1945 Orwell Essay: A Description of Modern America?

I'm a huge sucker for the 4th of July. You name it: flags, Americana music, historical trivia — I revel in almost anything patriotic.

But while the love for one's country is a commendable quality, can it sometimes be taken to an extreme? Can it squelch rational thought and objective reasoning?

This question came to me while reading an essay by George Orwell entitled "[Notes on Nationalism](#)." In it, Orwell explores the difference between praiseworthy patriotism and the questionable position of nationalism. Orwell writes:

> *"Nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism. Both words are normally used in so vague a way that any definition is liable to be challenged, but one must draw a distinction between them, since two different and even opposing ideas are involved. By 'patriotism' I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally.* **Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, NOT for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality.*"*

As Orwell goes on to explain, this attitude of nationalism is present not only in terms of one's country of origin, but can also take place in other areas such as a religion, a political party, or some other social cause or ideology. The trouble

with nationalism in any of these areas is that it creates a tendency toward blind obedience:

> *"The nationalist does not go on the principle of simply ganging up with the strongest side. On the contrary, having picked his side, **he persuades himself that it IS the strongest, and is able to stick to his belief even when the facts are overwhelmingly against him**. Nationalism is power-hunger tempered by self-deception."*

Such a description should give us pause. Have Americans begun to cave to the ideology of nationalism in the political candidates we choose or the causes we advance? Has America's lack of [knowledge](#), [critical thinking](#), and [logical](#) ability caused her citizens to succumb to self-deception?

It's perfectly fine and praiseworthy to align ourselves with certain groups or ideas. But when we do, are we willing to think through those beliefs and opinions, hold them up to the light of truth, and then reject them if they do not compute?