

Dear Reader,

I recently found a note I scribbled to myself November 10th 2016: “I am struggling to reconcile my identity as an American.”

While recent political history has brought this challenge to the front of my mind, this is something I had felt challenged by before. Patriotism always felt like a very particular brand of stars and stripes that did not fit me or my ideals. In recent years this question of American identity seems not just a struggle for me but for the country at large.

In the wake of the 2016 presidential election, I’d find myself walking with my nieces or students or kids I was babysitting and we’d come across a mass of people chanting, singing, or marching with signs. They would ask “what is going on?” Their question echoed what we adults, and often the marchers themselves, were asking: what *is* going on!?! The answer to either version of the question is not a simple one, but one I felt was too important to gloss over. There was a lot going on: politics, anger, fear, anticipation, reaction, the need for action, activism, civic pride, moral duty, camaraderie, hope, change. Even though it wasn’t simple, perhaps because it wasn’t, I didn’t want to ignore these hard conversations. So, together we would notice things about these protests: emotions, loudness, and togetherness. For some kids it felt confusing or scary, and I found myself saying, “sometimes people march—it is something Americans have done for a long time.” Connecting today’s activism to history it made it easier to talk about: it has always been an important part of what it means to be an American.

In these conversations I recognized in myself a swelling patriotism. It is through those who have fought for justice with their creativity, resilience, togetherness, and courage that I find my pride in America—and it is through that same activism that I feel hope for its future.

- Tessa