 2016). The videos of their deaths were publicized, drawing international attention, and triggering widespread protests.

On 7 July 2016, at the close of a peaceful protest against the killings of Sterling and Castile, Micah Xavier Johnson shot twelve police officers and two civilians, killing five of the officers in Dallas, Texas. Johnson was an Army Reserve Afghan War veteran who was reportedly incensed over the recent police shootings of black men (Karimi, Shoichet, and Ellis 2016). According to sources, the shooting was the deadliest incident for U.S. law enforcement since the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. Given that a black war veteran, an icon of patriotism, would target and kill white police officers, another patriotic figure, as an alleged act of retaliation against racism exposes the potential tensions and nuances between allegiance to race and allegiance to nation.

The preponderance of race scholarship diagnoses contemporary American society as one marked by systemic racism, which is encrypted in the mainstream framing of citizenship and patriotism (Collins 2001; Feagin 2013; Omi and Winant 1994). Du Bois (1903) proposed that blacks internalize racism in their identity development, experiencing a double consciousness: one soul striving to be American, one soul striving to be black. This study ethnographically explores the paradoxes of black patriotism – loyalties, service, and other American patriotic sentiments expressed by blacks and/or African Americans – in the present era of publicized police killings of black Americans, and how this double consciousness is negotiated in identity construction. I find that the double consciousness is negotiated on an Axis of Identities, which defines a typology of patriotic profiles.

Background

The era of protest on police killings

The deaths of Sterling and Castile, as well as several subsequent publicized police killings – including Alfred Olango in El Cajon, California; Keith Lamont in Charlotte, NC; Terence Crutcher in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and others – deeply affected American society. The year 2016 was marked by: publicized acts of police violence, commonly against black Americans; widespread domestic and international antiracism collective actions and protests (Tharoor 2016), many under the “Black Lives Matter” banner (BLM); a controversial Super Bowl 50 Halftime Show that was widely interpreted as a nod to the BLM movement and the Black Panther Movement of the 1960s (Zaru 2016); the Summer Olympic Games, in which black athletes achieved record-breaking success, some in predominantly white sports (Workneh 2016); the
infamous national anthem protest by San Francisco 49ners quarterback, Collin Kaepernick, who declared, “I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color” (Hauser 2016); and a racially polarized election season in which the republican candidate struggled with unprecedented low support from black Americans (Bump 2016), while democrats adopted a political strategy that simultaneously embraced both the BLM movement (Bradner and Scott 2016) as well as patriotic expressions traditionally associated with conservatives (Hohmann 2016). This period contextualizes the tensions between allegiance to race and allegiance to nation among black Americans.

America’s legacy of anti-black racism persists and is evident in the modern framing of American identity. The interdependency between racial and national identity construction is well documented (Collins 2001; Du Bois 1903; Feagin 2013; Omi and Winant 1994). According to Collins (2001), intersecting social hierarchies of race and ethnicity foster racialized perspectives of American national identity which assign African Americans an inferior status with inauthentic, temporary, or partial membership. Feagin (2013) refers to this as the White Racial Frame (WRF), a mechanism of cultural hegemony that vindicates and maintains the racial order. According to Du Boisian double consciousness (Du Bois 1903), blacks suffer psychological conflict when they internalize the dominant frame, which impacts their identity development.

**American patriotism**

Patriotism typically describes an attachment to America as a homeland, a commitment to American values, or a sense of pride in the journey, progress, and/or ideals of the nation. Since the early 1980s, national pride has been in decline among American men and women of all races, yet Americans are still considered highly patriotic (Sorek and White 2016). According to a 2015 Gallup Poll, eighty-one per cent of Americans reported being either “extremely proud” or “very proud” to be an American (Swift 2015). Though commonly measured by national pride, the definitions of patriotism vary by language and context (for distinctions between patriotism and nationalism, see de Figueiredo and Elkins 2003). Patriotic sentiments are typically heightened among older Americans, southerners (Swift 2015), and members of socially dominant groups (Ishio 2010). Sorek and White (2016) examined historical trends in national pride and found that patriotism has been consistently lower for blacks than whites for over 30 years.

