1989

To the Flag: Our Banner of Liberty

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Recommended Citation

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Our Banner of Liberty
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A
Commemorative Issue
of
THE ENTREPRENEUR
marking the
Tenth Anniversary
of the
Belden Center
for
Private Enterprise Education
HARDING UNIVERSITY
Searcy, Arkansas

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TO THE FLAG
Our Banner of Liberty

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What ever happened to TRUTH, JUSTICE, and THE AMERICAN WAY? A case in point occurred recently when the United States Supreme Court brought the curtain down on the latest act of a drama dating back to a 1984 rally at the Republican National Convention in Dallas.

There, protestors chanted, "America, the red, white, and blue. . .we spit on you." The individual burning the American flag on that occasion was, in his own words, a member of the Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade and a self-styled "proletarian internationalist." Essentially, he was assigning himself the sad status of being a man without a country.

Other Americans across the country would ungratefully trash our flag--that liberty banner that most Americans have pledged to protect and defend. The sad and angry scene of a visible few desecrating their American flag--only to hide behind the skirts of the government for legal protection from their misdeeds--is a strange irony.

It is much like the situation of the young man who, as he stood before the judge to be sentenced for bumping off his parents, pleaded for mercy because "After all, your Honor, I'm an orphan, you know."

Nevertheless, the Supreme Court did rule, in a close 5 to 4 vote, that the First Amendment of the Constitution gives a person the right to burn the flag. Isn't this a situation that is legally right but morally
wrong? Our founding fathers must be rolling over in their graves. The reader will be hearing more from them and others on this, to be sure.

"What have you done for liberty?" said William Jennings Bryan nearly a century ago. "If nothing, what can freedom mean to you?" It seems that no generation of Americans has talked as much about freedom as the present one, and yet none has shown greater readiness to abandon it.

On the flag issue in general, if a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, then some folks are a walking time bomb. John Milton observed, "License they mean when they cry Liberty! For who loves that must first be wise and good."

How far we have come from a time when patriots like Nathan Hale, who, before going to his death on a British gallows in our War for Independence, spoke the undying words: "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

Don't Tread on Me

One of the first flags flown by our navy during the War for Independence really summed up what the American people are trying to say on this flag-desecration issue. The words were written across that early flag in striking fashion: "Don't Tread On Me." In today's language, it's "Don't burn my flag." You see, it is the people's flag--our single and sacred national symbol.

Shouldn't we feel quite uneasy about the narrow Supreme Court 5 to 4 margin, that found flag burning to be "symbolic speech" of the type the First Amendment was intended to protect? Shouldn't such a unifying symbol as our American flag have been given exceptional status by the Supreme Court? Couldn't our flag as the guarantor of our liberty have been made exempt from the freedom of speech provisions of the First Amendment?

Further, if burning the flag is "symbolic speech", why couldn't it also be "symbolic aid and comfort to the enemy"--an act of treason under Article III, Section 3 of the same Constitution? Inquiring minds want to know.
The United States has no established religion nor monarch. Because we are such a melting pot of race, religion, creed, and national origin, only the American flag has been the symbol which binds us together. Couldn't the Stars and Stripes, our banner of liberty, have been excluded from the First Amendment court ruling regarding freedom of expression? Doesn't the American flag have that unique status?

Are Americans becoming timid and apologetic about the Stars and Stripes? Whatever happened to the flying of the flag as a symbol of our national unity? Why doesn't it stand for the best that is in us? Does it not stand for our greatest achievements, our fondest dreams? What about all the great men and women who have given us our heritage? Aren't the truly great events of our past and present embodied in our flag?

There Ought To Be A Law

There are those, such as an official of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), who observed recently that a Constitutional amendment to protect the American flag would inevitably lead to censorship of many unpopular views—that once we establish exceptions to the First Amendment for offensive speech, there would be no way to limit it. But such has already happened.

There have been exceptions all along. The most well-known one is the case of Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes finding that one cannot shout "Fire!" in a theatre and cause panic. Certainly, freedom of speech is not open-ended. Try running a campaign sound truck with loud speakers through a residential neighborhood at 2 a.m. Try burning a mailbox. Exceptions abound already.

Are we reduced to no more of a response than sadly saluting the flag as it burns? Shall we continue to have laws and court interpretations that prohibit the burning of garbage but not the flag, our banner of liberty? The bald eagle is also a national symbol. To kill one is to risk jail or at least a fine. Where is the justice in all this?

