

A Flag Designed to Inspire

“Resolved, that the Flag of the thirteen United States shall be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the Union be thirteen stars, white on a blue field, representing a new constellation.”

Amazingly, considering the hundreds of pages now seemingly required for any congressional measure, the Continental Congress, on June 14, 1777, established in just over 30 words the design for our nation’s emblem, the American flag: red and white stripes to symbolize the thirteen original states and a blue union with a white star for each state. Each of the three colors also had a symbolic meaning: red for “Hardness and Valor”, white for “Purity and Innocence” and blue for “Vigilance, Perseverance and Justice”.



Legislation was adopted in 1818 which established the policy of adding one star to the blue union of the flag on the 4th of July following the admission of each new state into the Union. In 1912, President Taft issued an Executive Order that set the overall vertical width (or “hoist”) and the horizontal length (or “fly”) of our nation’s flag at a ratio of 1:1.9. The width and length of the blue union area, the diameter of each star in the union and the width of each stripe were also fixed in relation to the overall width of the flag. Current U.S. Flag Code maintains essentially the same ratios, although some adjustments can be allowed in the overall width-to-length proportion.

Although the appearance of our nation’s flag has changed somewhat since 1777, as the number of states has increased, the great ideals and proud heritage that it represents have remained constant. Prominent 19th century clergyman, abolitionist and social reformer, Henry Ward Beecher, captured this heritage and these ideals in his essay “The Meaning of Our Flag”:

“If one asks me the meaning of our flag, I say to him: It means just what Concord and Lexington meant, what Bunker Hill meant. It means the whole glorious Revolutionary War. It means all that the Declaration of Independence meant. It means all that the Constitution of our people, organizing for justice, for liberty and for happiness, meant...It cheered our army...It crossed the waters rolling with ice at Trenton, and when its stars gleamed in the morning with a victory, a new day of hope dawned on the despondency of this nation.

“Our Flag carries American ideas, American history and American feelings. Beginning with the Colonies, and coming down to our time, in its sacred heraldry, in its glorious insignia, it has gathered and stored chiefly this supreme idea: *divine right of liberty in man*. Every color means liberty; every thread means liberty, every form of star and beam or stripe of light means liberty – not lawlessness, but...liberty through law, and laws for liberty! The American flag was the safeguard of liberty...Not a symbol of authority in the ruler was permitted to go into it. It was an ordinance of liberty by the people, for the people. That it meant, that it means, and, by the blessing of God, that it shall mean to the end of time!”