



FLAG Etiquette

What is the Flag Code?

Americans have a deep sense of reverence for their flag. It is a central part of the nation's heritage. In 1923, the United States government adopted a set of rules and regulations governing the display and care of the flag.

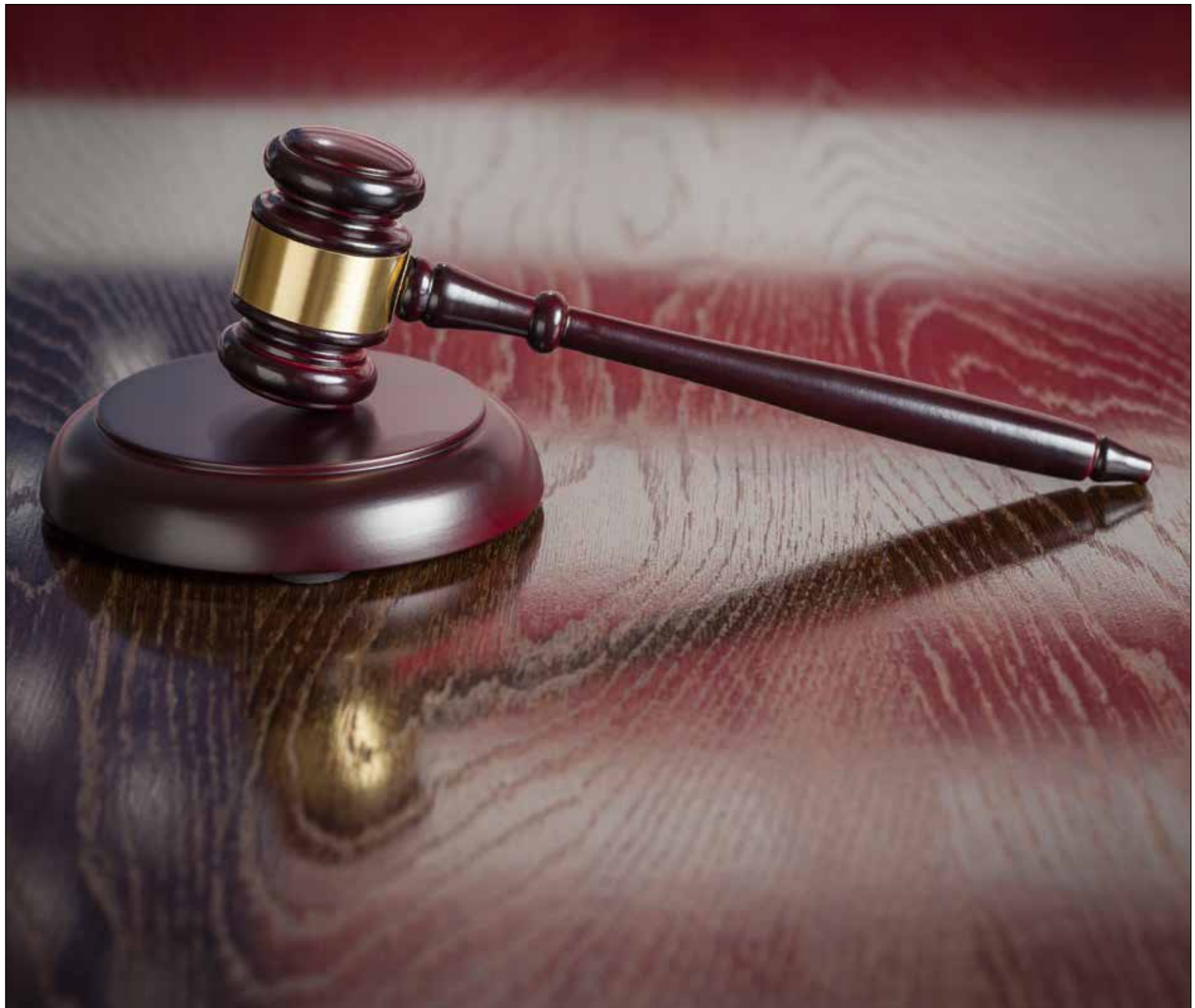
These regulations are known as the National Flag Code. Although the flag code is by definition federal law, there is no enforcement provision because of the Supreme Court's rulings on flag desecration. That said, the guidelines and advisory rules are binding on federal government employees who handle the flag. States also have individual laws regarding the handling of the flag, although these laws may not conflict with the court's ruling.