The prevailing conception of patriotism, that I call hegemonic patriotism, is drenched in whiteness and hegemonic masculinity (Ferber 1998; Gerstle 2001; Wingfield and Feagin 2010). It casts whites as exclusively the true Americans, responsible for all of the nation’s greatness and none of its failures. These
meanings imply that blacks are abnormal, illegitimate, uncivilized, and un-American (Du Bois 1903; Gerstle 2001). For example, the Birther Movement, which catapulted Donald Trump’s political career, served to delegitimize and degrade President Barack Obama by alleging that he was not a natural-born U.S. citizen nor a real American, but rather an un-American, un-patriotic, Islamic African (Wingfield and Feagin 2010). Hegemonic patriotism expunges black contributions and signals that blacks are outsiders, parasitic companions, merely by-catch in the nets of European conquest (For illustrations, see Bonilla-Silva 2001; Collins 2001; Feagin 2013; Wingfield and Feagin 2012).

Exclusion from this symbolic citizenship is not benign. Patriotic identities can be a source of psychological and social capital, with consequences for the individual and collective: efficacy, civic engagement, grassroots political mobilization, challenges to oppressive systems, and/or the re-traumatization of witnessing perceived racially motivated police killings (Schatz, Staub, and Lavine 1999). This frame is protected by an embedded ideology of colourblindness and meritocracy in which blacks and minorities make exaggerated or false claims of racism and oppression (Wingfield and Feagin 2012). The prejudiced and meritocratic notions that are encoded in mainstream patriotism essentially oppose a black identity.

Double consciousness

Du Bois (1903) proposed that blacks continually perceive themselves through the lens of the dominant society, creating an internal psychological conflict that he called double consciousness. “Is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American?” he asked (Du Bois 1897, 22). As blacks internalize the WRF, they experience self-inquiry, multiple identities, internal conflict, and constant negotiations (Collins 2001; Du Bois 1903; Feagin 2013). The American identity – a soul that yearns for the fulfillment of full social inclusion and is attached to American history, values, and spaces – contradicts the black identity – a soul that is the victim of Americanism, systemic racism, and hegemonic patriotism (Du Bois 1903). The manner in which they negotiate this identity dilemma is manifested in their interpretations, expressions, and brands of patriotism.

Despite the pervasiveness of the dominant frame, blacks traditionally construct counter frames (see Devos and Banaji 2005; Feagin 2013), including alternative brands of patriotism that influence social action (Hoyt and Goldin 2016; Schatz, Staub, and Lavine 1999). For example, James Baldwin described a brand of patriotism that allowed affection and critique to coexist. Baldwin said, “I love America more than any other country in this world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually” (Baldwin 1984). Further, Du Bois himself described a brand of patriotism in which protest is patriotic and benefits all “true Americans”. He said:
The battle we wage is not for ourselves alone but for all true Americans. It is a fight for ideals, lest this, our common fatherland, false to its founding, become in truth, the land of the thief and the home of the slave, a byword and a hissing among the nations for its sounding pretensions and pitiful accomplishments. (Du Bois 1906)

**The current study**

The current study ethnographically explores how conflict between two seemingly irreconcilable allegiances, one to race and one to nation, are negotiated in black American identity development. I suspect that individuals may abandon one identity to embrace the other, remain in a state of contradiction, or construct an identity that allows the two souls to harmonize. To appease the double consciousness, individuals may lean away from or abandon one identity for the perceived social benefits of the opposing identity. Some individuals may remain in a state of identity contradiction where they compartmentalize their life, emphasizing, and/or deemphasizing different identities in different contexts. Identity contradiction may produce anxiety, antipathy, and/or apathy towards both nation and race discourse. Lastly, individuals and communities could also achieve identity harmonization. Through embracing counter frames, they may mitigate the internal conflict.

Research on American patriotism is lacking, and black patriotism has been particularly neglected. The current literature is moving towards understanding diverse brands of patriotism (Ishio 2010; McClay 2003; Schatz, Staub, and Lavine 1999; Shaw 2004) and illuminating the social and ideological foundation of patriotic forms and expressions (de Figueiredo and Elkins 2003; Hoyt and Goldin 2016; Huddy and Khatib 2007). But there has not yet been a mechanism proposed by which patriotic identities are constructed. This study makes three critical contributions: (1) it provides foundational ethnographic insight into timely questions of black citizenship in the critical contemporary moment that vividly captures their experiences; (2) fuses classical and contemporary race theories and extends them into the literature on patriotism; and (3) proposes a model for understanding patriotic identity construction and a typology of patriotic identities.