Why can't there be legislation which would appropriately word a Federal law to make it a crime to
mutilate, deface, burn, display on the ground, or trample the American flag—and eliminate any vague, provisions of current law which forbids anyone "to cast contempt" on the flag by desecrating it? There ought to be a law.

The Christian citizen should be in the forefront of those on this planet who are trying to communicate a better understanding of the relationship between politics, economics, and morality. Even the apostle Paul, when he was not pleased with the treatment he received at the hands of the regional government leaders, appealed to Caesar in Rome itself.

Where Is That Wildfire of Protest?

Will we be content to make it a fundamental right that the Constitution will protect those who hold the flag in contempt, while it remains illegal to tear those little tags from the cushions of our new furniture? Can we not remedy the situation by enacting new laws which would comply with the court ruling; that is, focus punishment of the action of flag burning itself, without sanctioning the intent or common sense of the person burning the flag?

What are we going to do about it? Edmund Burke said it best, "The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing." Shouldn't "We The People" go on record about desecrating the American flag? As a matter of fact, we have. Before the Supreme Court's 5 to 4 ruling, 48 states and the Federal Government had such rules on the books. Only Alaska and Wyoming were the exceptions.

It was Daniel Webster who observed, "Liberty exists in proportion to wholesome restraint." So, how hard would it be to pursue the option of a Constitutional amendment? It would take the support of two-thirds of both Houses and 38 state legislatures. And it would take a lot of persistence and persuasive speeches at that. But after all, the First Amendment does guarantee the right of Americans to embrace their flag while also exercising the liberty to disagree with the Supreme Court's close ruling.

The following comments were made by Mr. Alan Grant, former President of the American Farm Bureau Federation:
When I was a little boy, very small, my father and I were watching a parade. My father was an immigrant to this country, and there was some marching and flags going by and I looked over at my dad and I said, "Daddy, why are you crying?" And he said to me, "You're too young to fully understand." But he also said, "remember that you asked the question, and think about it in later years when you're older and can think about it--remember that when you asked the question, 'Daddy, why are you crying?' your flag was going by."

It's a Grand Old Flag

We may not all remember the dates we learned in our history courses, and we will most certainly forget much of the details of our national development. However, each and every American should try to live up to the ideals that have become our American heritage: self-reliance; personal courage; love for country; faith in God; responsible freedom; limited constitutional government; fiscal integrity; and free, private enterprise.

As Woodrow Wilson penned it, "The things that the flag stands for were created by the experiences of a great people. Everything that it stands for was written by their lives. The flag is the embodiment, not of sentiment, but of history."

Yes, it did start out like any other day, but on July 4th, 1776, our Founding Fathers made it official with that one-page Declaration that said, in effect, "We're in charge here!" What does the Fourth of July mean to you: flag waving, chest pounding, pulse beating about the glory of our heritage?

And what about those men who signed the Declaration of Independence and meant literally that they would mutually pledge to each other their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor? Think of how much less is asked of us today. Shouldn't the celebration of our independence each year be a day of inspiration and renewal--a day that reminds us that a country is as great as its people?

Currently on the world scene are fine, courageous Chinese young people who have
experienced the ultimate in civil rights violations—the loss of their lives for the cause of freedom. Some have been able to flee toward freedom, leaving behind their own coveted version of a hastily created but fiercely revered "Goddess of Liberty."

And what greets our new refugees from mainland China as they arrive to shores of America, but the simultaneous home-grown desecration of America's own liberty banner? Why would we wantonly burn the very symbol that freedom-loving peoples around the world would lay down their lives to embrace?

Needed—A Civics Lesson

Consider this haunting mandate from yesteryear by John Quincy Adams: "Posterity—you will never know how much it has cost my generation to preserve your freedom. I hope you will make good use of it."

Is it possible that liberty itself has eroded our understanding of freedom? Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the Russian dissident, upon the occasion of receiving the American Friendship Award from the Freedoms Foundation, had these harsh but necessary words for Americans:

I boldly direct your attention to some aspects of freedom that are not fashionable to talk about—freedom to put commercial rubbish in mailboxes and telecasts...freedom of editors to seduce younger generations with their miscreations...freedom of adolescent to immerse themselves in idleness instead of invigorating tasks...freedom for healthy adults to avoid work and live at the expense of society...freedom for politicians to please voters today but not farsightedly providing for his safety and well-being...freedom of indifference to a distant alien's trampled freedom...freedom even to not defend one's own freedom...

