



Making Patriots

Walter Berns

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Although Samuel Johnson once remarked that "patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels," over the course of the history of the United States we have seen our share of heroes: patriots who have willingly put their lives at risk for this country and, especially, its principles. And this is even more remarkable given that the United States is a country founded on the principles of equality and democracy that encourage individuality and autonomy far more readily than public spiritedness and self-sacrifice.

Walter Berns's *Making Patriots* is a pithy and provocative essay on precisely this paradox. How is patriotism inculcated in a system that, some argue, is founded on self-interest? Expertly and intelligibly guiding the reader through the history and philosophy of patriotism in a republic, from the ancient Greeks through contemporary life, Berns considers the unique nature of patriotism in the United States and its precarious state. And he argues that while both public education and the influence of religion once helped to foster a public-minded citizenry, the very idea of patriotism is currently under attack.

Berns finds the best answers to his questions in the thought and words of Abraham Lincoln, who understood perhaps better than anyone what the principles of democracy meant and what price adhering to them may exact. The graves at Arlington and Gettysburg and Omaha Beach in Normandy bear witness to the fact that self-interested individuals can become patriots, and *Making Patriots* is a compelling exploration of how this was done and how it might be again.

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