

It's a grand old flag

WELL, it's official – the great minds in the Bush administration have solved our world's biggest problems. Now, with war and injustice out of the way, with the energy crisis over, with nuclear proliferation ended, with deforestation licked, with homelessness and lack of access to medical care a thing of the past, we can finally get down to dealing with the problem of flag desecration. Hence, I have to give kudos to all the great thinkers, Democrat and Republican alike, who voted 286-130 to shred the Bill of Rights and support amending the constitution to outlaw "flag desecration," whatever that means. The bill now goes to the Senate, and then it must be approved by two thirds of the state legislatures across the country, giving us a few years of mass media discussions about the splendid nature of our flag.

Actually, the periodic emergence of this legislative drivel normally means that in one way or another, we're fucked. Historically, when the economy tanks, politicians start talking flag desecration. When progressives sneak a real issue into the media mix, it's time to save the flag. When any politician's poll numbers go south, yep, it's time to wave and defend old glory from the invisible hordes who're at this moment lining up to burn their little dollar store Chinese replica American flags.

IT'S A GRAND OLD FLAG / 2

Any political weather forecaster would have seen this smoky little bit of theater on the horizon. Bush's policies have crashed the American dollar, the economy is tanking, we're systematically raping the environment, we're back in the plutonium business and we're losing a war to an enemy that was powerless before our attack. Then last month a high ranking British official leaked the Downing Street Memo – the smoking gun evidence of the Bush administration's successful conspiracy to cook intelligence data and lie to the American congress and people in order to make it look like Iraq was developing nuclear weapons even though the Bush administration knew they weren't. This concocted weapons scare proved to be enough to send our nation into a devastating quagmire of a war while the real reason we went to war is still a debatable perplexing secret. This smoking gun memo also seems to be enough not only to impeach Bush as if we needed yet another reason, but to send him to jail – possibly for 1,760 consecutive sentences (this is the approximate number of American soldiers killed in Iraq). So yes – it's time for a nice big red, white and blue distraction, just in time for the Fourth of July.

The current drive to "protect" the flag, at the expense of everything it stands for, stems from a non-event in 1984 when a member of the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP), a wacko little cult of charisma, was arrested at the Republican National Convention in Texas for burning a flag. When the adolescent pyroexpressionist was jailed for violating Texas' flag desecration blue law, a judge determined that the law was unconstitutional. There are a host of other regulations that outlaw hand-held fires at public events, but the cops chose not to charge the kid with violating any of them. Hence, today's need to amend the United States Constitution so that we can proudly join nations like China, Burma and Saudi Arabia in jailing anyone who dares wave the nation's banner improperly. Get it?

The amendment will work like this. Boy Scouts, the group that constitutes the vast majority of American flag burners, can still ritualistically burn tattered and worn star spangled banners. And presumably, yahoos will still be allowed to tie the little banners to the aerials of their pickup trucks and shred them at 65 miles per hour. And drunken parade goers can still throw their little old glories by the curbside after the jollies of flag waving have worn off. It's just when a flag is damaged as part of a political statement, that it becomes illegal. Once this shameful legislative door is opened, we're in for a long dark slide down a nasty political slope.

Of course this bill really isn't designed to be enacted into law. It's just noise – a political vehicle for so called "patriots" to flaunt their plumage and differentiate themselves from ... well ... constitutionalists. Here's where it gets real funky. Our would-be masters aren't really intellectual giants. Hence, they never quite got around to defining what they mean by "American Flag." Yippie leader Abbie Hoffman was arrested in 1968 and charged with

IT'S A GRAND OLD FLAG / 3

flag desecration for wearing a button-up shirt styled to look like an American flag. Last month the Chairperson of the Joint Chief of Staff, General Richard Myers, was photographed by a military photographer wearing an almost identical get-up. This once was flag desecration. Today it's "patriotism." If this law passes, is the General jail-bound?

Last week I was spelunking about inside my local K-Mart when I ran across what they called a "Patriotic Bundt Cake." It was a rather gross sort of dessert with red and white stripes, a blue field, and little sugar stars. Given this nation's obesity epidemic, I didn't see anything patriotic about feeding my fellow Americans this little bundt bomb of saturated hydrogenated fats, preservatives (this cake is designed for long shelf life, not healthful eating) and a bizarre array of coloring agents. Under the new law, such a display of patriotic fervor could get you jailed, as your incisors rip into those sweet blue stars.

So here's the recap, brought to you by a bipartisan congressional effort. Lie to the nation and lead us into an insane senseless war, violating every shred of decency along the way, turning us into a reviled pariah of a rouge state, and you're a patriot. Eat a bundt cake and go to jail.