



American Flag



My grandmother can be overheard telling a story about how when I was about five years old I saw a state funeral on TV and asked about the American flag draped over the coffin. My grandmother says that when she told me the reason it was there and that when my grandfather died, he would have a flag draped over his coffin, the first thing out of my mouth was, “Grandma, can I have the flag?” Though I was only five at the time, I like to think I understood the significance of the flag even then. Though I’ve grown up a little since then, I still will be so honored to receive the flag. When my other grandfather passed away a few years back, he was buried with full military honors for his service in Korea and the images and feelings of that day will be with me for the rest of my life.

How do I feel when I see someone burning our flag? Well, first, I call it our flag because if you are a citizen of the United States, that is your flag. Whether you were born here, or you lived part of your life under a different flag, if you are a citizen of this country, living the lifestyle that so many generations of Americans fought for, that is your flag. When you go to put a flag up in front of your home, your business, or on your car, this is the flag that you should be displaying. Now, I understand whole-heartedly that being proud of your heritage is important, and I myself am very proud of my heritage, but if you are displaying another country’s flag without the stars and stripes right above it, you are either living in the wrong country, just truly don’t understand the significance of your actions, or should be considered by this country’s government and citizens as a threat to our national security because of your lack of allegiance to the U.S. If anything, those who have just arrived should be displaying their patriotism even more...you just got here and some of our families have been fighting for and contributing to the American way of life since before we won our independence.

So, how do I feel when I see someone burning our flag? I feel like they are burning every flag that has ever been draped over a coffin, every flag that has ever been raised over a military cemetery, every flag that has ever been raised over a military base, ship, government building, or embassy. When I see someone burning our flag, I think about everyone who has come before us and fought and died under that flag and what a desecration of their memories it is. I think that when you are burning that flag, you are attacking the country and its people. Now, watching a bunch of protesters in another country is one thing, but when I see people who live under our flag burning it in protest, I have trouble finding the words to describe how utterly horrible it makes me feel.

Now, let’s look at the arguments of the flag-burner. Does the US Constitution give you the right to burn the flag through the First Amendment? Yes, it absolutely does. There was no way our nation’s founding fathers could have foreseen the issue as it stands today, but in the wisdom of the US Constitution, the ability to create amendments was given for this reason. There is something unforeseen then that needs to be addressed today. We need an amendment to the US Constitution that outlaws desecration of the American Flag. Now, of course, the flag-burners are going to chime in right here with questions like what is legally considered the American Flag and what is legally considered desecration? I say we leave it up to a jury of peers to make that decision. Law enforcement officers make judgement calls quite often today and they are definitely capable of determining what they feel is desecrating the flag, much like they do with unsafe driving or reckless endangerment. Arrest the flag-desecrater and send them to trial, innocent until proven guilty.

So, what do we do with those who are convicted by a jury of their peers? In some states, you can be put to death if a jury of your peers finds you guilty of murder. Well, if you desecrate the flag, you are showing your contempt and disgust with the USA, right? Well, if they think the country sucks so bad, I am sure they wouldn’t be too partial about leaving it, right? How about a one way bus ticket to Canada or Mexico for our flag-desecrating convicts? You can add the bus ticket cost to our taxes.

So, who are you to me if you are burning the flag? You are the guy spitting in a veterans face when he returns home from fighting to maintain your way of life. You may as well be a soldier fighting in an army



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attacking the USA. You may as well be a terrorist killing US citizens at home and abroad. You are as disrespectful and have the same lack of understanding and appreciation as a non-voter. Although, if you're stupid enough to be burning the symbol of your way of life, the rest of us probably are better off without you voting.

Now, let me clarify some things for those of you who might be reading this and think that this is coming from some ultra-conservative right-winger. I am not saying that we should restrict people's civil liberties in any way and we definitely should not take away their right to assemble in protest of the government or in support of their feelings about the issues. The way you live your life in your own home is your own deal. I am not saying that we need to change anything other than the desecration of the flag, solely for the reason of showing the proper respect and gratitude to the men and women who have fought and died to provide us all with the way of life that we enjoy. There are many other ways to show your protest towards the government. If you are truly that opposed to the US government and its actions, you should renounce your citizenship and leave so that you no longer have to pay taxes, thus boycotting support of the US government. If you want to make a difference on the issues, get out and vote and spend some time on the campaign. If you want to protest capitalism or the economy, get out there in the streets and burn your cash...I'm sure you'll get people's attention that way.

