

The construction of the american flag history essay



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The American flag was constructed more than 200 years ago to show our nation's struggle for independence from Great Britain, the strength that increased through this independence, and the amount of liberty our country possessed. On a fateful day in May of 1776 our flag was hand-sewn by a now famous woman, Betsy Ross. With her own hands she constructed a flag that now, centuries later, represents the well-earned democracy of the United States that Americans still prosper in today. Why should one destruct a symbol of our nation? With destruction, not only is one destroying a national symbol but also the honor of veterans who fought for the "freedom" in the flag. These wars produced the deaths of millions of soldiers who will in the end be dishonored for a flag they pledged to and fought for whether this be in the Vietnam War, World War One, World War Two, or even the War in Iraq. In addition, in this current war in the Middle East one has terrorists who threaten our freedom on a daily basis overseas, as well as in our own country. The desecration of the American flag adds to the ongoing hate terrorists contain in ending the development of this sought-after country. The flag has also become evidence of the history in the United States. With this flag, one sees the symbol of our freedom that this nation was founded on that which has lasted through time. This foundation provided by the religious freedom the colonist sought and the freedom to live how they wanted. The flag represents the independence the people of the United States live everyday, and the independence from England who threatened to take this away. By the desecration of the American Flag, one is in a sense supporting the endings of our history and the feats this country has trudged through. This all therefore combines to create for a point in cessation of the burning of the United States flag.

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The American flag is not just a piece of fabric that is flown up on a metal pole, but more of a representation of the history of the United States. In burning this “ fabric”, one also burns the symbolic representation of our history that the flag has stood for. The flag, itself, represents the freedom this country won as soon as the colonists step foot on this soil. When Americans first arrived here, they were escaping the bonds of religious torment, and wanted to be able to “ worship freely and have an opportunity to choose which religion they wanted to take part in (Olmstead par. 5).” Therefore, this created a religious diversity in the establishment of the “ Quakers, Puritans, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, Protestants, Lutherans, Lutherans, and even some German religions (Olmstead par. 5).” People from all over the world began arriving in search of this sought-after freedom starting with the “ Scotch-Irish.” This is the same sense of desire for freedom that which was shown in the wars against Great Britain in the American Revolutionary War as the colonist fought for independence in the years 1775-1783. In this battle, George Washington got word of Lord Cornwallis’ position in Yorktown, and “ raced southward from New York to link up with the French fleet under Admiral Comte de Grasse in the Chesapeake Bay (Klos par. 2).” While British reinforcements never came from “ General Henry Clinton or the British fleet,” Washington arrived to “ bottle-up the British... with three weeks of shelling (Klos par. 2).” Meanwhile, the French fleet “ blocked aid from Cornwallis...and Lord Cornwallis soon surrendered on October 19th, 1781 (Klos par. 3).” This resulted in the signing of the “ Treaty of Paris” which was signed on September 3, 1783. This peace treaty in the end “ formally ended the United States Revolutionary War for Independence (earlyamerica. com).” In addition, it “ gave formal recognition to the United

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States, established United States boundaries, specified certain fishing rights, allowed creditors of each country to be paid by citizens of the other, restored the rights and property of Loyalists, opened up the Mississippi River to citizens of both nations and provided for evacuation of all British forces (earlyamerica. com).” Thus, “ giving the 13 colonies political independence (law. jrunk. org).” The flag demonstrates these “ fights” and “ desires” for freedom in the history of the American people, especially in the well-fought war for independence from an overpowering “ mother-county,” as well as the turning of colonies to states in the depiction of stars. This was provided for in the “ Act of April 4, 1818 , which made for 13 stripes and one star for each state, to be added to the flag on the 4th of July following the admission of each new state (usa-flag-site. org).” This represented a historical event in itself American finally became its own country. One can also see the history the flag displays in the development of the values of the flag itself. This is shown in the courtcase from 1989, Johnson vs. Texas. Here one has a case over a man named, Gregory Johns who poured kerosene and set an American flag on fire during the Republican National Convention in Dallas, Texas in a protest against President Ronald Reagans renominatin (Hacht and Hayes par. 1). Soon after, Johnson was arrested and “ convicted of violating a Texas law which charaged the action of defacing, damaging, or otherwise physically mistreating in a way that seriously offends more persons who observe or discover the action with a misdemeanor offense (Hacht and Hayes par. 2).” Texas provided two justification of offenses toward him during the case, “ preventing breaches of the peace triggered by the offense that desecration inflicts and preserving the integrity of the flag as a symbol of national unity (answers. com).” From there, the case was heard by Justice <https://assignbuster.com/the-construction-of-the-american-flag-history-essay/>