Here are some key highlights of the U.S. Flag Code, as outlined by the Congressional Research Service, an arm of the U.S. Congress:

The code provides guidelines for the display and respect of the flag. It covers much of the minutiae of the protocol for using the flag, including saluting, hoisting and lowering the flag, parading the flag, the pledge of allegiance, the national anthem and when the flag should be displayed.

Other areas covered include protocols for the use of the flag during funerals and the display of the flag indoors.

The code spells out the names of government locations authorized to fly the flag 24 hours day. These include the Marine Corps War Memorial in Arlington, Va., and Fort McHenry in Maryland.



Respect For the Flag

Although the nation's high court has ruled that desecration of the flag is protected speech, Americans still deeply revere and honor the flag — and they expect you to, as well.

The U.S. Congressional Research Service, a unit of the U.S. Congress, offers the following guidelines for the use and display of the flag:

- The flag should be hoisted briskly and lowered ceremoniously. Think of it this way: up quickly and down slowly with great fanfare.
- Display the flag when the weather is inclement (rain, snow, hail) only if the flag is an all-weather type.
- The flag should be displayed each day, including holidays such as New Year's Day, Christmas Day and Thanksgiving, as well as on state holidays.
- The flag should never be displayed with union down. However, there is one exception: as a signal of dire distress in instances of extreme danger to life or property.
- The flag should never touch anything beneath it, such as the ground, floor, water or merchandise. The flag should never be carried flat or horizontally, but always aloft and free. Remember, the idea is to fly the flag.
- The flag should never be used as wearing apparel, bedding or drapery. It should never be festooned, drawn back or up. It should never be in folds and should always be allowed to fly free.
- The flag should be displayed daily on or near the main administration building of every public institution. The flag should be displayed in or near

every polling place on election days.

- The use of the flag for advertising purposes is generally discouraged. Some jurisdictions, such as the District of Columbia, have restrictions on the use of the flag for commercial purposes. Commercial speech does carry restrictions. The flag should never be used for advertising purposes in any manner whatsoever. It should not be embroidered on such articles as cushions or

handkerchiefs and the like, printed or otherwise impressed on paper napkins or boxes or anything that is designed for temporary use and discard. Advertising signs should not be fastened to a staff or halyard from which the flag is flown.

- No part of the flag should ever be used as a costume or athletic uniform. However, a flag patch may be affixed to the uniform of military personnel, firemen, policemen and members of patri-

otic organizations. The flag represents a living country and is itself considered a living thing. Therefore, the lapel flag pin should be worn on the left lapel near the heart.

- The flag code permits burning of an unserviceable flag. But — this is important — for individual citizens, it should be done discreetly so the act is not perceived as a protest, desecration or disrespect.



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Flying the Flag

The flag occupies a central part of many events, including military funerals, Boy Scouts pack meetings, school board meetings, legislative sessions and meetings of veterans groups.

Many businesses, schools, churches and assorted houses of worship fly the American flag.

The U.S. Flag Code includes the following recommendations for flying the flag:

- The flag should not be draped over the hood, top, sides or back of a vehicle or of a railroad train or boat. When the flag is displayed on a motorcar, the staff shall be fixed firmly to the chassis or clamped to the right fender.

- No other flag or pennant should be placed above, or if on the same level, to the right of the flag of the United States of America, except during church services conducted by naval chaplains at sea.

- When displayed with another flag, the flag of the United States of America should be on the right, the flag's own right, and its staff should be in front of the staff of the other flag.

- The flag of the United States of America should be at the center and at the highest point of the group when a number of flags of states or localities or pennants of societies are grouped and displayed from staffs.

- When flags of two or more nations are displayed, they



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are to be flown from separate staffs of the same height. The flags should be of approximately equal size.

International usage forbids the display of the flag of one

nation above that of another nation in a time of peace.

- When the flag of the United States is displayed from a staff projecting horizontally or at an angle from

the window sill, balcony or front of a building, the union of the flag should be placed at the peak of the staff unless the flag is at half staff.

- When the flag is used to

cover a casket, it should be placed so that the union is at the head and over the left shoulder. The flag should not be lowered into the grave or allowed to touch the ground.

Displaying the Flag

The intent of the flag code is not punitive. It was written to help citizens better express their patriotism. Still the flag code provides regulations for when and how to best use and display the flag.

