

Speech to Chicago Flag Rally

May 14, 1998

In some faiths there is a doctrine on grace. It teaches that there is a treasure chest filled with grace. And it was filled by the sacrifices of Jesus and the saints. It's available to all of us to help us as we struggle to do what is right. We can all draw from the treasure chest of grace through no particular merits of our own, but simply because of god's love for us.

Our freedom is, like grace, a treasure chest. It was filled by the sacrifices of our great heroes and patriots -- by our veterans, by our POWs, by our MIAs. We all draw from that chest of freedom - - often through no merits of our own, but simply because of their love for us.

The chest of grace is inexhaustible because it comes from God. Not so the chest of freedom. It must continuously be replenished by our sacrifices, by forever growing and nurturing patriots who alone will ensure our future when one day they become veterans.

Abraham Lincoln, that great man from Illinois, said at Gettysburg, that the world would never forget what those veterans did. He was wrong.

In the largest city in my state, Memorial Day was canceled. Too many in this country are amputating from their memory the very source of our being, the sacrifices of our veterans. And patriotism, the life blood of our democracy is in jeopardy.

But some do remember. Tomorrow patriotic Americans begin our season of remembrance when we decorate with the first flowers of spring the graves of those who sacrificed their youth, who gave all the spring times of their lives, so that liberty might grow old.

And then Flag Day when we honor the symbol of our sovereignty, of our soul, of our unity, of our values and of our respect for each other.

And then Independence Day when we celebrate the greatest event in the political development of mankind. In between we remember the pivotal event of this century, D-Day, when the American military tore down the wall of tyranny surrounding Europe.

Thirty-six days when we remember and thank the great blood donors to the treasure chest of freedom and we are again inspired by the beauty of their sacrifice. Their blood nourished the spring and summer of this country. And it is appropriate that we remember them in the spring and summer of our year.

The fact that we have such a tradition that we are grateful helps mark our greatness as a people.

Someone wrote about the importance of tradition in a democracy when he said: "a democratic people profess to object to a man's being disqualified from anything by accident of birth. Tradition objects to a man being disqualified from anything by accident of death. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking

around.

Tradition is the democracy of the dead and it keeps their timeless wisdom in our councils. Today our honored dead visit our councils and we are again inspired and strengthened by the memories of these men and women and the great beauty of their sacrifices.

They have been the vault for the values of this nation. And that is what is important to the veterans I have known. They did not take an oath to defend a person, or a party, a king or a dictator -- they took an oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States -- a set of values.

And that is what veterans would like for us to honor, not just them, but the values for which they gave so much of body and soul -- values such as courage, a willingness to sacrifice, service to others and to country.

And what is most important, indeed vital, is that the youth of today see that we remember, see that we are grateful, know that service and sacrifice and courage are noble things, and that America, which has no kings or queens, still has a nobility, and they are called -- veterans..

I wonder what those we remember today would think if they could come back to the America they saved and watch our TV, or sit in a classroom, or read our newspapers.

I know that in the midst of the devaluing of America and of patriotism, there is one issue which would hurt the most, which would turn them over in their graves, is to see that it is legal to desecrate the Flag for which they fought. It is the only family portrait of all Americans, it is the sacred shroud which embraced their coffin, and which was the tissue for the tears of their loved ones.

They would be outraged by a Supreme Court which took away our freedom to protect their Flag, and they did it in the same year that their sacrifices brought down the Berlin wall and won freedom for so many.

They would be horrified to hear those elitist in this country say they died on the battlefields of America so that their Flag could be burned on the street corners of America.

They did not give their last full measure of devotion to keep the likes of Hitler, Kim Il Sung and Ho Chi Minh from dishonoring our Flag, only to have the people they fought for allow a few judges to disgrace it.

It is not the media who gave us freedom of the press. Our patriots did. It is not the courts or the ACLU who gave us freedom of speech, our veterans did. It is not radical demonstrators burning our Flag who contribute to peace. It is the men and women who served and sacrificed under the Flag, and who respect the values it embodies who are the real peace demonstrators.

If the great Americans, we remember today, who gave us our freedoms, could come back, they would be in the front lines fighting to recapture our Flag.

Lincoln also asked at Gettysburg that “we highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain.

