

'Old Glory'

Desecration carries long history

BY PAT MURPHY

As Congress gets more embroiled in the debate over protecting the American flag, an Oakland University political science professor has published a book, putting into perspective the history of flag desecration in the United States.



The book "Saving 'Old Glory,'" by Robert J. Goldstein — is a history of the American flag desecration controversy and traces the issue from the mid-19th Century through 1989-90.

While history itself is important, Goldstein said his book has a more significant message: Specifically, the movement to outlaw flag desecration may seem to reflect American pride and patriotism. But given the lack of evidence that flag desecration has ever caused any real harm, efforts to protect the flag from desecration may reflect insecurity and doubt rather than pride and confidence.

Under his (Robert J. Goldstein) premise, the flag desecration controversy could be flaring — as it has periodically in U.S. history — because Americans are insecure and feel threatened.

Thus, according to Goldstein, who teaches political science specifically civil liberties, the clamor to protect the flag may be an outward sign of an inner problem.

"When people feel insecure," he said, "it's easy to focus on a symbol, like the flag."

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His book is timely indeed. Last Thursday the U.S. House of Representatives, by a 312 to 120 vote, passed a constitutional amendment that would allow Congress or individual states to enact laws against flag desecration.

If approved in the Senate, the proposed amendment would go to individual states for ratification. Forty-nine states have urged Congress to pass the amendment, according to the office of U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg, who voted with the majority last week.

"Our flag is not merely a piece of cloth, covered with stars and stripes," Knollenberg said in a press release issued after the vote. "It embodies the principles of liberty, hope and opportunity that bring us together as a nation and deserves our utmost respect and protection."

Goldstein's book doesn't address the fervor or specific sentiment expressed by Knollenberg and other law makers last week. Rather, it focuses on the controversy of flag desecration over the last 150 years or so.

As a civil libertarian, Goldstein makes clear his belief upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court — that the U.S. flag is a symbol of freedom. Included in that freedom, he insists, is the right to burn the flag as an ex-

pression of speech.

Ironically, the controversy over flag desecration is not as old as might be commonly believed. For one thing, prior to the war with Mexico the eagle — not the flag — was a more popular and universal emblem of the United States, Goldstein noted. Flags hadn't previously been mass produced, and the flags of individual states or military units were generally more recognized and revered.

As a result of the orchestrated effort to protect the flag, Goldstein notes, the U.S. House or the Senate considered bills to outlaw flag desecration on nine different occasions between 1890 and 1943. Congressional hearings were held at least a dozen times.

While the federal government was embroiled in the flag desecration controversy, so too were individual states. In Montana, for example, a man was sentenced — 10 to 20 years at hard labor under a state law for refusing to kiss the flag. When ordered to do so by a mob, the man said the flag was nothing but a piece of cotton with a little paint and some other marks "that might be covered with microbes."

During the Vietnam era, the emphasis on protecting the flag was a thinly-veiled attempt to suppress dissent, Goldstein noted. In one incident — that underscores political perspective — a young man wearing a flag on his buttocks was arrested by officers wearing flags on their shoulders.

One Midwestern city, Goldstein notes, Kent, Ohio, passed its own flag desecration law in 1970 — providing a maximum penalty of a year in jail and a \$1,000 fine — after a student burned a flag on May 4, the same day four Kent State University students were shot to death by Ohio National Guardsmen during an antiwar protest.

For those who might argue that laws banning flag desecration should be the lone exception to unlimited free expression, Goldstein cites the cautionary words of a Harvard University professor — Charles Fried, a former U.S. solicitor general:

"The man who says you can make an exception to a principle, does not know what the principle is . . ."

Lake concerns residents

BY PAT MURPHY

If high bacteria levels are cutting into the water quality of Flanders Lake, residents on the picturesque, West Bloomfield lake haven't particularly noticed it.



"My son swam in it yesterday," said lake resident Mike Fraas. "So far, so good."

Fraas and his wife, Barbara, Monday said from what they can tell, Flanders Lake is almost as nice as it was when they moved into the area almost 20 years ago. "It's just beautiful," said Barbara Fraas. "We love it."

Flanders is one of eight Oakland County lakes that health officials last week said had unusually high levels of bacteria. Signs were posted advising people against swimming; the swimming caution was lifted at two by week's end.

The Fraas family, like their neighbors, say they are concerned about the over-all health of the lake located north of Green Lake. It's home to some good-sized fish, at least one family of swans and numerous snapping turtles.

It's nice to know that somebody is monitoring water quality, they agreed. But the fact that health officials advised against swimming is cause for concern.

"We don't swim in the lake much," said Lorraine Swantek, another resident. "If you saw the size of the snapping turtles, you'd understand why."

"I think the lake probably has more algae than it used to," she said. "But I haven't noticed any serious decline in the lake. It's still beautiful, and we thoroughly

Closed beach: The Oakland County Health Department ordered this beach on Flanders Lake in West Bloomfield Township and seven others in the county closed last week after finding high levels of bacteria, which officials thought were due to storm water rain off.

enjoy it . . . mostly for boating."

The private, 16-acre lake is spring-fed, according to residents, with fewer than 20 houses and a nursing home on its shores. Electric motors are allowed on the lake, but power boats and jet skis are outlawed. Even so, residents said they are concerned about the lake's long range health. "This is the first time the lake has been closed to swimming," said Sky Van Duyn, "or at least the first time we've known about high bac-

teria counts. The bacteria problem may be short-lived, he said, but it's worrisome just the same.

Health officials speculate that heavy rains — following a brief dry spell — might have resulted in septic tank failures and run-off into the lake.

Other Oakland County lakes closed to swimming last week were Orion Lake, Woodhull Lake, Duck Lake, Harvey Lake, Crescent Lake, Round Lake and Perry Lake.

River's friends offer education

BY SANDRA ARMSTRONG

Education and citizen involvement are what will save the Rouge River, now ranking at 70 in the "low end of good range" in water quality, based on a range of zero to 100. That's the assessment of Jim Graham, executive director of the Friends of the Rouge. Graham said that a ranking of 100 would mean a pristine water source.

The non-profit, largely volunteer group has spent nine years sending teachers and their students out to study the river's quality along its four main branches, draining 470 square miles of southeastern Oakland County, western Wayne County and a small portion of eastern Washtenaw county.

But Graham said his group also is concerned about attempts to change the Clean Water Act. He said that the act has been responsible for a "positive influence . . . on limiting industrial pollution, adding that one Ford Motor Company plant actually returns water to the Rouge cleaner than it removes it."

Also helping water quality on the Rouge will be construction of sewer and overflow basins to contain water in wet weather conditions. Graham said it's expected that will reduce raw sewage by 85 percent, "but it won't fix it for fishing or swimming yet."

To do that, we'll all have to take a look at the way we live, according to Graham. "Storm water runoff is the latest chal-

lenge," he said. "Livonia is the first in our area that must have a storm water permit. . . . Storm water must be treated. It's a major challenge."

The Rouge suffers, Graham said, because it isn't largely fed by underground springs.

"It's going to be up to you and me to (watch how) we take care of our houses and our cars," he said.

Graham, who calls himself a scout, said that "people have to be aware of what they're putting into the sewers." To do that, groups such as the Boy Scouts have been recruited to paint the following message near Rouge River storm drains: "Dump no waste, drains to Rouge River." In between the two lines is a symbol of hope — a fish.

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