Although these rules are binding on some public workers in the federal government, they are useful for other organizations that use the flag as a central part of their activities, including groups like the Boy Scouts of America and veterans organizations. There is a protocol for the use and display of the American flag. Here are some tips for displaying the flag from the American Legion:

- Typically, the flag should be displayed from sunrise to sunset on buildings and on flagstaffs out in the open. However, on certain special occasions, particularly during periods when the objective is to arouse considerable patriotism, the flag may be displayed 24 hours a day. On such occasions, it should be illuminated at night.

- The flag may be flown at half staff following the death of the president or former president, vice-president, Supreme Court justice, member of Congress, secretary of an executive or military department, etc. Only the president or a state governor may order the flag to be displayed at half-staff.

- When the flag is not flown from a staff, it should be displayed vertically, whether indoors or out, and suspended so that its folds fall free as though the flag were staffed. The stripes may be displayed



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either horizontally or vertically against a wall, and the union should be uppermost and to the flag's own right (that is, to the observer's left). It should be the

same way when flown in the window of a home or business.

- When used on a speaker's platform, the flag, if displayed flat, should be displayed above

and behind the speaker. When displayed from a staff in a church, public auditorium or meeting place, the flag should hold the position of superior

prominence, in advance of the audience, and in the position of honor at the clergyman's or speaker's right as he faces the audience.



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Folding the Flag

The custom of folding the United States Flag into a triangle is both a sign of honor and deep respect. According to the American Legion, folding ceremony represents the same principles on which our nation was founded.

The legion offers the following steps for folding the flag:

- Fold the Flag in half lengthwise.
- Repeat, fold in half lengthwise again, being careful that the blue field is on the outside.

- As one person holds the flag by the blue field, another makes a triangular fold in the opposite end and continues to make triangular folds until the entire flag is in a triangle.

- Tuck the loose edge of the

Flag into the pocket formed by the folds so that only the blue field and white stars are visible

There is a great deal of symbolism in folding the flag. The portion of the flag that denotes honor is the blue areas contain-

ing the stars representing states our veterans served in uniform. The canton field of blue dresses from left to right and is inverted only when draped as a pall on the casket of a veteran who has served our country honorably

in uniform.

In the U.S. Armed Forces, at the ceremony of retreat, the flag is lowered, folded in a triangle fold and kept under watch throughout the night as a tribute to the nation's fallen heroes.

History of the U.S. Flag

The U.S. Flag may be the most recognized in the world. It also has inspired the design of flags of other nations, including Liberia, which was founded in the 1840s by freed American slaves.

But the Stars and Stripes, as we know it today, had several ancestors, including the continental Navy's "Don't tread on me" flag, the Sons of Liberty Flag, the New England flag and the Forster flag, according to the Betsy Ross home page on ushistory.org.

Betsy Ross is credited with sewing what is regarded as the first American flag. The other flags that preceded hers had similar elements but not all. In addition to being red, white and blue, Ross' flag contained, for the first time stars, albeit in a circle.

Here are some historical tidbits about America's most potent symbol of freedom, according to the site usacitylink.com:

- The United States Flag is the third oldest of the National Standards of the world; older than the Union Jack of Britain or the Tricolor of France.

- The flag was first authorized by Congress June 14, 1777. This date is now observed as Flag Day throughout America.

- The flag was first flown from Fort Stanwix, on the site of the present city of Rome, N.Y., on August 3, 1777. It was first under fire three days later in the Battle of Oriskany, August 6, 1777.

- The red in the flag is for



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valor, zeal and fervency. The white is for hope, purity, cleanliness of life and rectitude of conduct. The blue is the color of

heaven, for reverence to God, loyalty, sincerity, justice and truth.

- The Flag was first carried in

battle at Brandywine, Sept. 11, 1777.

- It first flew over foreign territory January 28, 1778, at

Nassau, Bahama Islands; Fort Nassau having been captured by the Americans in the course of the war for independence.

Flag Nicknames

You probably know Great Britain's flag is referred to as the Union Jack, but do you know the nicknames of the flags of other countries? Canada? Mexico? China? India?

