

**The
American
Legion**



For God and country

Suggested Speech

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Flag Day

2009

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“Just a piece of cloth,” some have called it. “Merely a symbol,” others have sneered. “Enough of the flag-waving,” a few have complained.

Some people just don’t get it. We honor the Flag of the United States not just because today is Flag Day. We do so because of what that flag represents- freedom. And that even includes the freedom to protest. But one should remember to do so respectfully.

In his poem, “I am the Flag,” Howard Schnauber writes:

I have fought in every battle of every war

for more than 200 years,

I was flown at Valley Forge,

Gettysburg, Shiloh and Appomatox,

I was there at San Juan Hill,
the trenches of France
in the Argonne Forrest,
Anzio, Rome and the beaches of Normandy,
Guam, Okinawa, Korea
and Khe Sanh, Saigon, Vietnam know me.

I was there...

When I am torn into strips and used as bandages
for my wounded comrades on the battlefield,

When I am flown at half-staff to honor my soldier
or when I lie in the trembling arms of a grieving
parent at the grave of their fallen son or daughter,

I am proud.

My name is 'Old Glory'!

Long may I wave

o'er the land of the free

and the home of the brave.

We should honor the flag because as long she flies America will be free. We just had a free election — and during the campaign flag lapel pins became an issue. The late journalist Tim Russert reflected on what the pin meant during a 2004 interview with The American Legion Magazine.

In the broadcast following the September 11 attacks, the Meet the Press host raised the ire of The Washington Post because he dared to wear a flag pin on the air and he mercilessly grilled a Taliban spokesman.

“Yes, I am a journalist, but first I am an American citizen,” Russert later said to the magazine.

If you think about it, we are all something. We are all journalists or teachers or police officers or construction workers or office workers or practice another occupation. But first and foremost, we should consider ourselves Americans.

Our flag not only symbolizes our freedom, it represents who we are. The only reason we get to choose to be journalists, teachers, police officers, office workers or anything else is because we live in a country that gives us these marvelous opportunities.

That is why The American Legion and the majority of Americans do not consider it right to desecrate old Glory.

Some call it “free speech” but it’s probably more accurate to call it a hate crime against America.

Fortunately Senator David Vitter and Representative Jo Ann Emerson have introduced bills that would give Congress the constitutional authority to protect Old Glory from desecration.

Retired Army Major General Patrick H. Brady earned the Medal of Honor for his heroism in Vietnam. He said, “Many Americans have raised their right hand and sworn an oath to protect and defend the Constitution from all enemies, both foreign and domestic. We believe that all Americans who put their right hand over their heart and recite the Pledge of Allegiance take that same oath. Both the oath and the pledge are taken in the presence of Old Glory to emphasize that our Flag is the symbol of our Constitution. We believe that we the people must exercise our right to rule by ensuring that the Court’s decision on flag-burning is not irrevocably fixed.”

And that decision – a 5-4 narrow majority in the 1989 Supreme Court case, *Texas v. Johnson* – invalidated flag protection laws that existed in 48 states and the District of Columbia. It is up to Congress to remind the Court that the flag belongs to “We, the People” and the people want it protected.

Gatherings such as this are important, but we should always remember that it is much easier to fight for our flag in the halls of Congress than it is in the halls of Montezuma and other places where Americans have actually bled for Old Glory.

One man who bled for the flag was Sgt. William Carney of the 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry. Immortalized in the film "Glory," Carney fought valiantly at Fort Wagner, South Carolina. When the color sergeant went down, Sgt. Carney grabbed the flag, led the way to the parapet and planted the colors. When the troops fell back, he again carried the flag through fierce fire and was wounded four times. He became the first black recipient of the Medal of Honor, and it was given for his defense of the flag.

Even though America was far from perfect, especially to a 19th century black man like Sgt. Carney, Carney and thousands of others knew that America and its flag were worth fighting for.

The flag does not represent perfection. It represents freedom, hope and opportunity. Today our troops fight in Iraq and Afghanistan, hoping to make those countries better places.

When our brave troops make the supreme sacrifice, it is only fitting that their remains be covered with the flag for which they fought when they are repatriated and given their final honors.

The flag holds a special place in the hearts of veterans. This is why Pearl Harbor American Legion Post 1941 in Port Jefferson, New York, raises tens of thousands of dollars so Boy Scouts can place more than one hundred thousand flags on veterans graves at the local cemetery on Memorial Day.

The placing of flags on the graves of veterans is a scene that repeats itself in cemeteries across the nation and even overseas, where so many heroic Americans fell in battle.

President Woodrow Wilson said, “The flag is the embodiment, not of sentiment, but of history. It represents the experiences made by men and women who live under that flag.”

And what a history it represents!

It represents the more than 44 million men and women who have served in this nation’s wars from the Revolution to the War on Terrorism. It represents liberation from tyranny, slavery, fascism, terrorism and communism.

It represents the creation of the industrial age, space exploration and computer technology. It represents a society where even the poorest among us receive the same Election Day ballot as the wealthiest. It represents the rural countryside, the concrete city and the beautiful coastal shore. It represents the middle class, a class that was created because the GI Bill allowed millions to achieve the American Dream. It represents white Americans, African Americans, Hispanic Americans and every ethnicity in which its native sons and daughters earn the proud title “American Citizen.”

Simply put, the Flag represents us. We owe it to our children – born and yet-to-be born – to continue to fly it high and proud.

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

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