

## Hang 'Em High

Whenever conservative politicians need a simple non-issue about which to beat their breasts, they seem to settle on abuse of the flag. The picture they paint is usually of ungrateful American citizens, or obviously-illegal immigrants, urinating on the government that gives them succor and freedom. This is aimed at eliciting barroom shouts of “There outta be a law,” and a subsequent march on Washington to hold down the infidels. A proposal for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution prohibiting such behavior is perpetually floating around.

This is just wrong. Burning the flag to make a point is so obviously an expression of a political opinion that making it illegal is burning the very ideals on which the country is founded.

Flag burning is not a new issue, or a particularly interesting one. Attempts to legislate respect generate contempt. Ask Lenin or Mao if you don't believe me. What concerns me is that lately I've been seeing evidence of flag disrespect, which might lay credence to the idea that legal action is needed.

I haven't done a study, but I've seen too many faded, ill-kept, generally raggedy-assed U.S. flags. I've seen them flying from restaurants, grocery stores, and other prominent places. I can't tell if there's a trend here, or if I just noticed it recently.

But does it really matter? What sort of idiotic message is the Taco Bell trying to send me by flying 6 badly faded U.S. flags after sundown? It's bad enough the flags are up at night, but to have them be so badly neglected I can see it in the dark is amazingly disrespectful.

The likely reason is simple carelessness. I doubt that any of the institutions that have irked me with their poor flag presentation intend to make any statement about their personal or corporate feelings toward the U.S. or its government. But, they have made one.

Quietly neglecting a national icon detracts from its value as a symbol. If faded flags flying from local businesses are the norm, the impact of seeing one abused to make a point is considerably lessened. The way to engender respect for the flag is to show some.

Of course, this doesn't change my viewpoint on what pundits laughably call the flag-burning issue. You can't legislate respect. If supporters of the flag-burning Amendment want to spend their energy constructively, they should write to the boneheads flying the wretched flags I've been seeing. More importantly, if you oppose flag abuse legislation, encourage your local merchants to treat their flags with respect. The last thing this world needs is ideological legislation generated by carelessness.