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OUR VIEW

AP Photo/Craig Ruttle

A flag worth celebrating

Today is Flag Day, a celebration of the Stars and Stripes of our country.

As an editorial board made up of amateur vexillologists (people who study the history, symbolism and usage of flags), we consider Flag Day a high holiday. It is not, to our dismay, yet a federal holiday — and a state holiday recognized only in New York and Pennsylvania.

The annual celebration commemorates June 14, 1777, when a resolution was submitted in the Second Continental Congress that called for an official United States flag. That resolution called for the flag to be "thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation."

And so it was born: The American Flag, one of the most recognizable symbols on planet Earth.

Yet it wasn't until much later, in the latter half of the next century, that American leaders led a charge to recognize the importance of the flag. Decades of grassroots efforts finally congealed and the first official Flag Day celebration was celebrated on June 14, 1877 — marking the American flag's centennial.

One cannot underestimate the symbolic power of the red, white and blue. Though the Supreme Court has ruled that burning and defiling the flag is protected speech, nothing enrages red-blooded Americans more than someone mistreating and treading upon it. It's no wonder then that protesters or enemies of the United States know doing so is a great way to get the goat of many Americans. The flag is a powerful symbol that elicits powerful reactions.

Yet as powerful and symbolic as the American flag is, Oregon's flag is dreadfully poor.

Any banner that includes the name of the place it represents is poor form, a lesson one learns in Vexillology 101. It's ugly, too, with its blue and yellow and its myriad symbols too small to be properly understood. It's only saving grace is the beaver found on the back (it's the only flag in the U.S. with two distinct sides).

It would be wonderful to make Oregon's flag more inspiring and aesthetically pleasing — a symbol that inspires allegiance and pride. The wonderfully evocative and well-designed Cascadia flag does that, and it helps engender a sense of community where a community does not necessarily exist.

Still, Flag Day is not about state flags. It's about Old Glory, which has flown now for 240 years. It is about a wonderful work of national art that has inspired millions — both those supporting and criticizing the government and its people. Its legacy and symbolism are unmatched.

Therefore it's a day to consider how we display and treat the flag. A few notes from the U.S. Flag Code, the official (though non-binding) rule book:

• The flag should not be displayed on a float in a parade except from a staff and should not be draped over the hood, top, sides, or back of a vehicle or of a railroad train or a boat.

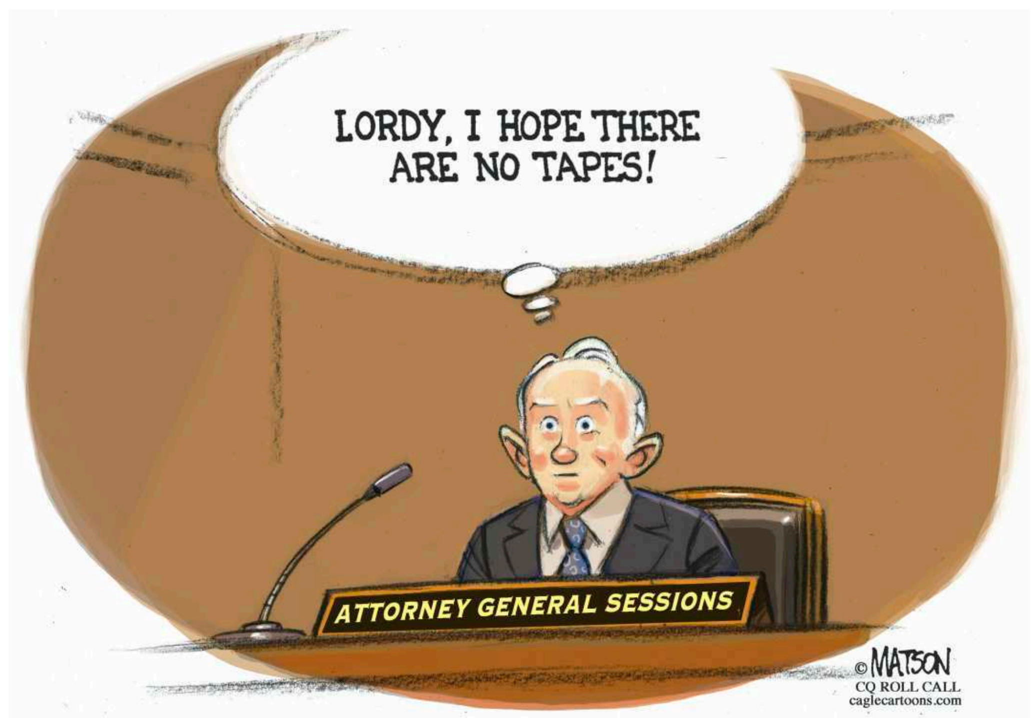
• The flag should never be used as clothing apparel, bedding, or drapery. It should never be festooned, drawn back, nor up in folds, but always allowed to fall free.

• The flag should never be used for advertising purposes in any manner whatsoever or embroidered on such articles as cushions or handkerchiefs and the like, printed or otherwise impressed on paper napkins or boxes or anything that is designed for temporary use and discard.

• The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning.

If you notice the display of a U.S. flag that doesn't fit these criteria, especially by a group or organization that is likely unaware of the standards, let them know. It is not a criminal offense, but can unintentionally turn patriotism into profanity.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of publisher Kathryn Brown, managing editor Daniel Wattenburger, and opinion page editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.



OTHER VIEWS

Is radicalism possible today?

DAVID BROOKS
Comment

Are you feeling radical? Do you think that the status quo is fundamentally broken and we have to start thinking about radical change? If so, I'd like to go back a century so that we might learn how radicalism is done.

