

**"HOW WOULD OUR FOUNDING FATHERS RESPECT THE
AMERICAN FLAG TODAY?"**

Entrant Information:

Grace Wiedman
1119 Granada Lane, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055
[Cell] (717) 710-6285 [Home] (717) 795-4909
gwiedman821@gmail.com

Teacher's Verification of Grade Level:

11th Grade

Signature: Todd R. [Signature]

School Information:

Mechanicsburg Area Senior High School
500 S Broad St, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055

Sponsoring Post:

American Legion Post 109
224 W. Main Street, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055

Parent Information:

Erik Wiedman
1119 Granada Lane, Mechanicsburg, PA 17055
[Cell] (717) 418-9488 [Home] (717) 795-4909
ewiedman@yahoo.com

Entrant Signature: Grace Wiedman

"How Would Our Founding Fathers Respect the American Flag Today?"

*"Show the flag and let it wave
As a symbol of the brave
Let it float upon the breeze
As a sign for each who sees
That beneath it, where it rides,
Loyalty tod-day abides"*

-Edgar Albert Guest, "Show the Flag"

(Let Freedom 182)

On, June 14th, 1777, the Continental Congress passed the First Flag Act, establishing the American flag as the official flag, "representing a new Constellation" (*The Flag*). For the Founding Fathers, along with the rest of America, the Flag represented the valiant fight for freedom from the British, a fresh start, and the birth of a new country. Since then, the American flag has been included in numerous paintings and photos that mark monumental moments in history: the crossing of the Delaware River, the Flag raising at Iwo Jima, the moon landing, and more recently, the 9-11 cleanup effort. However, as time has passed, people take the Flag and the freedom it represents increasingly for granted. Today, the Flag is forgotten, abused, or even desecrated as a form of protest. The Flag should be treated with the same respect and esteem as the Founding Fathers in order to appreciate the gift of freedom and the soldiers who have/are fighting for it.

To begin, patriotism during the Revolutionary era was more highly valued than it is today. During that time, "unpatriotic acts", which would include desecration of the Flag, warranted any punishment from a fine to life in prison with no bail or banishment (Allen). Beyond crime and punishment, the Flag was valued because of the great price it came at for that generation. In a letter to his mother, soldier Peter Brown recounts the Battle of Bunker Hill: "The danger we were in made us think there was treachery, and that we were brought there to be all slain . . . We began to be almost beat out, being tired by our labour and having no sleep the night before, but little victuals, no drink but rum . . . [but] if we should be called into action again I hope to have courage and strength to act my part valiantly in defense of our liberties and our country." ("Peter Brown"). The persistence of soldiers such as these is because to them, freedom was not a guarantee. The only way to live a life independent from British tyranny was to lay their life on the line. Therefore, the declaration of a national Flag brought them one step closer to complete independence.

Unfortunately, such admiration of the Flag did not last. Nearly 200 years later, Flag desecration was a means of protest to Vietnam War military recruitment. Attitudes of draft-dodgers were a polar contrast to preceding soldiers (some of which forged ages in order to serve). Instead, the era was filled with walkouts, protests, and other acts of rebellion. The valor

of previous generations was, frankly, replaced by cowardice and complacency of many dodgers. Of course, some people rejected the War for moral reasons. That being said, flag desecration is not an effective means protest, as it is a figurative "slap in the face" to former and current military personnel. The 1960s were notorious for such rebellion, and similar kinds of protests have continued into the 21st century.

Today, patriotism is a muddled subject. Events such as 9-11 have brought people together and aroused a sense of patriotism in a way that only nation-wide tragedy can. On the other hand, disputes over policy and politicians has caused a great divide, and protests similar to those of the 1960s are present again. Flag desecration, as well as kneeling for the national anthem are increasingly common forms of protest. One woman reacted to another flag stomping incident saying: "Maybe to the people stomping on the Flag, it was just a rectangular piece of material. Not to me, though . . . the American flag represented the freedoms we are given here in America. Those freedoms do not come without a price. There are thousands of men and women that are fighting for these freedoms. Thousands of children sit at home without a mother or father, and thousands of spouses sit at home without their husband or wife. You can disagree with the government, or the way America is run, but you can't disrespect those who fight for us." (Ochsenknecht). While many of these acts bring attention to genuine issues, their controversial nature does little more than further isolate and anger their opposers, as well as show grave disrespect for the defenders of this country.

If the Founding Fathers returned today, they would be appalled by the treatment of the American Flag, as well as the widely-lacking patriotism. America is blessed with the gift of freedom, but for those who have never had to fight for it, then it is easy to take it for granted. On September 22, 1776, Nathan Hale, an American spy, was about to be hanged by the British when they asked for any last words. He said, "I regret I have but one life to give for my country." (*Let Freedom* 34). It is for brave, unselfish people such as these that the Flag honors- both then and now- who are willing to give anything for freedom. The Founding Fathers would treat the Flag with utmost respect, honoring those who have fought and died for the country. They would stand and salute proudly as the anthem plays, knowing the nation they fought for still stands over 200 years later.

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