

## EDITORIAL: Our flag represents our ideals — may it fly forever



Firefighters carrying 343 American flags representing each of their colleagues who died during the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, march up Fifth Ave. during the St. Patrick's Day Parade, Tuesday in New York. The American flag represents our nation's ideals, and honors many Americans who have died.

MARY ALTAFFER — AP

None of us can claim to have done everything perfectly, to get everything right every time. We don't always live up to our ideals. The same goes for our country.

But one of the great things about living in the United States is that we have those ideals. We put them in writing 240 years ago, and we've tried mightily to stick to them and advance them ever since. When we fail, we try to correct that failure — even if it takes bloodshed. If anything can be said about Americans, it is that we put our ideals into action.

Our flag represents those ideals. Thousands have gone into battle with the Stars and Stripes waving in front of them or sewn onto their uniforms; too many have come home beneath that flag. Many, many homes have a flag folded into a triangle displayed in a place of absolute honor.

So when six University of California, Irvine, students decided the American flag was a symbol of “colonialism” and “imperialism” and voted not to display our flag in one of our buildings, well, that didn't fly — as they have since learned.

Let's start with “colonialism.” Perhaps these six students slept through history class, but our flag came into being as we fought a war to end Great Britain's colonization of America. To win that war, all we had to do was defeat the greatest imperial power of the time. And maybe those six Anteaters missed the chapter in their history books about

how our nation finally decided to throw off the horrible curse of slavery, fighting the greatest, most bloody war in our history to free people who would someday become our fellow citizens.

Maybe they didn't learn about the millions who have given up everything just for a chance to come to America and pledge allegiance to that flag. And surely they must have been napping as their professors explained that we have rights here that virtually no other nation guarantees.

Among those rights is the right to be wrong. The six students who voted down four others on the UCI Associated Students Legislative Council surely know that now. Their decision to outlaw all flags from a campus lobby was overturned — not by school administrators but by their fellow students three days later.

The Associated Students Executive Board said the original decision runs “counter to the ideals that allow us to operate as an autonomous student government organization with the freedoms of speech and expression associated with it.”

It was good to see the majority get it right. It was heartening to know they appreciate what the flag stands for and recognize those who proudly stand behind it and, when necessary, in front of it.

Naturally, some politicians, including state Sen. Andy Vidak of Hanford and Assembly Republican Leader Kristin Olsen of Modesto, are trying to use this as a political vehicle. Hard to blame them; the decision to ban Old Glory angered us, too.

But you don't need a constitutional amendment to protect our flag. You don't need a law or chest-thumping or angry words. We've got a lot of patriotic citizens, including students, who are more than up to the task of defending our flag. Only when that's no longer true will this flag fall.