The years around 1917 were a great period of radical ferment. Folks at The New Republic magazine were championing progressivism, which would transform how the economy is regulated and how democracy works. At The Masses, left-wing activists were fomenting a global socialist revolution. Outside the White House radical suffragists were protesting for the right to vote and creating modern feminism.

People in those days had one thing we have in abundance: an urge to rebel against the current reality — in their case against the brutalities of industrialization, the rigidities of Victorianism, the stale formulas of academic thinking.

But they also had a whole series of mechanisms they thought they could use to implement change. If you were searching for a new consciousness, there was a neighborhood to go to: Greenwich Village. If you were searching for a dissident lifestyle, there was one — Bohemianism, with its artistic rejection of commercial life.

People had faith in small magazines as the best lever to change the culture and the world. People had faith in the state, in central planning as an effective tool to reorganize the economy and liberate the oppressed. Radicals had faith in the working class, to ally with the intellectuals and form a common movement against concentrated wealth.

There were many people then who had a genius for creating ideals, and for betting their whole lives on an effort to live out these ideals. I've just been reading Jeremy McCarter's inspiring and entertaining new book "Young Radicals," which is a group portrait of five of those radicals: Walter Lippmann, Randolph Bourne, Max Eastman, Alice Paul and John Reed.

All of them had a youthful and exuberant faith that transformational change was imminently possible. Reed was the romantic adventurer — the one who left Harvard and ventured to be at the center of wherever the action might be — union strikes, the Russian Revolution. Paul was the dogged one — the diminutive activist who gave up sleep, gave up leisure, braved rancid prisons to serve the suffragist movement.

But the two true geniuses were Lippmann and Bourne, who offer lessons on different styles of radicalism. With his magisterial, organized mind, Lippmann threw his lot in with social science, with rule by experts. He believed in centralizing and nationalizing, and letting the best minds weigh the evidence and run the country. He lived his creed, going from socialist journalism to the halls of Woodrow Wilson's administration.

Bourne was more visionary and vulnerable. He'd grown up in a stiflingly dull WASP town. It was only when he met the cosmopolitan stew of different ethnicities in New York that he got the chance to "breathe a larger air."

At a time of surging immigration, and fierce debate over it, Bourne celebrated that "America is coming to be, not a nationality but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors."

Bourne believed in decentralized change — personal, spiritual, a revolution in consciousness. The "Beloved Community" he imagined was a bottom-up, Whitmanesque "spiritual welding," a graceful coming together of unlike ethnicities.

> Most of the 20th century, radicals were wrong to put their faith in a revolutionary vanguard.

The crucial decision point came as the United States approached entry into World War I. Lippmann supported the war, believing that it would demand more federal planning and therefore would accelerate social change. Bourne was appalled by such instrumentalist thinking, by the acceptance of war's savagery. As McCarter puts it, "As Bourne has been arguing, no choice that supports a war will realize any ideal worth the name."

The radicals split between pragmatists willing to work within the system and visionaries who raised larger possibilities from outside.

Spreading their ideals, they pushed America forward. Living out their ideals, most were disillusioned. Reed lost faith in the Soviet Union. Lippmann lost faith in Wilson after Versailles. Bourne died marginalized and bitter during the flu epidemic of 1918.

Bourne was the least important radical a century ago, but with his fervent embrace of a decentralized, globalist, cosmopolitan world, he is the most relevant today. He is the best rebuttal to both Trumpian populism and the multicultural separatist movements on the left, who believe in separate graduation ceremonies by race, or that the normal exchange of ideas among people represents cultural appropriation.

Most of the 20th-century radicals were wrong to put their faith in a revolutionary vanguard, a small group who could see farther and know better. Bourne was right to understand that the best change is dialogical, the gradual, grinding conversation, pitting interest against interest, one group's imperfections against another's, but bound by common nationhood and humanity.

Are we really going to hand revolutionary power to the state, the intellectuals, the social scientists, the working class or any other class? No. This is not 1917. But can we recommit ourselves to the low but steady process of politics, bartering and exchanging, which is incremental about means but radical about ends? That's a safer bet.

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David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003. He has been a senior editor at The Weekly Standard, a contributing editor at Newsweek and the Atlantic Monthly, and is currently a commentator on PBS.

OTHER VIEWS

Both sides hesitant to revisit sage grouse protections

The Baker City Herald

We have mixed feelings about Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's decision to require federal agencies to review two-year-old plans to protect sage grouse across the West, including in Baker County and other parts of Eastern Oregon.

On the one hand, we don't object to taking a fresh look at plans that affect a variety of activities on public land, including livestock grazing, a vital part of Baker County's economy. It's hardly implausible to believe that the conservation plans can be improved.

But on the other hand, we wonder whether that possibility is worth upsetting the status quo. The current situation might not be ideal from the perspective of some ranchers. But we don't believe any would dispute that the 2015 conservation plans, which were approved in lieu of the sage grouse being listed as a threatened or endangered species, were a preferable option.

Our ambivalence reflects the reactions of two members of Oregon's congressional delegation.

Rep. Greg Walden, a Republican, applauded Zinke's decision, saying the Interior Secretary "wants to involve and listen to local input."

But Democrat Sen. Ron Wyden contends Zinke is "ignoring the input of local stakeholders who spent years working to avoid a damaging Endangered Species Act listing."

Our chief concern is that the review could lead to changes in conservation plans that conservation groups and others who think sage grouse need federal protection can use to bolster their legal case.

Which is to say that this decision could backfire, and make an ESA listing more likely rather than less. And in Baker County, where the sage grouse population has declined by about 73 percent over the past decade, that's a frightening prospect indeed.