**Method**

For over two years, I engaged in multiple site fieldwork to inductively explore patriotism among black Americans. To capture a broader variety of perspectives, I collected data from varied community meetings, collective actions, and university events at multiple locations in the southeast. I served a hybrid role: as group member and outsider. I implicitly presented myself as an ordinary participating group member (usually a community member or
student), and secondarily, as student researcher. Participants typically assumed that I was an ordinary member of their particular group. For example, some Muslims greeted “As-salamu alaykum” and I replied, “Wa alaykumu as-salam, brother”. Some youth greeted me, “what’s good bruh”, to which, I replied, “nothin’ much, fam”.

Multiple informants assisted in accessing these spaces and groups; I recruited informants from social networks and from the field. Attempting to achieve a diverse sample, I employed purposive sampling techniques. I set a general quota to recruit at least one participant from five groups: law enforcement, university students, Black Nationalist community, activist community, and the underclass community. I continually amended the criteria to recruit underrepresented groups. The resulting sample comprised of twenty-two black Americans: fifteen were males and seven were females. Their ages ranged from eighteen to fifty-six, with a mean age of thirty-two. Their occupations varied, but ten of them either served in the military or in law enforcement (see Table 1).

I employed content analysis, participatory observational research, questionnaires, and in-depth interviews to collect data. I recorded data using field notes, survey software, and audiovisual equipment. I watched twenty lectures and debates from leaders in the black community as well as coverage of the Republican and Democratic National Conventions. I also examined various online groups including “Black Patriots & Supporters of the National Tea Party

<table>
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Notes: N = 22, 7 females and 15 males. CP: conscious patriot (n = 15); SUB: subverter (n = 3); BYS: bystander (n = 2); and SYC: sycophant (n = 2).
Movement” and “The Nation of Islam”. I engaged in participatory observational research at five Police Community Dialogue events at a major university in the southeast, two BLM rallies in the southeast, two police training sessions, two federal law enforcement graduation ceremonies, a large black nationalist rally in Detroit, Michigan, and the twentieth Anniversary of the Million Man March entitled Justice or Else, in Washington, D.C.

Once I recruited participants from the field, I obtained their consent and then administered fifteen-minute anonymous online surveys. In addition to demographic and socioeconomic information, the surveys asked twenty-four questions about patriotism, racism, and social inequalities. Participants completed these surveys on laptops and smart devices. Then, I conducted 60–120-minute semi-structured interviews. The core questions included: “What does patriotism mean?” “What does patriotism mean to you, personally?” “Describe the moment in your life when you were proudest of your country or felt deep national pride?” “Describe the moment in your life when you were proudest of your race or felt deep racial pride?” All data, including field notes and interview transcriptions, were examined using selective thematic coding techniques. Four main themes were identified: “inequality and/or struggle”, “meritocracy and/or colourblindness”, “attachment and/or pride”, and “detachment and/or animosity”.

I strengthened internal validity through triangulation, crosschecking the interview data against the field notes and other data sources. In addition, three participants were randomly selected to conduct respondent validation. They reviewed the codes, patterns, and interpretations and provided feedback on authenticity, particularly assessing the interpretive validity of the results. Generalizability was inherently limited by the design and sample size. While these data are not generalizable to the broader black population in the U.S., the sampling techniques aimed to capture a wide range of black American experiences.

**Findings and discussion**

**Overview**

To understand black American patriotism, I investigated the participants’ interpretations of patriotism, whether these meanings contradicted the meanings of blackness, and how potential contradictions were negotiated in their identity development. Policing and protesting was a key topic of conversation throughout my investigations. Interpretation of police conduct was intricately related to patriotic identities. Renee, a thirty-year-old female sailor, said, “the police shootings only highlight already known issues. It is extremely difficult for an African American to maintain patriotism in this country knowing what we deal with on a daily basis”.

