

# Celebrate America

## From Flag Day through July 4th is an especially good time to publicly express your pride in the nation

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One of the pillars of VFW's foundation is the promotion of patriotism. Love of country is high on our agenda, for it is the very basis for military service. What prompts many young Americans to join the armed forces is a genuine desire to defend their nation.

Public displays of patriotism are relatively rare these days. But one place that does not hold back is Bristol, R.I. Nicknamed "America's Most Patriotic Town," it has held the country's longest continuously running July 4th celebration, dating back to 1785. Officially kicking off on Flag Day, it is so big that two years ago an Iraq vet postponed his leave just to arrive home in time for the parade.

It is an occasion for a genuine outpouring of patriotism, no question about it. "I just think our veins are filled with red, white and blue blood," said the parade organizer. VFW Post 237 in Bristol would no doubt agree. It is refreshing to see such unabashed pride openly expressed at a time when it is too often dismissed by some as old-fashioned.

Most veterans I know wholeheartedly agree that America is an exceptional nation. Though this may not be fashionable to say in certain circles, I believe it to be true. Our history and Constitution are evidence enough. America's Revolution, as it has been called, produced "the first new nation." Our nation's ideology consists of a unique combination of individual liberty, equality of opportunity, popular governance and freedom to prosper.

Impartial observers such as Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville confirmed this 180 years ago. He wrote: "The position of Americans is therefore quite exceptional, and it may be believed that no democratic people will ever be placed in a similar one."

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For sure, our national identity (see “What is an American?” on page 18) was molded by our Puritan roots, political republicanism, social mobility, expansive population and rugged frontier spirit. These and other shared values, as outlined in this month’s issue, made us the nation we are today.

As critics are quick to point out, of course, we have not achieved perfection. Yet with blemishes and all, America is still a nation that has much to be proud of. Ours is a past that must be passed down to one generation after the next. Judging from the knowledge (or lack of) possessed by our youth and others, we as a society rate a failing grade.

When 38% of citizens cannot pass the U.S. Citizenship Test, as Newsweek recently found, 40% do not even know that we fought Germany and Japan during WWII, and an amazing 73% were unaware that communism was the enemy during the Cold War, surely something is fundamentally wrong with our national priorities.

So let’s celebrate America loud and clear, especially on holidays like Flag Day and Independence Day. By doing so we will send a message that America’s history is worthy of recognition and praise. No one knows this better than the nation’s war veterans.

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