Our national flag has been around for 238 years. In that time it's picked up several nicknames. They include:

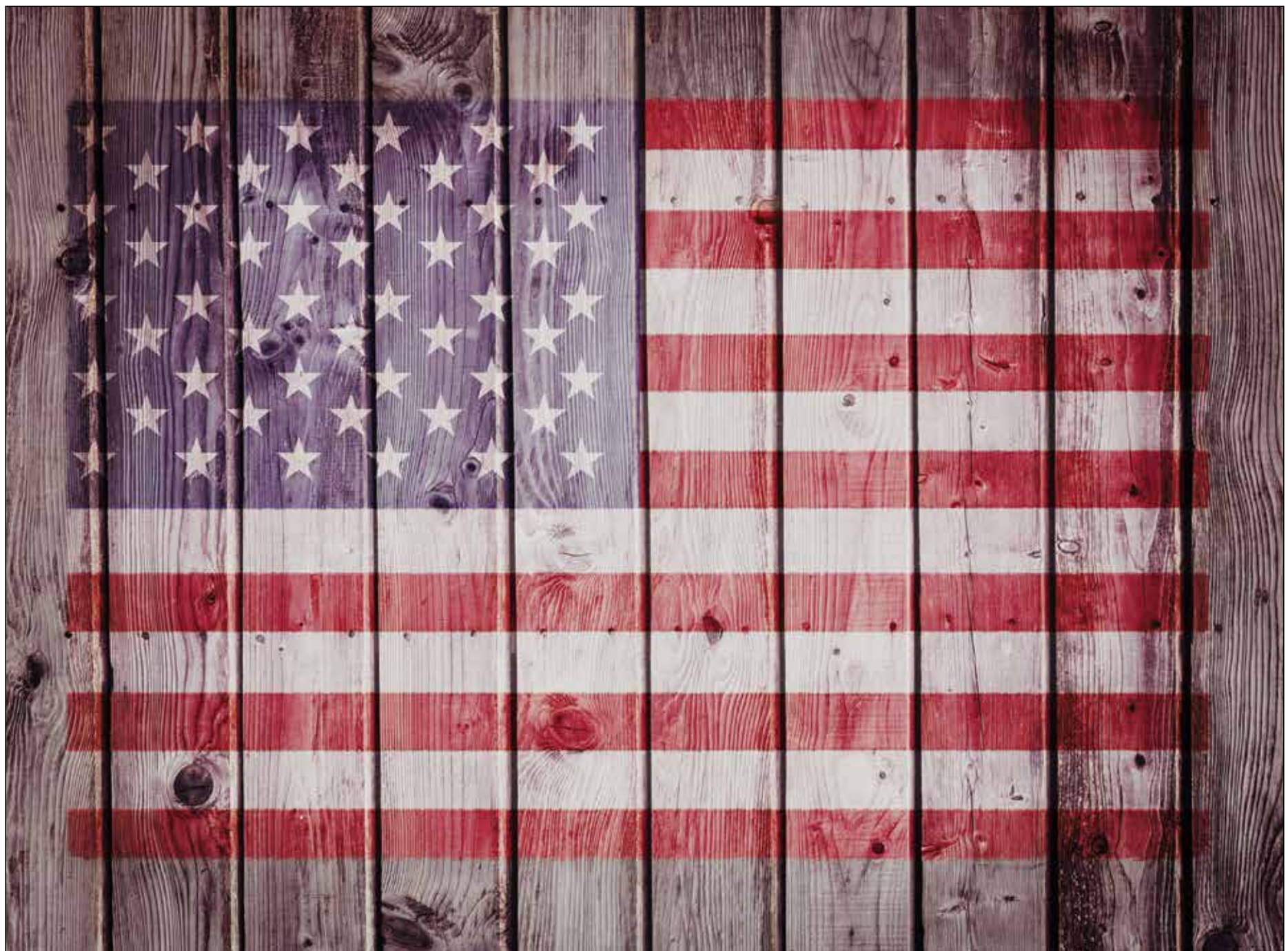
- The Star Spangled Banner
- Stars and Stripes
- Old Glory
- Red, White and Blue

How did our beloved flag get these names? Here is a little background from the Smithsonian:

- Old Glory is a common nickname for the flag of the United States. It was coined by William Driver, an early 19th-century American sea captain. However, it also refers specifically to the flag owned by Driver, which has become one of the nation's most treasured historical artifacts.

- The Stars and Stripes and is actually more than a nickname. It is one of the most popular names of the American flags. Its stars represent the 50 states; its thirteen stripes represent the 13 colonies that became the original states.

- The original Star Spangled Banner flew over Fort McHenry during the Battle of Baltimore in the Anglo-American War of 1812. Francis Scott Key wrote a poem about the battle and flag that was later turned into a song. The song eventually became the national anthem of the United States. The name draws its inspiration from its design, which, as



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everyone knows, is dotted with stars.

- Dozens of countries, includ-

ing the United Kingdom and Australia, have red, white and blue colors in their flags. There

are several theories behind the Red, White and Blue name. The most obvious is the three colors,

which are similar to that of Great Britain, under which the Founding Fathers had served.