

## American Flag fad has become retailers' dream *Flags only intended to promote patriotism*

From the ragged banner with stars and stripes that distinguished separation from British oppression, to the modern 50-star standard born by representatives of our nation, Old Glory has represented a nation characterized by pride, bravery and resolve.

In the wake of the recent terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., the flag has become an all-encompassing emblem of the feelings among citizens of this nation.

It shows the strength of a people to face each day, and to support whatever measures may be necessary to prevent these atrocities from happening again. It signifies the honor and

mourning for those brave souls willing to give their lives for the smallest possibility that others might be saved. Most importantly, it represents the unity and resiliency of a nation that, in the face of crisis and adversity, takes a deep collective breath and responds in a way previously unimaginable and consummate.

But why now? Certainly, these times call for a show of accordance and harmony between people of all nationalities, religions and mindsets. The most imperative reaction after the attacks was to show the world and, most importantly, those who would seek to threaten us, that the foundation of our country cannot be destroyed. Of course, the easiest and most accessible way to show unity is with the ubiquitous and globally renowned red, white and blue.

But is our country only great in times of misfortune? Absolutely not.

Since the attacks, the economy has taken a huge hit. Consumer sales in every major category have dwindled. The glaring exception has been sales of the American flag. Major retailers scrambled to keep their shelves stocked.

Production companies are still swamped. Across the nation, flag sales after the week of the attack were 1500 percent higher than the same week last year.

Did America have a sub-par performance as a country in the year 2000? Again, no. Unemployment continued to slow as the U.S. stock markets set growth record after record.

American business significantly contributed and supported the major financial networks of the world. And who could forget about the first Olympics of the millennium, where U.S. athletes garnered the most medals?

The national anthem is played before sport-

ing contests. Often, fans and athletes do not show the patience to stand still and respectfully throughout the entire song. Televised games are notorious for showing fidgety athletes, whose eyes wander the field, eager to find something of interest. Is three minutes too much to ask to pay respect to those who have willingly put their lives on the line for the defense of the United States?

There is nothing wrong with the newfound desire to fly the flag from every possible location. There is no problem with putting a flag in a

Since Sept. 11, Americans have responded with an amazing display of patriotism. Flags have been placed in front of countless homes since the terrorist attacks. Although the increased demand for American flags has risen dramatically within a short period of time, that does not mean that flags have become merely a fad of popular culture. It is indisputable that the demand for American flags has reached a level far surpassing that before Sept. 11.

Local stores have sold out of U.S. flags so

John Bodnar, chairman of the Indiana University history department and an expert on patriotism and its symbols, told CNN that this flexibility is what is allowing the American flags to become so widespread in patriotic displays.

"For some people, the flag expresses a desire for a safe and secure home," he said. "For others, it is a plea for peace and still others can view a flag display as a command to go out and destroy evil in the world."

Does this sudden jump in demand for American flags

qualify as a fad? Of course not.

The recent stir of patriotism is a product of the war against terrorism. The propensity of flags is simply America's way of preparing for war.

Anyone who has seen Braveheart can remember the blue war paint Mel Gibson wore in portraying Scottish hero William Wallace in battle. American flags are similar to the war paint worn by the Scottish clans — they are our way of preparing for war.

Referring to our increased display of American flags as a fad does no justice to the ideas inherent behind the raising of those flags. American flags are not simply rectangular pieces of cloth colored with red, white and blue. The physical nature of the flags is not the reason why Americans are displaying them. As Bodnar said, the reason Americans are displaying such patriotism is because of what the flag symbolizes for each American.

In the weeks following Sept. 11, the flag has come to stand for even more than the freedom it had previously signified. It now represents the courage and the selflessness of the firefighters and rescue personnel who gave their lives helping others in a time of confusion and tragedy. It represents the determination of those who have lost loved ones suddenly and violently. More importantly, it represents the unity of Americans in the face of tragedy and honors those who died.