Nineteen participants perceived two forms of patriotism: mainstream patriotism and their personal brand of patriotism. There were strong tensions between race and nation that manifested in opposing patriotic identities. Eighteen respondents described the black community as a “nation within a nation”, with many experiences, perspectives, and customs that contradict the broader society. Twenty respondents defined blackness as ancestry, social heritage, and lived experiences rooted in racial struggle and oppression, which directly conflicts with the post-racial and meritocratic ideologies that permeate mainstream America. These conflicts were evident in (1) their definitions of blackness that contradicted the WRF; (2) the naturalization and exile policies of the symbolic black nation that were largely predicated upon substantiations of black oppression; and (3) the use of oppositional pronouns among those who identified as patriotic. Thirteen participants denounced patriotism (see Table 1), yet, ironically, nineteen conveyed sentiments that embodied the ideals of patriotism and constructed alternative patriotic identities. An individual’s position on two intersecting philosophical spectrums that I call the “Axis of Identities” determined an individual’s brand of patriotism as one of the following: the bystander, the sycophant, the subverter, or the conscious patriot.

The findings are organized into three subsections. In the first subsection, A Nation within A Nation, I discuss the meanings of blackness and conditions of symbolic dual citizenship. Then, in the second subsection, Hegemonic Patriotism, I describe how the participants perceived the mainstream brand of patriotism. In the third subsection, Axis of Identities, I present mechanisms by which blacks mitigate the double consciousness in their identity development and the brands of patriotism they construct.

A nation within a nation: Dion, Shawn and Lionel

Defining blackness
Understanding how blacks define and experience blackness is essential for understanding double consciousness. The black community, or nation, refers to a symbolic collectivity that encompassed a variety of groups including the Black Nationalist community, Afrocentric community, black religious organizations, the black conscious community, and other imagined communities associated with blackness or African ancestry. I asked, “what does it mean to be black” and “how do you define blackness?” For the respondents, blackness was obvious, but many grappled with explicitly defining it. Many suggested that blackness could not be explained but rather one had to possess, feel, or experience it to understand. Blackness was a metaphorical phenomenon. It was deeply rooted in visible skin colour, but not exclusively. As Du Bois proposed, blackness referred to a social heritage. In defining their blackness, many individuals referenced African enslavement and personal
experiences with black oppression. Dion, a twenty-eight-year-old black male said:

For a sec, I had nothing, really, to be honest. But if I could try to explain it I would say blackness to me is mostly an experience. Based off the history of this country and the world entirely, my skin color or being black has created many experiences that create a subculture separate from those who are not black. Oppression doesn’t entirely separate the two [races] but that’s huge portion.

**Dual citizenship**

The overwhelming majority of the participants described belonging to two, often opposing nations: the American nation and the black nation. Corroborating Du Bois (1903), the participants felt accountable to two communities. Most of them aimed to assimilate into mainstream America, yet maintain a degree of authenticity among blacks. The connection between blackness and struggle was so strong that invalidating black oppression could mean exile while possessing empathy for black oppression and cohabitating in black spaces could grant non-blacks social capital that acts as a credibility passport to navigate the black “nation”.

Black respondents in the study reported lower levels of solidarity with co-racial who were perceived to be detached from black culture, black identity, and oppression in pursuit of white acceptance. While code switching was permitted, blacks that are alleged to have fully and permanently abandoned their blackness to assuage whites, inhabit white spaces, and/or enjoy upward mobility could completely lose credibility with the community indefinitely. Participants branded such abandoners as “coon”, “green”, “uncle Tom”, and “house nigga”.

While observing a mentor meeting between black males in the southeast, I met Aton, a twenty-eight-year-old black male. He explained,

> a coon describes a black person who sold themself out for another culture. Their entire identity and personification does not represent the group they were born into. Some Coons do not identify as black. They work against the body of their race.

Shawn, a thirty-five-year-old black male, explained:

> We live in a nation within a nation. Choosing the recognition of the American side in favor of any other [is what we call] Shambos or Coons. The Uncle Tom title use to work but now it does not apply. Uncle Ruckus does though, or ya boy from Django [the house slave, Stephen]. They have many names for those dudes.