William J. Brennan who had to incorporate the values of the First Amendment, and whether “Johnson’s” desecration was ‘conduct’ or ‘speech’ (answers. com).” “After being first appealed and reversed by the courts, the United States Supreme Court decided to hear the case. In a vote of 5 to 4, Justice William Brennan “noted that although the amendment specifically refers to “speech,” the Supreme Court had long considered the protection to extend beyond the spoken and written word to conduct “with elements of communication (Hacht and Hayes par. 3).” With this the Supreme Court rejected the claims of the Texan authorities that had an “interest in claiming peace [without a] riot...and the argument that it had an interest in protecting the flag as “a symbol of nationhood and national unity (Hacht and Hayes par. 4).” Later, Justice John Paul Stevens states, “That tarnish is not justified by the trivial burden on free expression occasioned by requiring that an available, alternative mode of expression – including uttering words critical of the flag – be employed (freedomforum. org).” There was much opposition toward the case’s outcome, and by “July 1st, 1989, less than a month after the decision, members of Congress had introduced thirty-nine separate resolutions calling for a constitutional amendment authorizing laws forbidding desecration of the flag (Spiropoulos par. 2).” After this case, the Flag Protection Act of 1989 was put into effect and later caused Eichman to be arrested. This act was the “GOP’s first attempt to overturn Texas vs. Johnson. Soon the Flag Protection Act was passed by both house of Congress, and became a law without the current president, President George Bush, Sr.’s signature (Apel par. 1).” In this new amendment of the United States Code, it stated that whoever knowingly mutilates, defaces, physically defiles, burns, maintains on the floor or ground, or <https://assignbuster.com/the-construction-of-the-american-flag-history-essay/>

tramples upon any flag of the United States shall be fined under this title or imprisoned for not more than one year, or both...did not prohibit any conduct consisting of the disposal of a flag when it has become worn or soiled (Spiropoulos par. 1).” This act was followed by a similar court case to Johnson vs. Texas in the case, United States v. Eichman. In this case, Eichman was charged under the courts in Washington State and District of Columbia by the Flag Protection Act for burning American flags. These courts argued that his actions went against the First Amendment. Soon this case moved onto the Supreme Court. In a 5-4 decision, “ the Supreme Court held that the flag burning was a form of expression protected under the First Amendment (infoplease. com).” Justice William Brennan “ rejected the government’s argument that the law protects the flag’s integrity as a national symbol, as well as considering Congress’s finding of a “ national consensus,” against flag burning (infoplease. com).” Justice John Paul Stevens argued that “ government can put limited restrictions on expression if there is a legitimate reason for them that is unrelated to the ideas being expressed and if other methods of expression are available as alternatives (infoplease. com).” In these decisions, it sparked a stampede of controversy and opposition, which in the end highlighted the fact to this unfairness. “ Polls [taken after these hearings] indicated that an overwhelming majority of Americans-70 percent or more-opposed the rulings (Jost par. 2).” As a result of this court case, the House of Representatives voted to “ adopt proposed constitutional amendments banning flag desecration in 1990, 1995, 1997, and 2000” each in the end never receiving the necessary two-thirds approval in the Senate (infoplease. com). “ It is not a limit on freedom of speech to say that one must use another method more dealing with speech rather than <https://assignbuster.com/the-construction-of-the-american-flag-history-essay/>

