

Amerikai Zászló

THE AMERICAN FLAG

(By Henry Fonda)

Old Glory, the Stars and Stripes, the Star Spangled Banner. By any name it's a beautiful sight—makes me feel proud.

But a flag is nothing in itself—some cloth, some dye, some thread, nothing to be thrilled about in itself—an abstract design of colors and shapes, a symbol, like a cross or a star or a coat of arms are symbols, only as good or as bad as what it stands for, nothing in itself.

And the flag, being only a symbol, will change as the country it symbolizes changes, as our country has changed. And so it becomes a tangible record of these changes, of our beginnings, our growth, our history, a visual memory. And, as with most things remembered, it's the positive things, the great moments, the beloved people, the stirred emotions, that remain in the heart and in the mind.

Before there was a country called the United States of America there were separate states and many states of mind and a mother country, and so there were many flags. But soon those states and states of mind came together in a common cause. "Give me liberty or give me death."

And the British began to refer to our flags as "The Rebellious Stripes." While our friend from France, the Marquis de Lafayette, called them our "dear noble stars and stripes."

Our greatest revolutionary struggle began under General George Washington—a disorderly and dangerous struggle by inadequately armed civilians without even an official flag to fly until 1777, when Congress declared, "Resolved that the flag of the United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white, that the Union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field representing a new constellation." And that flag flew at Yorktown as General Cornwallis surrendered. Our nation had begun.

And that's what we remember, that glorious beginning—not the confusion, the uncertainty, the defeats, but that glorious beginning. "The rockets red glare, the bombs bursting in air, gave proof through the night that our flag was still there." There

at Fort McHenry on the night of September 13, 1814, and still flying on the morning of September 14—fifteen stars and fifteen stripes, that had survived, as did our country survive, this threat to our newly gained independence.

Fifteen stars and fifteen stripes, yes, and soon twenty stars and twenty stripes. Where would it end? The flag was already too big and too busy and the end was not even in sight.

So in 1818, wisdom triumphed over stately pride. Thirteen stripes for the original thirteen, and a new star for each new state.

And then a harder problem, a terrible problem. Not one of too many stripes, but of too many flags, one too many. Four bloody years to decide whether one flag or two would fly over this American territory. In the end, after a long and painful struggle, one flag flew over our country once more.

Now came a time to gladden the heart of every flag maker—the blue field of that flag became a constellation—38 stars by 1876, 45 by the turn of the century, 48 by 1912. And there it held fast for nearly 50 years.

But not history, for now our country passed through a time like nothing before, a World War, a ten-year fling, a searing depression, still another World War, the nuclear age, assassinations, civil upheaval, Vietnam—and the incredible sight of an American raising a banner of 50 stars and 13 stripes on the surface of the moon. ✕

The world has become more complex, not a black and white world any more, or even a red, white and blue one. The two hundred years that lie ahead may prove even more challenging than the two hundred that went before, making it even more important for all of us to stand by our flag and by our country. Not somebody else, each one of us. Answer America.

✕) 49 : Hawaii
50 : Alaska

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