These social controls served to ensure that blacks “know what time it is” and “don’t forget where you come from”, in fear that blacks will succumb to the treasures of mainstream America and aid in divesting the black community for personal gain, or even internalize anti-black racism. Aton explained, “A coon [black] cop will shoot a brother [black man] faster than a white boy.”
He described this internal conflict as the “I versus the We”. The “I” was the desire for acceptance by whites and upward social mobility. The “We” was the attachment to black identity, history, and oppression. He explained,

If you are only worried about the “I”, then be a coon, it will work for you. But if at some level, you are concerned with the “We”, it hard to be a coon because it will hurt you or bring some sort of consequence to the I.

In certain contexts, I observed non-blacks that relished honorary membership; some even had more credibility within the community than certain blacks. These whites were referred to as “light skin brothers” or “John Brown types”. Aton explained,

These are not white folks who act black or even want to be accepted by blacks. We need less acting black and more empathy from whites. White people don’t even fuck with some lower class white people, so we like come join the club dog, they don’t fuck with us either.

This naturalization policy emphasizes oppression as a fundamental condition of membership, which conflicts with a meritocratic ideology.

**Hegemonic patriotism: Donnie, Trent, and Lionel**

Despite the pervasiveness of the WRF, there were clear deviations from the mainstream patriotic meanings and expressions. This divide was more than mere differences in interpretations, but rather a profound clash of two allegiances. I asked participants, “what is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word ‘patriotism’?” The participants linked patriotism to attachment, duty, pride, and national symbols (American flag, national anthem, etc.). These findings align with results from national studies (Ishio 2010; Sorek and White 2016).

As Wingfield and Feagin (2010) posited, most blacks connected the mainstream personifications of patriotism to whiteness and masculinity. I asked, “What is patriotism? Are you patriotic?” Respondents typically conveyed distance from patriotism. Some used terms such as “ridiculous” and “asinine”, and related patriotism to political ideology, gender, race, and racism. Though five conveyed positive emotions, such as “grateful” and “love”, fifteen had negative reactions and thirteen respondents described patriotism using terms such as “conservative”, “white men”, and “white supremacy”. Those who used possessive pronouns or expressed positive or neutral views on patriotism, typically used oppositional conjunction terms such as “but” or “however” to acknowledge or validate realities that contrasted conventional perspectives. I spent two days with Lionel, a twenty-eight-year-old, black male cyber security expert and veteran of the U.S. Coast Guard. He explained, “Yes, I am patriotic. I love this country but at times it’s hard to see this country loving me back.”
Thirteen respondents did not identify as patriotic, which aligns with the national data (Ishio 2010; Sorek and White 2016). Donnie, a thirty-two-year-old, black male federal law enforcement officer, lamented, “patriotism is white men being proud of their country. I’m not patriotic because I don’t really embrace the cultural values of America. I salute the flag but I’m not proud of our history”. Shawn put it more plainly, he said, “A patriotic black man loves America and sides with the officer. A black man cannot be patriotic because police are known for routine senseless killings of black people.”

Trent, a fifty-one-year-old Pharma-marketing representative, explained, “patriotism refers to the people that think they are superior or better than other inhabitants of the planet”. Trent and his wife are members of the Nation of Islam. I first interviewed him at the twentieth Anniversary of the Million Man March. Months later, we met up in his hometown, Lafayette, LA. I interviewed and observed him and his wife over the course of three days. For Trent, there was a fundamental contradiction between mainstream patriotism and his version of patriotism. He explained,

Patriotism is a false sense of identity to something that is not real. A denigration of other cultures, ideas, and customs. A right to harm others because they are considered lesser. Patriotism means egotism, denial of all others. No I am not based on America’s version of it. I value all original peoples of this earth. I am not better than them. I want to be my brother’s keeper and live in peace.

Ironically, though thirteen participants did not identify as patriotic, nineteen people possessed a profound attachment to their homeland and conveyed patriotic sentiments. As discussed in the subsequent subsections, many blacks articulated aspirations to contribute to American society, safeguard the constitution, and illuminate the brilliance of black Americans. Many even served in occupations that are trademarks of American patriotism. For instance, six were police officers, three served in the military, two had military families, and two worked at the white house. To negotiate conflict between their allegiance to America and allegiance to the community, blacks embraced diverse identities, some of which countered mainstream narratives.