the burning of one's own country's flag (Jost par. 4)." In this instance, one sees the lasting history that our flag has carried through time. Even through a court case like this, the flag still holds its threatened importance especially in the words of Justice John Paul Stevens. One sees similar representation years later in the history of the American nation in the tragic event of September 11, 2001. In this horror, " the flag became a symbol of hope and pride. Though tattered and dirty flying above the rubble of the World Trade Center, it, like our country would prevail (toritako. com)." In this event, the people found strength in this flag to symbolize the will to survive even through an act of terrorism, and killing of millions of Americans. This is similar to the feeling Francis Scott Key felt as he looked up to the flag in the middle of the bloodied sea to see even through " the bombs bursting in air [it] Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there. Thus, adding to the fact that the flag has recorded the history in our nation, whether it be in the 1700s or the 2010s. It has always been proof to the American nation that the people can survive through the history this flag shows, and bears. In this flag, one sees the effects of our nations in wars, and tragedies. With the act of burning of the flag, one ruins the history that the flag represents, and degrades it to ashes. The flag itself symbolizes the feats the United States has accomplished, the toils it has bared, and how far it has come and therefore has become an important part to displaying our history.

On June 14th 1777, the Continental Congress adopted the American flag in " seeking to promote national pride and unity...and resolved that the union between the thirteen stars, white in a blue field [represent] a new constellation (ushistory. org)." Ever since this day, American soldiers have

fought and served under this flag in their pledge to “ solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God. (oath-keepers. blogspot. com).” As they are sworn in, with their face to the United States flag, they and others like them before have pledged their life to the protection of this country’s freedom represented in the flag itself. With the desecration of the flag, one is not only destroying the symbolism of the history of the United States but also the honor of the millions of soldiers who have fought for the benefit and goodwill of this country. Denny Rehberg, member of the House Appropriations Committee and the House Liberty Caucus expresses his opposition toward flag-burning in the statement, “ This about honoring and respecting the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of Americans who served to protect liberty and freedom. These high ideals have always unified Americans, and though some may denounce our country and our troops, why they would want to physically desecrate a symbol of freedom is beyond imagination (rehberg. house. gov).” “ Soon after 1890, veterans and other related organizations began protesting the acts of destruction on the United States flag with concerns on the effect on the American people’s patriotism (Goldstein par. 2).” With these protests, many laws were made between 1897 and 1932 in all, previously, 48 states. These laws consisted of outlawing the “ attaching anything to or placing any marks on the flag; using the flag in any manner for advertising purposes; and physically or even verbally “ harming” flags in any way, including “ publicly”

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mutilating, trampling, defacing, defiling, “ defying” or casting “ contempt,” either “ by word or act,” upon the flag (Goldstein par. 3).” In addition, the Flag Desecration Amendment was proposed on June 26, 2006, which stated, “ Congress and the states shall have power to prohibit the physical desecration of the flag of the United States (usa-flag-site. org).” This amendment came into effect in response to the Supreme Courts decision over previous hearings in the banning of flag burning. The supporters of this amendment stated that the flag deserves special protection because it symbolizes freedom and unites a diverse country (usa-flag-site. org).” With this attitude, the supporters took the amendment to the House on June 28th, 1995 where it was approved with a vote of “ 312-120, with 93 Democrats joining 219 Republicans in the majority, while 12 Republicans sided with 107 Democrats in opposition (usa-flag-site. org).” On July 20th, the Senate Judiciary Committee approved it also, with a vote of 12-6. Yet, as it got to the Senate things began to downfall. The Senate needs to have a two-thirds majority vote in order to take an amendment to be ratified by the states. However, even with just causes, the vote failed by one vote in the Senate, with a vote of “ 66 to 34 falling short of the two-thirds majority required (Babington par. 2).” Many opposing this amendment, including Russell Feingold, argued “ that Congress must defend the right of all Americans to express their views about their government, however hateful or spiteful or disrespectful those views may be (Babington par. 20)” However, Senator Dianne Feinstein commented on this unfortunate outcome saying, “ The flag’s special symbolic status makes its desecration different from holding a sign denouncing the president. Burning an American flag in anger is “ conduct, not speech” because the flag is “ the symbol of our democracy, our <https://assignbuster.com/the-construction-of-the-american-flag-history-essay/>