I think Congressman Dana Rohrabacher got it right when he said, "Oh, feel free to burn the American flag, just be sure that you wrap yourself up in it before you light it on fire." Do we have a flag up at our house? We certainly do. Do we put it out everyday? No, but every day when we feel the need to express our feelings about our nation, the flag is up. We put our flag out on September 11th and the following 30 days. We put our flag out on Veterans' Day, Memorial Day, 4th of July Weekend, Flag Day, Ronald Reagan's birthday, Washington & Lincoln's birthdays. When a tragedy occurs that affects our fellow Americans like the bombings in Africa and the bombing of the USS Cole. The day I saw people here in California being heckled for displaying the American flag by Mexican soccer fans draped from head to toe in the Mexican flag, I called home and asked my brother to put the flag out for me because I couldn't wait for the flag to go up until I got home. When I see that flag flying there, I think of the men and women who have given me the gift of the lifestyle I live and all of the people throughout history who have gone before us just because they were Americans; people like Joe Allen and the other victims of the September 11th attack. And when I take that flag down, you can bet it gets a kiss of thanks from me. You can only image, then, how it makes me feel when I see a group of people burning the flag to protest their view. I hope to live in an America where the quickest, sure-fire way to destroy your cause would be to burn the flag.

I'd like to close my argument with a passage from the Los Angeles Vietnam Veterans Alliance, a group of wonderful people who have taken the time out of their lives to help homeless Vietnam vets in the L.A. area:

"Does the First Amendment give us the right to desecrate the American flag? Or is the flag a sacred symbol of our nation, deserving protection by law? Tough call?

For those who want to light Old Glory on fire, stomp all over it, or spit on it to make some sort of 'statement,' I say let them do it. But under one condition: they MUST get permission from three sponsors.

First, you need the permission of a war veteran. Perhaps a Marine who fought at Iwo Jima? The American flag was raised over Mount Surabachi upon the bodies of thousands of dead buddies. Each night spent on Iwo Jima meant half of everyone you knew would be dead tomorrow, a coin flip away from a bloody end upon a patch of sand your mother couldn't find on a map. Or maybe ask a Vietnam vet who spent years tortured in a small, filthy cell unfit for a dog. Or a Korean War soldier who helped rescue half a nation from Communism, or a Desert Storm warrior who repulsed a bloody dictator from raping and pillaging an innocent country. That flag represented your mother and father, your sister and brother, your friends, neighbors, and everyone at home. I wonder what they would say if someone asked them permission to burn the American flag?



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Second, you need a signature from an immigrant. Their brothers and sisters may still languish in their native land, often under tyranny, poverty and misery. Or maybe they died on the way here, never to touch our shores. Some have seen friends and family get tortured and murdered by their own government for daring to do things we take for granted every day. For those who risked everything simply for the chance to become an American, what kind of feelings do they have for the flag when they Pledge Allegiance the first time? Go to a naturalization ceremony and see for yourself -- the tears of pride, the thanks, the love and respect of this nation, as they finally embrace the American flag as their own. Ask one of them if it would be OK to burn the flag or spit on it.

Third, you should get the signature of a mother. Not just any mother. You need a mother of someone who gave their life for America. It doesn't even have to be from a war. It could be a cop. Or a fireman. Maybe a Secret Service or NSA agent. Then again, it could be a common foot soldier as well. When that son or daughter is laid to rest, their family is given one gift by the American people; an American flag. Go on. I dare you. Ask that mother if you can spit on her flag. Away from family, away from the precious shores of home, in the face of overwhelming odds, and often in the face of death, the American flag inspires those who believe in the American dream, the American promise, the American vision...

Americans who don't appreciate the flag don't appreciate this nation. And those who appreciate this nation appreciate the American flag. So, if you want to desecrate the American flag, before you spit on it or before you burn it, I have a simple request. Just ask permission. Not from the Constitution. Not from some obscure law. Not from the politicians or the pundits. Instead, ask those who have defended our nation so that we may be free today. Ask those who struggled to reach our shores so that they may join us in the American dream. And ask those who clutch a flag in place of their sacrificed sons and daughters, given to this nation so that others may be free. For we cannot ask permission from those who died wishing they could, just once ... or once again ... see, touch, or kiss the flag that stands for our nation, the United States of America ... the greatest nation on earth."