**Axis of identities**

To resolve the fundamental contradiction between mainstream American identity and black identity, blacks construct diverse patriotic identities that may conquer, contradict, or comply with their blackness. The type of patriotism that they embraced was contingent upon their location on two intersecting ideological spectrums: one measuring attachment – to American history, progress, values, etc. – and another measuring awareness of racial inequalities – and/or attachment to the black experience.
**Intersecting spectrums**

**Attach/detachment spectrum.** An individual’s level of attachment to America naturally shaped their patriotic perceptions and expressions. On one end of the spectrum were those who felt completely attached to America, which was often expressed as loyalty, pride in progress, and/or faith in America’s ability to advance. On the other end of the spectrum were those who felt completely detached, which manifested as expressions of numbness, rejection of patriotic sentiments, or a connection to another homeland. Ethnic and cultural backgrounds, family philosophies, and personal experiences typically influenced an individual’s positioning on the attached/detached spectrum.

**Inequality/meritocracy spectrum.** Social philosophies shape an individual’s patriotic perceptions and expressions. Individual philosophies ranged from a belief that America is characterized by historical and systemic inequality, to a belief that America operates on a system of equality and meritocracy. Individuals closer to the social inequalities pole prioritized critique, while individuals on the meritocracy pole prioritized assimilation. Knowledge, experiences, and/or personal philosophy generally influenced an individual’s positioning on the inequality/meritocracy spectrum. These two spectrums intersect, creating four quadrants, categorizing distinct profiles in which individuals negotiate and attempt to resolve the double consciousness. I refer to these four quadrants, or profiles, as the bystander, the sycophant, the subverter, and the conscious patriot (see Figure 1). Circumstantial shifts, such as aging, new experiences, ideological changes, and upward social mobility may cause individuals to consciously or unconsciously shift from one quadrant to another. These shifts may occur instantaneously or over the course of several decades.

**The bystander: Camille and Willie**

I observed individuals that were disconnected from America and refrained from any patriotic sentiments, yet adopted a meritocratic view of society. These individuals usually express little affection towards the United States and are personally detached from U.S. history, values, and ideology. They either reject the notion of patriotism altogether, or are attached to another nation. I refer to this profile as the bystander. These individuals, though refraining from reinforcing mainstream patriotic expressions, tend to dismiss or diminish accusations of social inequalities. The bystanders often perceive individual interpersonal experiences with systems of oppression as mere stressful life events. I met Camille, a twenty-one-year-old black female student, while travelling to attend the twentieth Anniversary of the Million Man March. She worked as a Clerk at a convenience store along the route to Capitol Hill. Camille was not aware of the event or that hundreds of
thousands of black Americans had entered the city to attend the event. She expressed a detachment from the black community, internalizing the racist framing of blacks. Camille said,

I like parties, don’t get me wrong. I just don’t enjoy being around African Americans. So it’s not a matter of me loving whites, blacks, reds or yellow. It’s me loving whoever deserves my love, respecting whoever deserves my respect, independently of his race.

Camille conveyed the hegemonic racial framing of blacks and professed the colourblind ideology. Further, she also expressed a detachment from America. “I would definitely say that I am not patriotic at all. I definitely think that it is a country where everybody can make it, not because I love this country but because of the opportunities.” Camille represents the bystander Profile: those who lack a sense of attachment to America, are detached from blackness, and yet echo a colourblind, meritocratic framing of society.