Mr. Solzhenitsyn concluded, "Genuinely human freedom is inner freedom, given to us by God: freedom to decide upon our own acts as well as moral responsibility for them—that which was called in an age-old, and now quaint, word—honor."
Former Chaplain of the U.S. Senate Peter Marshall once delivered this "Prayer for the Fourth".

God of our Fathers, whose Almighty Hand has made and preserved our Nation, grant that our people may understand what it is they celebrate.

May they remember how bitterly our freedom was won, the down payment that was made for it, the installments that have been made since this Republic was born, and the price that must yet be paid for our liberty.

May freedom be seen not as the right to do as we please, but as the opportunity to please to do what is right.

May it ever be understood that our liberty is under God and can be found nowhere else. May our faith be something that is not merely stamped upon our coins, but expressed in our lives.

To the extent that America honors Thee, wilt Thou bless America and keep her as Thou hast kept her free, and make her good as Thou hast made her rich...

It Should Be A Burning Issue

What good, then, can come from the recent sad and outrageous desecration of our flag? Will we more frequently and properly salute our flag? Will we try to learn more about American civics? Will we develop a resurging patriotic spirit? Will we be sure that the flag is more properly displayed? Will we help the next generation to better appreciate the priceless privilege of being an American? Will we make it a point to routinely say the Pledge of Allegiance with feeling?

The following is titled, "THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE"--as revised and annotated by Red Skelton, the dean of American entertainers:

"...Getting back to school, I remember a teacher that I had. Now, I only went through the seventh grade. I left home when I was ten years old, because I was hungry. I'd work in the summer, and I'd go to school in the winter. But I had this one
teacher at Harrison school in Indiana—to me this was
the greatest teacher, a real sage of my time, anyhow.
He had such wisdom. We were all reciting the
Pledge of Allegiance one day. And he walked over,
this little old teacher, Mr. Laswell was his name, and
says, 'I've been listening to you boys and girls recite
the Pledge of Allegiance all semester, and it seems
as though it's becoming monotonous to you. If I may,
may I recite it and try to explain to you the meaning of
each word:

I--me, an individual, a committee of one--
Pledge--dedicate all of my worldly goods;
Allegiance--my love and my devotion;
To the flag--our standard, old glory, a symbol
of freedom. Wherever she waves there's
respect because your loyalty has given her a
dignity that shouts freedom is everybody's
job;
United--that means that we have all come
together;
States--individual communities that have
united into 48 great states, 48 individual
communities with pride and dignity and
purpose, all divided with imaginary
boundaries, yet united to a common purpose--
-and that's love for country;
And to the Republic, Republic--a state in
which sovereign powers are vested in
representatives chosen by the people to
govern, and government is the people, and it's
from the people to the leaders, not from the
leaders to the people;
For which it stands, one nation--one nation,
meaning so blessed by God, individuals
incapable of being divided;
With liberty--which is freedom, the right of
power to live one's own life without threat,
fear, or some sort of retaliation;
And justice--the principles or qualities of
dealing fairly with others;
For all—which means, ladies and gentlemen, it's as much your country as it is mine.

Red Skelton concluded: "Since I was a small boy, two states have been added to our country and two words have been added to the Pledge of Allegiance—"under God". Wouldn't it be a pity if someone said, "That is a prayer" and that it would be eliminated from school, too."

**Does That Star-Spangled Banner Yet Wave?**

Will we get in touch with our heritage through a renaissance of patriotism? Will we use the opportunity to place greater emphasis on citizenship education? Will we make the Constitution and our flag an immediate part of our lives and forestall the day when each might become ancient history to us? "Eternal vigilance," said Thomas Jefferson "is the price of liberty."

Yes, even today, there are so many unanswered questions. Even our National Anthem, penned by Francis Scott Key, ends with a question mark:

*Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave*

*O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?*

Admired by thousands of Americans each year who pass through the campus of the Freedom's Foundation at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, is a 30 foot by 50 foot American flag atop "Freedom Hill." The giant flag is a spectacular sight, majestically silhouetted against the royal sky overlooking Valley Forge National Park. It is both a fine local landmark and a great source of national pride—one of the largest continuously flying flags in the nation. At night, six thousand watts of electricity illuminate the 50 pound nylon flag atop its one hundred-foot pole.