shared values, our commitment to justice, our remembrance to those who have sacrificed to defend these principles (Babington par. 8).” A vital argument was also indicted by General Patrick Brady who states, “ In the movie “ Saving Private Ryan,” his simple, haunting, burning question was whether he was worth the sacrifices of Captain Miller and those who saved his life. Those opposed to the right of the people to protect their flag tell us that it is the freedom to burn the flag that makes us worthy of their sacrifices. If Private Ryan’s saviors heard that they died on America’s battlefields so that their flag could be burned on America’s street corners, they would turn over in their graves (library. cypress. com).” This provides insight to the thoughts in a soldier’s mind. The soldier knows his sacrifices for his country are worth anything he has to lay down, including his life. The fact someone would make a single choice to destroy those sacrifices and dishonor them in one flick of a match is simply inexcusable. Senate Majority Leader, Trent Lott, adds to this by stating, “ The American flag is a sacred, basic, fundamental symbol of our nation’s ideals, the symbol of those fundamental values for which we have asked our young men and women to fight and die. Allowing the desecration of our national symbol is not a sign of strength, it’s a sign of self-indulgence (infoplease. com).” The term “ actions speak louder than words” becomes key in the argument for the banning of burning American flags. American soldiers, this second, are out fighting for our freedom to continue living with a full range of opportunities not tainted by dictators or emperors. With the American flag pinned on their arm they are fighting in an act of patriotism that “ flag-burners” threaten to destroy. With the desecration of a flag, one is putting the deeds of soldiers on a burner, degrading their honor and their lives to ashes. Even through free <https://assignbuster.com/the-construction-of-the-american-flag-history-essay/>

speech one must protect the people who fought for this country's " free speech." In this, one is drawn to the point that " the Constitution gives us the right to peacefully protest the actions of our government. That is what we are doing. It does not give us the right to violently protest the [deeds of men who fought for the establishment of that Constitution.] That is what flag burners do (library. cypress. com)." With dishonoring the flag, one dishonors those who fight everyday to keep this nation intact.

On September 11th, 2001 this nation experienced an atrocity that left millions across the whole United States speechless. As one watched the two towers fall to the pits of the earth, one could only think of the thousands dead with the crush of debris and the family those people left behind. The next question, after the initial shock of the massacre was, who could have been so heartless? Now, in the year 2010 one has concreted this answer to the war on terrorism. These terrorists, which haunt ones mind in the image of those two towers crashing down, are the sole reason this war has lasted so long, with so many soldiers dead. The sense of emotion is evident in former President, George Bush's statement, " How do I respond when I see that in some Islamic countries there is vitriolic hatred for America? I'll tell you how I respond: I'm amazed. I'm amazed that there is such misunderstanding of what our country is about, that people would hate us. I am, I am — like most Americans, I just can't believe it. Because I know how good we are, and we've go to do a better job of making our case. We've got to do a better job of explaining to the people in the Middle East, for example, that we don't fight a war against Islam or Muslims. We don't hold any religion accountable. We're fighting evil. And these murderers have hijacked a great

religion in order to justify their evil deeds. And we cannot let it stand (Klein par. 4).” This one statement shows the effect September 11th had on our nation, making us empty but with a sole purpose of destroying whoever tried destroying our freedom in our nation. These terrorists are the ones who crave the American people’s position, and life. Former President, George Bush, really puts a clear message out with his statement in an address to Congress, “ Why do they hate us? They hate what they see right here in this chamber - a democratically elected government. They hate our freedoms: our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other (library. cypress. com).” This jealousy is what drives them to kill our men overseas, bring in suicide bombers to our nations, and threaten our lives. One example of this involves the recent thankfully unsuccessful bombing of a Detroit bound plane. Nigerian, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab “ attempted to murder and use a weapon of mass destruction in to kill nearly 300 people (timesonline. co. uk).” The twenty-three year old tried to “ destroy the plane by injecting chemicals into a package of pentrite explosives concealed in his clothes (timesonline. co. uk).” It was later confirmed that Al Qaeda did train this individual in Yemen, “ a country grappling with crushing poverty and deadly insurgencies,” where he was instructed to attack the Detroit-bound plane in America (Gordon par. 6). In a time of war, terrorists are posing threats to ruin freedom, like in this previous event. Now years after September 11th and the increase of proposed terrorist attacks on America’s borders, America would again begin to question the faith in it’s nation to protect them, being what exactly the terrorists want. This is what leads to the decline in patriotism and therefore the burning of flags. Terrorist groups have even gone so far as <https://assignbuster.com/the-construction-of-the-american-flag-history-essay/>