Willie, an eighteen-year-old male student, at a major university in the southeast while attending a Police Community Dialogue – events initiated by police intended to foster positive relationships with community members. Willie first discussed patriotism in saying, “patriotism means pride for the American country. I wouldn’t say I’m patriotic because I wouldn’t sacrifice my life for this country”. Willie further explained that he was “uncertain of institutional and interpersonal discrimination”. He harshly criticized the BLM movement, and stated, “it is stupid to be afraid of police and people should just follow orders”. Bystanders are typically detached from race and nation, yet may perceive that America is post-racial, meritocratic, and exceptional.
The sycophant: Patrice and Dennis
The sycophant engages in obedient flattery, prioritizing assimilation. Sycophants are deeply connected to America and adopt a meritocratic perception of America. Blacks that fall into this category, who according to Du Bois engage in “tasteless sycophancy”, often distort or suppress their own realities to align with mainstream narratives. Sycophants downplay social inequalities and recite mainstream expressions of American exceptionalism and minority deficiency. Some alleged that Raven-Symoné Pearman and Dr. Ben Carson mimic this behaviour, denouncing black oppression for mainstream appeal and personal gain. At a law enforcement community outreach event, I met Patrice, a forty-year-old, black female police officer. Throughout the several hours that I observed and conversed with her, she expressed a mainstream framing of society and echoed American exceptionalism. She said, I am “uncertain” if minorities experience interpersonal or institutional racism and discrimination, but “I am blessed to be living in America who fought for our freedoms. Our country has come a long way.” While attending a Police Community Dialogue at a major university in the southeast, I also met Dennis, a fifty-four-year-old black male law enforcement officer. Dennis expressed “love for the U.S.” and “love for America”. Dennis suggested that minorities are arrested more because they commit more crimes and disagreed that minorities are victims of institutional and interpersonal discrimination. He disagreed with the notion that “police officers needed more training on gender and race issues”. Whether conscious or unconscious, sycophants prioritize assimilation and acceptance by mainstream America. These individuals employ a mainstream racial framing of themselves and the world around them.

The subverter: Bridget and Spence
A third profile describes those who are detached from America, yet aware and connected to social inequalities, particularly injustices concerning the black community. These individuals are typically attached to an alternative homeland, such as Africa, Caribbean countries, or a metaphorical nation. This profile, which I refer to as the subverter, typically advocates for radical change in American society. They may embrace a wide range of philosophies, communities, and movements, such as Black Liberation Theology, BLM, black power, Black Nationalism, the Nation of Islam (NOI), the conscious community, and others. Minister Luis Farrakhan, the leader of the NOI, embodies the subverter profile.

For the subverter, any American patriotic identity is a paradox. As Du Bois predicted, some factions expressed “hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white” (Du Bois 1903). Some countered white supremacy by adopting a black supremacist ideology. Their activities range from passive activism such as social media commentary, to fulltime active participation in protests and social action organizations. The subverter may reject
and/or critique any concept or cultural item coopted, adopted, or created by white America. Like sycophants, they may also engage in distortion and delusions but to combat and critique mainstream America rather than assimilate. They are highly critical and reject notions of American benevolence or progress. During a Black Lives Matter rally in the southeast, I met Bridget, a twenty-seven-year-old female student and member of the Dream Defenders (Defender (n.d.)). She said:

American patriotism glorifies a world that doesn’t exist. The idea is that all Americans benefit from their rights to liberty, life, and justice for all, but this is a false ideal because everyone isn’t allotted to those rights in America. I’m not patriotic because I don’t feel there is anything to love about this country that globalizes imperialism and capitalism crippling every nation it comes across.

Through key informants, I also met Spence, a thirty-one-year-old male rap artist. Over the course of several days, I observed and conversed with him. Despite lacking any formal postsecondary education, Spence had a reputation among his social circles for possessing exceptional knowledge of black history and social inequalities. He explained,

American patriotism means believing and protecting as well as willing to kill and die for the ideologies and makings of America, therefore I am not and cannot be patriotic when America itself tells me and shows me that my belief and trust in America would be without merit and oxymoronic.

I asked, “What do you mean by ‘tells me and shows me’?” He replied:

At what point in time in Americas history has America given the black man reason to be patriotic? On the contrary, America continuously shows the black man he has no rights that the white American has to respect ... how can a black man be Patriotic when acts of patriotism could be deemed as a criminal act by his fellow Americans and contemporaries alike. White America has shown the black man past present and future that without hesitation or confirmation or validation, his life can be taken and the particulars can and will be sorted out later regardless of age, size, social status, economical status, or political party.

