



Why I Wave My Country's Flag

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One recent Friday, I stood with a group of other flag-waving citizens, enjoying the waves and horn-blowing of people driving past. Then a man rode by on his bike and hollered something about how we would do better to demonstrate for peace.

I have tried many times to put into words my reasons for coming to Bayshore Boulevard to wave the flag. It was then that I found voice.

We ARE demonstrating for peace. So are all of these uniformed Americans who recognize and respond to the grave dangers in the world. Waving the flag is just our way of supporting our way of life, our ideals and our history.

I imagine the bicycle rider would proudly display the peace symbol. And don't we all wave our school colors? How many cars pass every day with a flag or some other symbol of the owner's favorite sports team?

So why, I wondered, do some folks find the American flag an unacceptable symbol of peace?

Even before our country had its flag, brave men and women rallied under banners as they fought and died to free us from a monarchy that never would have permitted us to enjoy the freedom that has made America so great.

The writers of the U.S. Constitution have given the world hope that a free people controlling their own government could be greater than any monarchy or dictatorship. The Founders gave us a system to which all of the world's population would aspire.

Our population - people of every race, color, religion and national origin - confirms that our system of government is the dream of freedom - loving people.

Since our flag first waved, it has traveled to all parts of the world and even to the moon. We have had to fight many bloody battles under our flag to preserve our remarkable way of life and the lives and freedom of many allies.

We have had to conquer some countries. I wonder if the America-haters notice that we have always given the conquered countries back to their citizens, who got back a freer way of life than they had ever known.

Naturally, our rich and powerful economy has raised envy. Those who control the lives, wealth and freedom of their citizens naturally resist any change that reduces their power.

Even in this country, those who don't find the riches that they desire, for one reason or another, envy those who use our capitalist, free enterprise system to create and succeed. Those who won't or can't succeed often turn to socialism.

I am perhaps a little more aware than most of the marvelous opportunities in this great country, having been born a poor boy from a broken home. The good fortunes that have given me a fine life, through hard work and determination, have fanned the fires of my optimism.

I lived through World War II as a child, the Korean conflict as a soldier and the Vietnam War as a parent. Through the Cold War, two of my sons served in the military.

In spite of many threats, never in my 71 years have I had to face a real danger in my homeland. I have enjoyed a lifetime of peace, protected by millions of Americans who marched under the Star Spangled Banner.

I hope that poor soul on his bicycle will come to know that peace is here. The calm in which he rides in safety and confidence is peace. The military personnel who work just three miles away at MacDill Air Force Base ensure this peace.

It must be comforting to them, as they pass this way, to know that the people for whom they risk their lives do support and honor them.

I shall continue to believe that peace is a product of strength and awareness.

So I shall make my token effort to thank those who ensure the peace by waving my flag with pride.

Paul Diehl is a member of the Bayshore Patriots, a nonpartisan and nonpolitical support group for U.S. troops.