

**The  
American  
Legion**



*For God and country*

## *Suggested Speech*

« PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE « P.O. BOX 1055 « INDIANAPOLIS, IN 46206-1055  
« (317) 630-1253 « Fax (317) 630-1368

# **Flag Day**

# **2014**

The American Legion  
Media & Communications  
PO Box 1055  
Indianapolis, IN 46206  
[www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org)

“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.

They do not understand that the American Flag is not representative of every grievance or gripe that they hold against the federal government. Nor, should The Flag of the United States be blamed for problems that have long plagued humankind.

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 the American way of life.

I am proud, not just of the role that American veterans have played in defending our Flag over the years, but in the long history that The American Legion has had in honoring it.

Ninety-one years ago, The American Legion chaired a National Flag Conference in Washington. Appropriately convened on Flag Day in 1923, it was – to paraphrase our current Vice President – “a BIG DEAL.”

Representatives of The American Legion and 68 other patriotic, fraternal, civic and military organizations gathered at Memorial Continental Hall for the purpose of drafting a code of Flag etiquette. They were enormously successful.

President Warren G. Harding gave the opening address. "I hope you succeed in formulating a code that will be welcomed by all Americans and that every patriotic and educational society in the Republic will commit itself to the endorsement and observance and purpose of the code that you adopt here today," he said.

Samuel Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, described how his union felt about Old Glory. “To us, the American flag means more than even its colors in themselves portray. It means the leadership of the democratic and humane struggle that has been carried on throughout all the ages.”

The consensus among the conference delegates was that most breaches of flag etiquette were unintentional mistakes made by well-meaning patriots.

But even today, we get some real boneheaded decisions.

School administrators, backed by a recent court decision, have prohibited students at a California High School from wearing images of the U.S. Flag on t-shirts during Cinco de Mayo since 2010. While the t-shirts are not actual flags and therefore do not fall under the Flag Code, the school administrators went overboard in their attempts not to offend supporters of the holiday, which marks a famous Mexican battle.

Spinning in his grave at this decision must be John J. Tigert, the U.S. Commissioner of Education, who spoke at our 1923 conference. “I do not believe that the American people would ridicule other nations as the Germans did when before this last war they called us a nation of shopkeepers and the French a nation of degenerates, and the English a nation of perfidious people,” said Tigert, a World War I veteran. “Of course, if you go that far, that kind of nationalism and – if that is what the American Flag stands for – then I am not in favor of respecting the American Flag. But the American Flag never stood for that kind of a thing, and never will.”

Much has changed in the United States since the Flag Conference of 1923. But the Flag still stands proudly.

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 Orin Hatch and Representatives Spencer Bachus and Daniel Lipinski have introduced bills that would give Congress the constitutional authority to protect Old Glory from desecration.

Retired Army Major General Patrick H. Brady, a supporter of the Flag Protection Amendment, 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 54<sup>th</sup> 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 not perfect, especially to a 19<sup>th</sup> century black man like Sgt. Carney, Carney and thousands of others knew that America and its Flag were worth fighting for.

In closing, I would like to once again quote from the National Flag Conference of 1923. Teddy Roosevelt, Junior, a founder of The American Legion, described what Old Glory meant to him.

“The Flag,” he said, “personifies that ideal of service...And when the flag fails to be honored and respected by our people, then the ideal will fail, then the country will fall.”

Ladies and gentlemen, it is up to us to keep that from happening. We will not fail our country and we will not fail our Flag.

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

###