

Flag Day 2016

Today we celebrate one of the first symbols of this great nation, the American Flag. Commissioned by the Continental Congress on June 14, 1777, the official flag of the United States of America would be 13 stripes of alternating red and white with a blue field of 13 white stars.

As our nation grew and evolved over the years, so has our flag. It is likely the only nation's flag that has changed so frequently over the past 239 years. In that same time, the British Flag hasn't changed once. Our flag has changed 27 times. The Flags of France and Brazil have changed only 4 times since 1777. Japan's flag has changed once in 239 years. For most countries change is a radical and traumatic event. For the United States of America change is embraced in our flag, our culture and our politics.

What hasn't changed is the liberty that our flag stands for. Liberty is our constant.

The American Flag is a visible reminder of the liberty for which the signers of the Declaration of Independence pledged their lives and fortunes in order to guarantee freedom and liberty for each and every American.

Our flag is a powerful symbol of who we are as people and as a society. And its changes remind us that we are always changing and that our ideals of liberty are ever expanding.

Anyone can become an American. I can't be a Frenchman or an Italian or Brit no matter how hard I try. Other nations restrict membership and hold back change.

My grandparents arrived in America as poor peasants who didn't speak English and they became Americans. I'm betting everyone here today has parents, grandparents or great-grandparents who came from somewhere else and became Americans.

Who we are as Americans is constantly changing to reflect latest group of immigrants to arrive. We are the most diverse nation ever. It is in our diversity that we gain our strength and prosperity. Those of here today trace our ancestry back to a great number of nations and religions --- many of those nations and cultures have been at odds with

each other for centuries. They are still at odds. Just look at the wars in the Middle East. Think about the tensions between the Irish and British. Remember WWII was just 76 years ago. Yet, here in America these same cultures and religions live and prosper together.

America is a land of diverse backgrounds and opinions. Yet, we stand as one people under the Flag of the United States. Think of the great accomplishment of having 50,000 people of different races, creeds, religions and political opinions standing together at the start of a football game to salute one flag and one nation. To declare themselves one people. We Americans do this every day. The American Flag inspires unity in America like no other symbol. This unity is free and voluntary. Respect for our flag is given honestly without force.

President Ronald Reagan said, “There is no greater, more beautiful and instantly recognizable symbol of our nation and its ideals, traditions and values than the flag of the United States.”

Happy Flag Day.