

Flag burning



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I. Introduction
Flags are embodiments of nations. 2. A flag symbolizes all of a nation's history, identity, values, and what it stands for. II. Americans are intolerant of flag burning because it expresses disregard for those who lost their lives battling under the flag (subtopic 1), disrespect for the institutions of the nation and (subtopic 1), a symbolic attempt to deny national memories (subtopic 1).

III. Flags symbolize defence of the nation

1. Soldiers fight under the flag and for the flag

a. Political and military historians have determined that, in war time, soldiers are inspired in battle by the flag.

b. The flag is a concrete symbol of the nation.

2. Respect for the flag is respect for the nation's fallen soldiers

a. Millions have died for the flag so that millions more may live

b. Burning the flag is akin to trampling on the memories and legacies of the nation's fallen soldiers.

IV. Flag burning is expressive of utter disrespect for the nation's institutions

1. Jurists argue that respect for the flag implies respect for all of the nation's institutions.

a. The flag represents the American justice system, American democracy, as in the presidency and the two Houses, and the unity of the federation.

b. Flag burning comprises a statement of utter disrespect towards the nation's institutions..

2. The flag represents the American Constitution

a. American citizens are obliged to respect, and safeguard that which safeguards and respects them.

b. Flag burning is indicative of disregard for the constitution and that which

safeguards America and Americans.

V. The flag is an embodiment of national memories, and all that which is the nation.

1. The flag is a symbolic representation of what the nation is and hopes to be

a. The flag stands for the national past

b. The flag stands for a nation's future aspirations

2. As a symbol of the past, present and future, the flag is representative of the national identity

a. Respect for the flag constitutes respect for a national identity and set of values which were forged over the centuries

b. Since the flag is all that which the nation is, its burning is a denial of the nation itself.

VI. Conclusion

1. Flag burning does not comprise a legitimate criticism of the nation but its symbolic destruction.

2. Americans are intolerant of flag burning as the act is not one of political or social protest, but of the rejection of America herself.

Flags are not patterned cloth but embodiments of nations. Their symbolism extends beyond the pictorial representation of a nation to their being a symbol for that nation's history, identity, values and, importantly, what it stands for (Schatz and Lavine, 2007). Indeed, the symbolism of the flag is so deeply embedded in national consciousness that Bourne (qtd in Schatz and Lavine, 2007: 329) was prompted to declare that " We reverence not our

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country but the flag. We may criticize ever so severely our country, but we are disrespectful to the flag at our peril." The difference lies in that the flag is a symbolic representation of all that which the nation is; the flag represents the past, present and future and is not associated with particular policies and governments, as may be the nation at any given time. It is within the context of that which the flag stands for that intolerance towards flag burning should be understood. Americans are intolerant of flag burning because it expresses disregard for those who lost their lives battling under the flag, disrespect for the institutions of the nation and, a symbolic attempt to deny national memories.

The 1960s were the heyday of flag burning in the United States and even though many Americans sympathized with the politics which incited the said act, few were tolerant of it. As Boime (1990) notes, countless Americans opposed the Vietnam War and supported the Civil Rights but were enraged by the expression of the aforementioned through flag-burning. This is partly because the flag has long been associated with the defence of the nation, in which instance respect for the flag may be partially interpreted as respect for those who gave their lives to the country and to their fellow citizens (Boime, 1990). In support of this position, Schatz and Lavine (2007: 329) quote Durkheim as saying that " the soldier who dies for his flag dies for his country, but as a matter of fact, in his own consciousness, it is the flag that has the first place." The implication here is that the burning of the flag constitutes an act of blatant disrespect for those who fought for the nation, from the War of independence to the current War on Terror. The fact is that millions of Americans died under the flag so that millions more can live in security. To burn the flag is to trample on their memories and legacies.

Americans are further intolerant of flag burning because it is expressive of utter disrespect for the nation's institutions. As early as 1917, an American jurist argued that citizens were obliged to respect their nation's flag because it was a symbolic representation of all the nation's institutions. Within the context of the stated, the flag represents the American justice system, American democracy, as in the presidency and the two Houses, and the unity of the federation (Scott, 1917). Concurring, Rasmussen (1998) affirms that the American flag is a symbolic representation of all the nation's institutions, including its constitution, in which instance its burning comprises a statement of utter disrespect towards all these institutions, including the constitution. Intolerance towards flag burning, therefore, partially stems from respect for the nation's institutions, institutions whose function it is to safeguard the interest of the American people and promote their welfare. Added to the above, flag burning is intolerable because the flag is nothing short of the embodiment of national memories. Glassberg (1996) maintains that the flag is a symbolic representation of a nation's history; it stands for the national past, future aspirations, and a national identity and values which were forged over the centuries. While this may sound as if it is a reading of too much into that which the flag symbolizes, it is not. McPherson (2002) interprets the flag in similar terms, insisting that it is all that which is the nation. Accordingly, the burning of the flag is a denial of the nation itself. In consideration of that which the flag symbolizes, its burning becomes the symbolic destruction of the nation, not its criticism. Accordingly, it can hardly be interpreted as an act of protest against governmental policies and a legitimate expression of free speech but, a rejection of America herself. It is, thus, that the act is intolerable insofar as the greater majority is concerned.

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