He was telling us that remembrance is precious, but it is what we resolve to do about the memories that is priceless. It is only through our actions that we can ensure that they shall not have died in vain.

And I don't think there is anything more we can do to show our resolve to preserve what they died for, than by flying their Flag.

The courts have taken the word speech from the first amendment and distorted it beyond recognition. Just consider. Prayer is not protected speech, pornography is. Burning a draft card or a cross is not protected speech, but burning a Flag is.

If speech can be other than verbal, then flying the Flag is the most powerful speech there is. Our Flag speaks a language understood by the entire planet. Nothing speaks as eloquently as Old Glory. About what we are, about what is right, and about the sacrifices of those who got us here.

If flying the Flag is speech, why isn't burning the Flag an assault on speech, in fact all our freedoms which it represents?

And that is the best way for us to speak on this issue, fly our Flags. If enough Senators see enough Flags they will hear us.

If you believe that burning the American Flag is an act of cowardice, that only a coward, hiding behind false speech, would spew his venom on something that cannot speak back. Then speak for the Flag, fly it.

If you disagree with the courts who say that defecating on the Flag is speech, and if you agree with 80% of the American people who say it is despicable, hateful conduct, fly your Flag.

If you believe that the core of this issue is values, and if you believe that our laws should reflect our values, then Show Your Colors!

If you believe in democracy, in the right of the majority of the people to determine the laws and values that govern their society, fly the symbol of democracy.

Mike Christian made a Flag out of debris from a gutter at the Hanoi Hilton and used that Flag to inspire hope in his fellow POWs. The communists found that Flag, destroyed it and then tortured Mike for making it. He recovered, and made another Flag.

If you think that Mike's Flag and the Flag of all our POWs should be protected, fly yours.

If you believe that no one should be allowed to substitute hateful, violent acts for reasonable rational speech in order to be heard, fly the symbol of free speech, fly Old Glory.

Fifth grader Steven Green said "on Memorial Day I will look at the Flag with respect. I will think of it as rewarding the dead soldiers who all now own a little piece of our Flag. Where did they get the courage to do what they did? All I know is there are two words that tell about them - - courage and respect. If you agree with Steven, fly that piece of our dead patriots, fly the symbol of courage and respect.

Justice Hugo Black said "it passes my belief that anything in the federal Constitution bars ... making the deliberate burning of the American Flag an offense." Five Supreme Courts in this century agreed with him. If you agree with them, fly your Flag, but not only for them, for all the great jurist who for 200 years defended the right of the people to protect their Flag..

If you agree with Chief Justice Harlan who said that "love both of the common country and of the state will diminish in proportion as respect for the Flag is weakened" and if you see respect in our country weakening, especially in the atrocities involving our youth, then help restore respect and patriotism by flying your Flag.

Webster Anderson is a great black American soldier who lost 3 limbs while earning the MOH in Vietnam. He was once asked by a grade school youngster if he would do what he did again knowing what it would cost. Webster replied that he only had one arm left but that his country could have it anytime they needed it.

If you want to say thanks to veterans like Webster, and other living Medal of Honor recipients who believe the people should have the right to protect their Flag, then fly yours.

If you agree with Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, who adopted the first Flag and wrote the First Amendment, that the Flag should be protected. Fly your Flag. It will say thanks to all the founding fathers and be a giant step to recapture the Constitution and to restore it to the way they intended it to be.

If you agree with George Washington that amending the Constitution is the only way for the people to control and perfect it, then fly the Flag that Washington himself helped design.

If you disagree with the ACLU, the ABA, the newspaper editors and other minority voices who say that the Flag is just a star spangled piece of cloth, fly the Star Spangled Banner.

The great thing about our veterans is that they never really leave us, dead or alive -- the noblest part of their being stays with us; becomes a part of our being as a people, in our military, with us here today, -- everywhere in this great land, a part of our common ideals and feelings for each other, of all those things that make us a united country, a singular people, a people who enjoy each other's company and wish each other well..

As long as they are a part of our being, as long as we remember, we will never fly a white flag, but we will forever wave a red, white, and blue Flag. Nothing we do, will do more to free Old Glory, and to honor their memory, than to begin on Memorial Day to fly Old Glory.