

Common Misconceptions about the U.S. Flag

The Flag Code prohibits washing the flag

- There are no provisions in the Flag Code for washing the flag.
- This decision would derive from the condition and material of the flag, and the owner's prerogative.
- U.S. flags can be cleaned and, as long as they remain serviceable, displayed.

Flags used to cover caskets must be retired

- The Flag Code does not state that flags used to cover caskets must be retired or that they cannot be displayed.
- Often, such flags are folded and stored in presentation cases.
- This decision, of course, would be left to the sole discretion of the family of the deceased.

Elected officials or post commanders can order flags to half staff

- This is one myth that is specifically addressed in the Flag Code.
- The gesture of placing the flag at half-staff represents a state or national solidarity in mourning a highly regarded state or national figure.
- As such, out of reverence for the collective nature of the action, the responsibility of ordering flags to half-staff falls only to the President or to governors.
- This is in accordance with section 7 of the U.S. Flag Code.

The red, white and blue colors symbolize American sacrifice

- No federal law, resolution or executive order exists providing an official reason for the flag's colors or their meaning.
- The closest thing to an explanation are the words of Charles Thomson, the secretary of the Continental Congress, who was instrumental in the design of the Great Seal of the United States. Thomson's report to Congress on June 20, 1782, the day the seal was approved, contained a description of the colors, the same as those in the flag:
 - White signifies purity and innocence.
 - Red hardiness and valor
 - Blue signifies vigilance, perseverance and justice.
- But the colors do not have, nor have they ever had, any official imprimatur.
- Historians believe that the use of red, white and blue in the Stars and Stripes has to do with the simple fact that they were the colors of the first flag of the American colonies, the Continental Colors.
- And there is little doubt where the red, white and blue of the Continental Colors came from: the Union Jack of the United Kingdom.

The Flag Code prohibits the display of a United States flag of less than 50 stars

- According to the U.S. Army Institute of Heraldry, the United States flag never becomes obsolete.
- Any officially approved U.S. flag, irrespective of the number or arrangement of the stars and/or stripes, may continue to be used and displayed until no longer serviceable.

The United States Flag Code enforces penalties for violations of any of its provisions

- The Flag Code is simply a guideline for proper flag etiquette.
- The law does not provide penalties for violation of any of its provisions.