The very term "fad" denotes a certain meaninglessness and insignificance. Considering just a few of the many things the

American flag represents, the recent display of American flags does not seem at all insignificant. We simply are not talking about a brand of clothing or a new accessory. The display of the American flag is about the assortment of emotions that Americans have felt since Sept. 11. Those underlying emotions and quiet, unyielding anger are simply far beyond a fad.

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RICHARD BRAY

## Flags for fashion



## Flags for freedom

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window, a car or any other place that displays the stars and stripes in an acceptable manner. But allowing the fervor, pride and patriotism to dwindle will do more harm than merely being apathetic. If those who wish to harm us see us growing to care less and less about our country, it gives them the idea that we are susceptible to attack. Let Americans not give that impression.

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quickly that newspapers across the country printed copies of American flags to help alleviate the overwhelming demand. Online suppliers of American flags, such as Flags Unlimited and USFlags.com, have posted warnings to customers that orders have been backed up four to six weeks due to the sudden demand.

A large part of the American flag's popularity now is the flag can mean whatever the bearer wants it to. People of opposite ideologies can wave the flag with an equal amount of pride.

not agree with them." However, GLBTA members are not even approaching people in the MSC — interested persons must approach them. In contrast, YCTAM is actively approaching people in order to get rid of their quota of 5,000 white ribbons, which are supposed to symbolize that it is okay not to accept homosexual values that are being pushed on the A&M campus. Those participating in Gay Awareness Week are not trying to force their foes to become their best friends. They are simply asking for

respect for their rights and equal treatment. YCTAM members have just as much of a right to voice their beliefs as GLBTA members. But by refusing to admit that gays deserve at least this, the members of YCTAM are showing a bigotry that should have died during the race riots of the 1960s.

Considering their behavior, one might find it paradoxical that YCTAM chairman David Rushing said of family values week, "Our message is not a message of hate or

intolerance, but rather one of conviction. Any group that assumes it can educate us and make us more accepting and open to their values is very self-righteous. The homosexual community needs to stop being so closed minded ..."

If the matter was not so serious, this quote would be laughable. Surely he is not serious. Those who feel it necessary to preface their statements with "I'm not intolerant, but ..." are generally the most intolerant of all. If it is self-righteous and closed-minded to expect gays and other minority groups to be treated like human beings, then may I be the most self-righteous and closed-minded of all.

The people involved in "traditional family values week" need to take a step back and listen to the intolerance that is coming out of their own mouths before they start accusing other groups of being intolerant. YCTAM members should review their own tactics of spreading their beliefs before being too critical of the beliefs of others. And most of all, everyone espousing animosity toward the gay community, and other minority communities, should remember that everyone is a human first, and their rights and beliefs should be respected accordingly — no matter how different they are from one's own.

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## More tolerance is needed for gays

Gay Awareness week, sponsored by Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Aggies (GLBTA), seems to be a divisive issue on the Texas A&M campus. As most people already know, Gay Awareness week began Monday and will continue through Sunday afternoon.

The main goal of the program is to educate others and promote tolerance of the gay community. These goals badly need to be reached in the A&M community, a place where anti-homosexual epithets seem to be a part of daily life. GLBTA should be applauded for their uphill battle to ensure equal treatment for everyone, regardless of sexual orientation.

However, there is at least one group on campus who seems determined to deny non-heterosexual Aggies even minimal courtesy: the Young Conservatives of Texas A&M (YCTAM). In response to Gay Awareness Week, YCTAM is simultaneously sponsoring Traditional Family Values Week. They will also be at the MSC all week, and will be sponsoring a "traditional wedding" at 1 p.m. Thursday, to show what marriage was "intended to be." YCTAM members said that this effort originated "out of a desire to prevent pro-homosexual values from being forced on people that do

not agree with them." However, GLBTA members are not even approaching people in the MSC — interested persons must approach them. In contrast, YCTAM is actively approaching people in order to get rid of their quota of 5,000 white ribbons, which are supposed to symbolize that it is okay not to accept homosexual values that are being pushed on the A&M campus. Those participating in Gay Awareness Week are not trying to force their foes to become their best friends. They are simply asking for

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JESSICA CRUTCHER

### CARTOON OF THE DAY



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