

Burning the american flag in protests



Over the last two years burning the American flag during a protest has become the norm. Protestors have burned the flag to show disapproval of President-Elect Donald Trump, to bring attention to the recent police involved shootings, for race equality, to fight oppression, and to show supremacy of the People over the Government. It is our constitutional right to the freedom of speech guaranteed by the First Amendment, however the American Flag is so much more than just a piece of cloth to many Americans. “ The white stripes signify purity and innocence, the red signifies valor and hardiness, while the blue signifies vigilance, perseverance, and justice” (Flag Cases, 2002). There is a saying we use in the Army; “ The flag does not fly because the wind moves past it. Our flag flies from the last breath of each military member who has died protecting it.” “ I often think of how our flag grew into what it is today. It is so much more than a decoration. Think of the areas around the world that our flag has flown. Think of the transformation the flag has underwent throughout the decades on our own shores. It is truly humbling to think of all that was given and sacrificed so that our flag can fly freely across this nation.” (Streufert, 2005).

President-Elect Trumps Views

On November 29, 2016, President-Elect Donald Trump posted “ Nobody should be allowed to burn the American flag – if they do, there must be consequences – perhaps loss of citizenship or jail!” (Levy, 2016).

This statement has caused a lot of controversy and a lot of political debates. Some believe it is a justifiable expression of free speech, while others believe it is an anti-American act. Burning the American flag doesn't show

distastetowards the government, instead it shows resentment of the nation as a whole.

“ In many other nations, burning the flag in protest is illegal. In some nations, such as Norway, Austria, and Germany have strict penalties on this form of flag burning. In an attempt to stop protest flag burning as a whole, Norway and Austria have also placed penalties on burning the flags of other nations as well. Other nations like Egypt and Turkey have allowed flag burning when it comes to enemy nations flags” (Lengling, 2016). “ There are two types of flag burning, one in protest and the other in respect. Protest flag burning is condemned by most countries, and arguably does not fit into freedom of speech. Flag burning done out of respect however is in keeping with the best traditions of the United States Military. This sort of flag burning deserves a place alongside other traditions such as not letting a flag fall to the ground, flying flags where they never dip towards anything, and of course pledging allegiance to the flag. These traditions show that America, after 238 years, is as strong as it ever was, and that the flag still waves in glory.” (Flag Cases, 2002).

First Amendment Rights

The First Amendment states “ Congressshall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting thefree exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; orthe right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Governmentfor a redress of grievances” (Bomboy, 2016). In 1989 Texas tried to pass ananti-flag burning law due to Gregory Lee Johnson who was protesting thepresidential candidates Ronald Regan and Walter Mondale. The Flag ProtectionAct of <https://assignbuster.com/burning-the-american-flag-in-protests/>

1989 made “ it unlawful to maintain a U. S. flag on the floor or ground or to physically defile such flag...” (Bomboy, 2016). When the case went to court, the jury ruled in favor of Johnson. They argued that Johnson’s actions, though upsetting to most, was an expression of symbolic speech political in nature. The last time an anti-flag burning law went to Congress was in 2006 where it failed by just one vote. “ Trough it is legal to protest by burning the American Flag, there is flag etiquette stating that if and when a flag is sworn that it is no longer fit to serve as a symbol of our country, it should be destroyed by burning in a dignified manner” (Streufert, 2005).

“ The flag burning service begins with the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by the reading of the poem “ I Am Old Glory”. Which recounts all of the fateful moments and victories the American flag has witnessed. A moment of silence is usually next, as the crowd quietly considers the solemnity of the moment. Then the field of blue stars is carefully cut out of the flag, and placed in the fire. As the red and white stripes are added to the fire the color guard shouts ‘ Our flag rests in Peace!’ As the ceremony comes to an end the military band plays Stars and Stripes Forever. This flag burning service combines solemnity with the joy and pride of being an American. While viewers of the ceremony can’t help but feel a little sad over the retirement of a flag, they take comfort in the flag’s message, and the nation that it represents will live on” (Flag Cases, 2002).

I am strongly opposed to the legality of flag burning. America’s flag is a symbol of its greatness, democracy and freedom. Burning the flag demeans these values that are symbols of the country. The flag should be respected as such. Burning or desecrating the flag in any way should be considered an

offense to freedom and democracy and should be considered a crime. There are other ways to voice your political opinion that doesn't involve burning the symbol of the nation. I feel that it is not only disrespectful to our country, but it is also disrespectful to the people who have died fighting for what the flag stands for. The American flag is draped over the casket or accompanies the urn of deceased veterans, police officers, and firefighters. The military life is what I have always known. When I look at the American flag I see service to our nation and the nations of the world as our family's way of life.

A clear distinction should be made between this form of flag burning, and the respectful way that the United States Military uses. "Flag burning protestors insist that they have respect for the principles covered in the United States Constitution, but choose to burn the American flag to symbolize the ways that they believe that America has drifted from its original path. Opponents of this form of flag burning argue that this is counterproductive, and is really working against America itself" (Flag Cases, 2002).

The Faces I See. When I look at the American Flag I see the faces of service members who gave the ultimate sacrifice. I see the faces that didn't make it home to their families and friends. I see the faces that willingly gave their last breath for the freedom of Americans and their rights to free speech. I see SPC Justin K. Adams who passed away November 22, 2013, just one week before he was scheduled to fly home to surprise his fiancé and their three-week old baby girl that he was going to meet for the first time. SPC Adams was only 21 when he passed away. I had the pleasure of starting my military career with SPC Adams. From basic training at Fort Jackson to our first duty stations in South Korea, Adams had a huge impact on a lot of lives. His

selfless service is what drives me to be a better soldier and a better person. That is the face I see when I look at the American Flag. A soldier, a fiancé, a father, and a friend.” Our flag is the symbol of the things we as Americans hold in our hearts and minds. The power to guard and protect loved ones, homes, beliefs, and Americans in general; even if deserving or not” (Streufert, 2005). The Stars and Stripes mean that this is the United States of America. Having the privilege to serve this country in the US Army gave me the opportunity to show the love I have for this country, and the pride we have in defending it.

Can you imagine the feelings that the Marines had placing the flag upon Iwo Jima so many years ago? Or the feelings the fireman felt hosting the flag at Ground Zero? What about all of the countless times people have viewed the flag during conflicted times and it provided a sense of hope when all hope seemed lost? To burn the flag would be a disgrace to all of those who have fought for and protected our country throughout the years. Our flag is an honorable symbol that has been shot at, burned, spit upon and stomped on, and yet it rises time and time again. Let us all, as Americans, hold the respect that is due, not only to our flag but to all of those who have given their lives and time defending it.

In conclusion, burning the American flag may be a Constitutional right, but anyone that has the rights of the Constitution should respect their nation and everything the American flag stands for. Too many men and women have given their lives protecting those rights and Americans should respect that. We should come together as a nation and protest peacefully instead of violently. There are a number of different ways that you can express

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dissatisfaction with issues, one of which is peaceful protesting. A peaceful protest is the act of expressing disapproval through a statement or action without the use of violence. I stand behind President-Elect Trump and support taking action to pass a Flag Protection Act to ban any and all burnings of the American flag unless done so in a dignified manner. The American Flag means home to me, and protecting our flag means protecting my home. May God bless America and those who defend it. Waltrup, 2016

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