Truly, the Star Spangled Banner is still a comforting and inspiring symbol. It is comforting to know that the flag is still there, still whole, still preserving. "Let it rise! Let it rise! 'Til it meets the sun in his coming," said Daniel Webster. "Let the earliest light of the morning gild it, and the parting day linger and play on its summit."
So, what is our freedom worth? Isn't freedom our most priceless possession? Was it really won from King George III for good? Doesn't it have to be earned over and over again every day of our lives? Don't we have to work for it all of the time? Can we put these current matters regarding the flag into historical perspective and do our homework about our America? Even as he referred to his own English roots, Edmund Burke dutifully observed, "With all of her faults, she is my country still."

Three Cheers For The Red, White, and Blue

Let's get personal; what about you? Do you know of a better flag to wave? That's the burning issue. What will you do with your liberty banner? Will you show the flag? Will you show your true colors? If so, then three cheers for both you and the red, white, and blue! Put out more flags. Let the bands play. Sing to the flag. Sing about it. Take a stand.

Theodore Roosevelt was right on target in observing that, "The man who loves other countries as much as he loves his own stands on the level with the man who loves other women as much as he loves his own wife."

Let's get back in touch with our heritage and celebrate our remarkably durable Republic. Remember, it's our First Amendment right to speak out about the good things, too. It's guaranteed in writing.

We have so much to be thankful for: a country of unbounded beauty; almost unlimited natural resources; a standard of living beyond the dream of kings; a judicial system that is the envy of the rest of the world; food so plentiful overeating is a major problem; a press nobody can dominate; a ballot box nobody can stuff; churches of our choice; 115 million jobs; freedom to go anywhere we want, with the planes, cars and highways to get us there; Social Security; Medicare; Unemployment insurance; public and private schools, plentiful scholarships; a people "free" to be anything we want, if we have the "enterprise" to do it.

Back to the burning issue—it is precisely at times of national stress and anxiety that a renewal of faith and purpose is required. America remains an
inspiration to millions; but ingratitude, misunderstanding, even hatred may have to be endured. You see, "Liberty means responsibility," said George Bernard Shaw. "That is why most men dread it."
MEET THE CENTER’S DIRECTOR

Dr. Don Diffine is the recipient of the Freedoms Foundation George Washington Honor Medal in the category of Published Works, for his article "All American Economics—Made in the U.S.A." He is the editor of the ENTREPRENEUR, a newsletter that has received five Freedoms Foundation awards in the category of Non-profit Publications.

The recipient of the $7,500 Freedoms Foundation Leavey Principle Award for Excellence in Private Enterprise Education, Dr. Diffine has received eight other Freedoms Foundation awards, in the categories of Economic Education, Public Affairs-Advertising, Public Address, and Published Works. He is also the faculty winner of a $1,000 First Place prize in a National Essay contest judged by Nobel Economist Milton Friedman.

Dr. Diffine has provided Congressional testimony on business problems, economic impact statements, and inflation-recession dilemmas. Also an economic humorist, Dr. Diffine is a frequent speaker for conventions, trade associations, chambers of commerce, and commencements.

Listed in the Heritage Foundation’s Guide to Public Policy Experts, Dr. Diffine is the author of a 200-page Facts Book for Business and Industry and compiler of the American Incentive System Calendar—A Daily Chronicle of Enterprise. He has been published frequently in the Journal of Private Enterprise.

In 1988, the First Annual Distinguished Scholar Award was presented to Dr. Diffine by the Association of Private Enterprise Education in Cleveland, Ohio. Dr. Diffine is also listed in Personalities of the South and Outstanding Educators of America. The Wal-Mart Foundation has designated him as a Free Enterprise Fellow and he has published a 50-page, 10-chapter digest about the company, titled Always A Winner.

Dr. Diffine earned the B.A. degree in Economics from California State University at Long Beach, the M.A. in Economics from St. Mary’s University, San Antonio, Texas, and the Ph.D. from the University of Mississippi. He is a former Air Force Captain, Squadron Commander, Senior Training Officer, and Administrative Officer.