

# A Commentary On The History Of Our Flag And Recent Controversies.

-Freddie Hatfield

Recently Nike has decided to pull a model of shoe that includes "The Betsy Ross Flag". This comes after the flag was criticized as a flag that was in being during a time when there was slavery in this country. That is true. Slavery was first instituted in 1619 when a Dutch ship brought slaves to Virginia. Slavery was ended by an army under that very same flag (in an updated form) in April of 1865 and that armies' government sealed the date of slavery in December that same year. In fact, Congress already approved it by January 31st, 1865: before the war was even won!

So, a Nation in uttermost turmoil managed to pass that bill in both the house and Senate, wrap up a bloody and brutal war, dealt with an assassination of a legendary President and still got this job done in under a year! They had trains, horse and buggies, libraries with books and telegraph's. Today we have emails, airplanes and Google. I'd say they did a much better job getting stuff done with a lot more turmoil!

But I am straying from the topic. The point was that those who were represented by that same flag ended slavery, even if they didn't solve all the problems that came with it (at least, not right away).

But in light of the Controversies today, let us revisit some facts about our flag. Let us remember that it is a symbol of who we are and who we were.

On June 14, 1777 the "Betsy Ross" flag was commissioned. There is controversy surrounding the accounts of this, but they are beyond the scope of this commentary. But the meaning behind it was this:

"Resolved, that the flag of the United States be made of thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new Constellation."

There is nothing about slavery in this reason for the flag. It can only be seen as a symbol of a new Nation being born who was looking to break away from what they perceived to be a corrupt government.

Slavery was an issue, and in fact at one point threatened the passing of the Declaration of Independence. But the issue was never about slavery. It was about breaking away from a tyrannical government. THAT is what the Betsy Ross flag is a symbol of!

With the growth of our country came growth to our flag. In 1794 the flag had 15 stars and 15 stripes. That's important... as we shall soon see.

By 1818, under President Monroe, we reasoned that the country was growing too big for our flag. It wouldn't be practical today to have 50 stripes on our flag, so they limited the number of stripes to 13: one for each of the original colonies.

Keep that in mind.

The flag was altered in design in 1912, but nothing drastic.

1954 was a year I want to discuss. In that year we had an opinion rendered (which means a judicial verdict was passed) that ended segregation in schools. This was, of course, *Brown v Board of Education*.

Despite this landmark and just decision, merely passing it didn't make it happen. At least not right away.

1964. The Civil Rights Act was passed. This seemingly ended segregation everywhere. Whether or not its passing really did so right away is debatable. I suspect not, and perhaps we are still working it out today. But according to the Law, that was it!

Let me get back to the history of the flag.

January 3rd, 1959: Alaska becomes a state. August 21, 1959: Hawaii becomes a state. That same day (August 21st), President Eisenhower fixed the final (to date) rendition of our flag.

This was 5 years before the landmark 1964 Civil Rights Act.

So, what shall we take away from this history?

We have a major U.S. corporation in Nike being persuaded by a former professional athlete who is offended by the "Betsy Ross" flag. The reason being that during that time there was slavery. So the Corporation decides to pull the product in question. They didn't alter it. They just pulled it off the market.

There was slavery during that time. But the flag was never about slavery, but rather about a new country who in less than 100 years would abolish the practice.

That flag had 13 stars and 13 stripes, which represented to 13 original colonies.

Today's flag still has those 13 stripes, although it didn't always. But today it has 50 stars: one for each state. Yet, when that flag was instituted in 1959, we still had work to be done.

Each rendition of the flag shows progress, and when it comes to racial equality, the date of the current flag predates the progress that has been made.

If corporations like Nike and individuals like Colin Kaepernick refuse to acknowledge that progress, it is a shame. And if they are offended by the beginnings of our flag then they have every reason to be offended at our current flag. It still has 13 stripes, and the 50 stars were instituted before the 1964 Civil Rights bill.

When they go to such great lengths to be offended at what our past has, I see no reason why -- even if we could correct it and make amends -- they wouldn't find something new to be offended at.

The Betsy Ross flag is not what offends them; it's the American flag, it's history and who we as Americans have become that offends them. Ban the Betsy Ross flag and they will find a new thing to be offended at, and there is every reason to believe it could be our current flag.

This, coming from an American company who makes their shoes in China where labor laws are...

Let's just say that Nike has not been so innocent!

I want to add one more thing. If you are one that really is offended by the Betsy Ross flag, I'd like to speak to you directly. I don't want to debate that particular issue. You have your convictions, and despite my disagreeing, for the time being I will respect that.

But do you really believe Nike cares about the cause? Remember what I said about their shoes being made in China. I have no problem with that on the grounds that if they can offer a better unit price, it should be done. On the other hand, it means Americans aren't earning the money. And yes, Under Armour is doing the same.

Here's the difference: they are protesting human rights violations that happened almost 250 years ago yet have their gear made under oppressing conditions today.