Spence, a self-proclaimed black revolutionary, embodies the subverter profile: completely detached from America, fully alert of social inequalities, and intimately connected to black oppression. Even among overt black revolutionaries who vehemently denounced patriotism, after thoroughly interrogating the data, I found that they possess essential aspects of patriotism: attachment to the homeland, service and social action, and faith that a better America can be forged. Instead of American patriotism, they expressed similar sentiments towards their community, family, religious group, organization (fraternity, sorority, etc.), or native land. For instance, black power was a brand of patriotism in the symbolic black nation among certain collectivities such as the Nation of Islam and the Conscious Community.
The conscious patriot: Jacob, Aton, Victor, and Maurice

Many blacks negotiate the double consciousness by constructing identities that counter hegemonic patriotism. They are equally connected to both America as a homeland, and the realities of black oppression in America. These individuals, called conscious patriots, are keenly aware of social inequalities, and actively critique what they deem to be a society characterized by historical and systemic social inequalities. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was attached to both nation as well as race, personifies the conscious patriot profile. They tend to possess a profound sense of tradition and duty, connectedness to the homeland and pride in African contributions, and faith that a more just America can be forged. Over the course of several days, I spent many hours with Jacob, a twenty-eight-year-old black male. We connected at the Justice or Else Rally in Washington D.C. Jacob, a federal law enforcement officer, described his loyalty to both his race and country. He explained, “the most patriotic moment of my life was going to Cuba with the president, making history not only for my family name, but making history for our nation”. Jacob explained,

Patriotism is when someone has an emotional connection to their homeland, for example America. To a certain extent I feel patriotic. The reason I feel somewhat patriotic is because there are days I don’t feel connected to my country because of my beliefs in reference to racial issues. In addition, the interactions with law enforcement and black males.

As an act of solidarity, Jacob autographed his name on a thirty foot “Justice or Else” banner at the twentieth Anniversary of the Million Man March. For many conscious patriots, it is a fallacy to consider it a contradiction to be both patriotic and critical of inequality. On the contrary, they believe that social awareness, social action, and social reform are the byproducts of true patriots. This American duty – to engage, critique, and reform America society – is heightened for Americans that are attached to black history, which includes an ancestry of black patriots who petitioned and protested for racial equality. Victor, a thirty-year-old Adjunct Professor, said, “Patriotism is the blood, sweat, and tears of my ancestors. I am somewhat patriotic due to my ancestors building this country”. Aton defined patriotism as a “fight for freedom and justice”. He explained:

I am patriotic but not blindly. I don’t place the policies and principals over the people. In my patriotism, I strongly honor my ancestors who believed in this country and chose to fight for it. Patriotism includes military service, but also contributions to American society.

Maurice, a thirty-two-year-old sales representative explained further:

What patriotism means to me is to have a fondness or enthusiasm about those ideals of democracy and justice that America supposedly stands for based on the words in the constitution. How it’s defined to me through the actions and words of a particularly zealous demographic [whites], is to blindly love and
give recognition to only those seemingly positive aspects of American life while simultaneously ignoring any negative implications of an increasingly disproportionate social hierarchy based in race and class. Am I an American patriot? Ideologically, yes. I believe in freedom of speech, free press, democracy, equality, social justice, etc. But because I recognize the hypocrisy behind the actions of the American government as it concerns its dealings with foreign nations and its own citizens, I’m called unpatriotic.

From this perspective, all “true” Americans must embrace conscious brands of patriotism that require active dissent because it is their heritage and duty to directly combat social inequalities the distorted mainstream framing of American society.

**Conclusion**

This study provides novel ethnographic insight into black American patriotism in the critical contemporary moment of unprecedented publicized police killings and international antiracism protests. This study is the first to leverage Du Boisian Double Consciousness and contemporary race theories to propose a model for understanding patriotic identity construction in America and submit a typology of patriotic profiles. These profiles, the bystander, the sycophant, the subverter, or the conscious patriot, are methods to satiate two contradicting strivings.

The blacks in the study had symbolic dual citizenship, in the black community and the broader American society. There were clear contradictions between these memberships. In an era of publicized police killings of blacks, for many it is absurd to embrace hegemonic patriotism, which is associated with aspects of meritocracy, conservatism, masculinity, and racism that contradicts their realities and vision of America. Hence, despite any notions of progress, the conscious patriot and subverter profiles may be more prevalent in modern society. Since the double consciousness is a condition predicated to some degree upon internalizing the racial order, naturally, it might be remedied through these counter frames. At this critical point in history, with black excellence and oppression on full display, identifications that serve to actively combat inequalities may become more prevalent.

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