

**The
American
Legion**



For God and country

Suggested Speech

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Flag Day

2008

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Americans love their flag. If there is any doubt about that, ask the editors of “*Time*” Magazine.

On the cover of its April 21st issue, *Time* used the famous Joe Rosenthal image of the Iwo Jima flag-raising on Mount Suribachi. In what could be mildly called a “lapse of judgment,” editors replaced the U.S. flag in the photo with a tree, in order to make a statement about global warming.

Donald Mates, a severely wounded Iwo Jima veteran, said “to stick a tree in place of a flag on the Iwo Jima picture is just sacrilegious.”

Tim Holbert, a spokesman for the American Veterans Center, said the doctored photo “trivializes the most recognizable moment of one of the bloodiest battles in U.S. history.”

Readers were outraged at *Times'* lack of respect for Old Glory.

Today, we are not honoring only the flag, but what it symbolizes. We are honoring freedom. We are honoring the freedom to worship as we please, to speak as we please and to vote as we please. We are honoring the hardworking men and women who have made this the greatest and most successful country that the planet has ever known. Flag Day is America's Day.

The 13 stripes on our flag are not just symbolic of the original colonies but they are symbolic of the founding fathers who hailed from those colonies. They are symbolic of their dreams for a great Republic, dreams that have been forged into reality by all the men and women who have defended this great nation.

George Washington once said of the original Flag, “We take the stars from Heaven, the red from our mother country, separating it by white stripes, thus showing that we have separated from her, and the white stripes shall go down to posterity representing liberty.”

The United States Flag is the embodiment of our Constitution that proclaims our absolute commitment to defending the freedoms given to us by our Creator.

President Coolidge may have been known as “Silent Cal,” but he had plenty to say about our Flag.

“We do honor the Stars and Stripes as the emblem of our country and the symbol of all that our patriotism means,” Coolidge said.

“We identify the flag with almost everything we hold dear on earth. It represents our peace and security, our civil and political liberty, our freedom of religious worship, our family, our friends, our home. We see it in the great multitude of blessings, of rights and privileges that make up our country. But when we look at our flag, and behold it emblazoned with all our rights, we must remember that it is equally a symbol of our duties. Every glory that we associate with it is the result of duty done. A yearly contemplation of our flag strengthens and purifies the national conscience.”

Legend says Betsy Ross created the U.S. Flag. What is not in dispute is that the U.S. Supreme Court has allowed misguided protestors to destroy it.

In 1989 the Supreme Court mistakenly ruled that flag desecration laws were invalid because of First Amendment free speech protections.

Yet, the First Amendment's prohibition against "abridging the freedom of speech" clearly does not include all forms of expression.

Why else would the Founding Fathers have separately delineated protections for a free press, assembly and petition of government redresses if these actions were already "protected speech."

Wouldn't these additions have been redundant?

As former Los Angeles Dodger Manager Tommy Lasorda says, "Speech is when you talk."

Supreme Court Justice John Paul Steven dissented from the Flag desecration ruling. He wrote, "sanctioning the public desecration of the flag will tarnish its value – both for those who cherish the ideals for which it waves and for those that desire to don the robes of martyrdom by burning it.

“That tarnish is not justified by the trivial burden on free expression occasioned by requiring that an available, alternative mode of expression—including uttering words critical of the flag...be employed.”

So here we are 19 years later, respecting and honoring the Flag of The United States but at the same time waiting for Congress to act. It will take a constitutional amendment to restore the right of the American people to once again protect their flag from desecration.

All 50 state legislatures have petitioned Congress for a constitutional amendment that would restore to Congress the authority to prohibit flag desecration. Poll after poll shows the overwhelming majority of the American people want to see their flag protected.

Lopsided majorities in both houses of Congress have supported a flag amendment. The House of Representatives has passed such an amendment in six consecutive votes and the Senate failing by only one vote of a needed two-thirds supermajority in the 109th Congress.

Rep. John Murtha of Pennsylvania has introduced H.J. Res 12, which would once again protect the flag. It is up to "*We the People*," to tell our Representatives to pass H.J. Res 12 and for the United States Senate to follow suit.

The American Legion takes it personally when the Flag of the United States is disrespected. As Medal of Honor recipient and retired Army Major General Patrick Brady often says, "If the flag is precious enough to drape over the coffins of our dead heroes, it is precious enough to protect."

Another great Legionnaire who knows something about protecting the flag is Charles Bennett, The American Legion's 4th District Commander in the Department of Maine.

When a misguided student at the University of Maine at Farmington needed to conduct a so-called art experiment, she came up with a truly offensive idea.

The student placed American flags and likenesses of the American Flag on the floors of a hallway to see how many students would walk on Old Glory and how many would walk around it. Charles Bennett bravely said, "ENOUGH."

Mr. Bennett attempted to pick up the flags but was threatened with arrest. As a police officer at the scene told Mr. Bennett, "If you are arrested, *they win.*"

Bennett, a Vietnam War veteran, then demonstrated on his own.

He bravely and peacefully stood in front of one of the flags – holding a sign stating “Disgraceful” – and, by his mere presence, discouraged many of the students from trampling on it.

Mr. Bennett was soon joined by Travis Hill, a young Iraq war veteran and member of The American Legion. The pair bravely stood their ground.

There were many faculty members and professors at the university that day, but it was Mr. Bennett and Mr. Hill who were the true teachers.

“I love the flag and will protect it until I die,” Mr. Bennett said afterward.

Yet, often times those who visibly love this country are mocked as “jingoistic flag wavers.” Some academics, politicians and even media personalities resent seeing Americans “rally around the flag.”

One huge exception is CNN's Lou Dobbs.

"Like many Americans, I began wearing a flag pin after September 11," Mr. Dobbs said on his broadcast. "I do so out of respect for those killed in the terrorist attacks, and in recognition of this country's war on radical Islamic terror. It turns out that some journalists and some presidential candidates are uncomfortable and even upset about flags on lapels. Their comments are both disappointing and bizarre given the very serious issues facing this nation. But maybe their superior and supercilious views offer a window into what ails us as a society."

But Mr. Dobbs was just getting warmed up. He continued, "Katie Couric of CBS News takes exception to the whole culture of wearing flags on our lapel and saying 'we' when referring to the United States.

“We are Americans, right, Katie? I’m sorry, but how can anyone possibly be offended by acknowledging that our troops who are sacrificing so much for us are ‘ours,’ and that we are their proud countrymen?”

Mr. Dobbs concluded, “I choose to wear that flag on my lapel because the nation it represents makes that choice possible.”

As Lou Dobbs realizes, a pin alone does not make one a patriot. But no American should ever feel ashamed of this beautiful symbol of freedom.

Thank you for being here. God Bless you all and God bless the Flag of the United States of America!

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