brainwashing little kids. For instance, “ in Middle East and Central Asia children are being taught little but the need to carry out holy war against the West. Here [bin Laden] is preaching to a ready-made group. By age 8, 9, 10, they are already shouting ‘ jihad, death to America (library. cqpress. com).” This hatred burns deep, and only increases the need for patriotism, like in the words of Osama Bin-Laden broadcasted on the Al-Jazeera television network, “[Americans] those killers who have abused the blood, honor and sanctuaries of Muslims (library. cqpress. com).” However, many burn the American flag instead to protest the war leading to the succumbing to these threats that constantly fight against us. By burning the flag one is supporting the ideals that the Taliban and Al Qaeda represent. The flag itself represents the American people’s freedom. As a student, one stands each morning with one’s hand over one’s heart to honor this freedom. This same respect carries on as an adult at, for example, a football game where the National Anthem is sung. This respect runs deep in the sovereign of this nation. In a time of war, when flags are being burned all across the United States one is left to think where has this country’s patriotism gone? By literally, burning the symbolism of this country’s freedom, one is strengthening the cause of the terrorist who watch this country like a hawk looking for any faltering. In burning the flag, one is doing just what the terrorists want one to do. They want to see one loose faith in their nation. They want to see one dishonor their people, and become rebels to their own government. With the burning of the flag, it is no longer just a piece of fabric engulfed in flames, but the symbolism of our nation and the freedoms, patriotism, and beliefs the American people represent. If one gives into the wishes of the terrorists, showing them that one no longer values one’s freedom or supports one’s country it adds to their

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cause. This in the end strengthens their hope to one day take over our nation, take our freedom, and take our will to fight back.

In the burning of United States flag, one does not just burn colorful fabric but the respect of the nation. A nation that one is lucky to live in, and that other third world countries strive to be like. These acts of destruction disrespect the soldiers that have died to create this nation, and to make this nation free. Every single flag represents the “ fabric” they pledge to in order to go protect our nation. With the burning of this flag one is not only disrespecting the deeds they have done to concrete this nation, but the names of the soldiers that have died during these wars, currently and in our nation’s history. In addition the flag represents the history of the United States and the events that have happened in order to get to the prosperous striving nation one has today. In this flag, one sees the independence acquired by the American Revolution, independence from Britain, history of past wars, and even the establishment of laws that have made this nation, free. With the burning of the flag, in this instance one erases the proof of pride in this nation and the historic events that create this pride. The flag represents the history, directly. Therefore, one is burning this “ evidence” of history and disrespecting the deeds of previous patriots to this country. Finally, with the threat of terrorism in the everyday life of every American one must keep this attitude of patriotism in the United States. Terrorists out there today are jealous of this nation’s freedom and how Americans are able to live a life so freely. They devout every minute despising the American people because of their jealousy. The American flag represents, as stated above, this freedom. With the burning of it, one is supporting the ideals of the terrorist

themselves. It adds sparks to their hopes in the down falling support Americans have in their country. With this resentment, the terrorist will become strong in knowing they are closer to taking over our nation and making it just as controlled as theirs. Therefore creating several problems that would add to the ending of this nation. Why would one want to ruin hundreds of years spent on developing a nation that could prosper, unite, thrive in freedom, and belong to the people? Why would one want to ruin a nation governed “ of the people, by the people, for the people,” as said by Abraham Lincoln. With the burning of the flag, one is doing this. One is disrespecting this nation directly, and the values it is made of. With protest one is formally declaring disapproval or objection issued by a concerned person, group, or organization (thefreedictionary. com).” However, by burning the flag one is not just making a disapproval or objection to an issue, but an opposition to the whole country. This is the flag in which millions and zillions of students pledge under each day. This is the flag in which people have stood under in times of trouble to unite as a nation. This is the flag that is hung at a graveside over a veteran or fallen war soldier’s grave. It represents the freedoms, the triumphs, the horrible atrocities, and the people of the United States of American. Flag burning degrades all of this, and more. With the threat of war in the 21st century, one should not be patronizing the United States but supporting it in patriotism. This patriotism is the kind of feeling that this nation has lived on every since the idea of independence came forth. This is what this country needs to overcome the lows it is in, and patronizing of this country is not the solution. The American flag is the union Americans are built under, a union that should not and will not be destroyed in ashes.

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