

June 1944

Shpenny Elks

FLAG DAY TALK

Flag Day was originated by the Government in 1877 to mark the hundredth anniversary of the adoption of the Stars and Stripes by the Continental Congress on June 14, 1777. For One hundred and sixty seven years our flag has flown over this broad land. This year Flag Day has an added significance as our soldiers and sailors and marines are carrying our national banner into our battle for freedom in the scattered and far places of the world.

More than ever our flag has become a symbol for tolerance and freedom the world over, the planetary emblem of democracy; just as the swastika and rising sun have become a symbol throughout the world for greed and cruelty and ruthless aggression such as the weary world has never seen.

President Wilson phrased the meaning of our flag in his stirring and prophetic words uttered at the Flag Day celebration in Washington on June 14, 1914. Remember, this was before the outbreak of World War I, when most people still cherished the dream that peace might continue to prevail on this earth. President Wilson spoke as follows:

"This flag for the future is meant to stand for the just use of undisputed national power. No nation is ever going to doubt our power to assert its rights, and we should lay it to our heart that no nation shall ever henceforth doubt our purpose to put it to the highest uses to which a great emblem of justice and government can be put.

"It is henceforth to stand for self-possession, for dignity, for the assertion of the right of one nation to serve the other nations of the world--our emblem that will not condescend to be used for purposes of aggression and self-aggrandizement; that is too great to be debased by selfishness; that has vindicated its right to be honored by all nations of the world and feared by none who do righteousness."

Today, thirty years later, during which the world has been beset with two great wars, these words are even more pregnant with meaning. Again there are those who have doubted our power and will to preserve the things our flag stands for. Again our boys must carry our flag into battle to demonstrate our solemn purpose to live as free men in a free world.

Franklin Lane, former Secretary of the Interior once delivered a beautiful fantasy on the flag. In it the flag was supposed to have been speaking to a group of Americans, even as you and I. This is what the flag said:

"I am not the flag; not at all. I am but its shadow.

"I am whatever you make me, nothing more.

"I am your belief in yourself, you dream of what a people may become.

"I live a changing life, a life of moods and passions, of heartbreaks and tired muscles.

"Sometimes I am strong with pride, when men do an honest work, fitting the rails together truly.

"Sometimes I droop, for then purpose has gone from me, and cynically I play the coward.

"Sometimes I am loud, garish and full of that ego that blasts judgment.

"But always I am all that you hope to be, and have the courage to try for.

"I am song and fear, struggle and panic, and ennobling hope.

"I am the day's work of the weakest man, and the largest dream of the most daring.

"I am the Constitution and the courts, statutes and the statute makers, soldier and dreadnaught, drayman and street sweep, cook, counselor, and clerk.

"I am the battle of yesterday, and the mistake of tomorrow.

"I am the mystery of the men who do without knowing why.

"I am the clutch of an idea, and the reasoned purpose of resolution.

"I am no more than what you believe me to be and I am all that you believe I can be.

"I am what you make me, nothing more.

"I swing before your eyes as a bright gleam of color, a symbol of yourself, the pictured suggestion of that big thing which makes this Nation. My stars and my stripes are your dream and your labors. They are bright with cheer, firm with faith, because you have made them so out of your hearts. For you are the makers of the flag and it is well that you glory in the making."

John D. Voelker
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