In the past month, I’ve seen more red, white, and blue than I have in 20 years of independence days. Nary a day goes by that I don’t see a car with a batted flag flying from its antenna or a home touting the symbol of Uncle Sam on a newly erected flagpole. In a world seemingly preoccupied with the terrorist attacks, it seems that we’ve all become patriotic after the events of Sept. 11. After all, how often do we hear Americans actually being proud of America? The only question I have is why?

Obviously, the flag is a symbol of national mourning, but, in the days following the terrorist attacks, it became far more than that. With patriotism suddenly in vogue, we find that red, white, and blue can mean anything from national unity to anti-terrorism, with no regard for their right to be hung at half-mast, but to celebrate their country. This, in itself, isn’t disturbing. If we’re celebrating a way of life that we’re proud of—one that includes democracy and individual freedoms—we have every reason to fly the American flag. But these are reasons that we’ve always had, and, as such, we should have been flying our flags all along.

I’m sure many flag wavers feel that with the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Osama bin Laden challenged our very way of life, and for this reason, we shouldn’t wait for the government to tell us what to do. Yet, bin Laden did not attack us for the evil of being American; he attacked us for the evils he feels we have committed. According to CNN, bin Laden’s second-in-command, Ayman al-Zawahiri explained why there is so much hatred for America. The answer is very clear and very simple, that America has committed so many crimes against the nations of Muslims. We are now paying the price because of how we’ve dealt with Middle Eastern affairs, particularly in Palestine and Iraq.

Are we proud of how we’ve dealt with the Middle East? If that’s the case, all our flag waving makes sense. I have a suspicion, however, that very few Americans consider the Middle East as the land where they were born and that it’s something to be proud of. I certainly don’t.

So, if we aren’t waving our flags because we believe in a way of life that has been challenged, and we aren’t waving them because we’re proud of our policy decisions, why are we waving our flags so frantically lately? I’m sure it isn’t because we’re proud of “America simply because we are not of anything America is or has been.”

Mindless patriotism is hardly something to take comfort in. Coming into the fold of the flag wavers without first considering the reasons to do so leaves us open to blatant propaganda. Suddenly, George Bush is a great leader even if he stumbles. The world is black and white, with America representing all that is good, and Afghanistan’s all that is evil. We no longer look for our own mistakes, but focus our attention on destroying those who may have pointed them out. We begin to become suspiciously like Nazis persecuting the Jews, or, lest we forget, like Americans sending the Japanese to internment camps.

In the patriotic fervor of the moment, stories abound of individuals ostracized for their lack of patriotism. Royce Singleton, chair of the Sociology and Anthropology department, has been criticized in the past few weeks, not because he limited Margaret Post’s right to free speech, but because he took down the flag she posted in the department’s hallway. It seems unlikely that the response to his action would have been as extreme as if Post had chosen to put up a photo of the man she intended to honor, rather than the highly charged symbol of the day.

Outside the Hill, there have been many journalists fired for anti-Muslim or, heaven forbid, anti-American rhetoric. While the newspapers have every right to control the information they print, the question of whether or not they should certainly arises. How different are they from the Middle Eastern countries that propagate the idea that America is evil, without allowing any conflicting points of view to go to print?

While several journalists have been goaded into choosing blind patriotism over honest reporting, many, like members of the general public, have suspended their right to free speech limited, even at home. One journalist, who has named his moments at the campus, found that his neighbor had hung a flag above the common entrance their homes. After discovering this, the man asked that the flag be taken down and hung elsewhere. In the fold of the flag wavers without first considering the reasons to do so leaves us open to blatant propaganda. Suddenly, George Bush is a great leader even if he stumbles. The world is black and white, with America representing all that is good, and Afghanistan’s all that is evil. We no longer look for our own mistakes, but focus our attention on destroying those who may have pointed them out. We begin to become suspiciously like Nazis persecuting the Jews, or, lest we forget, like Americans sending the Japanese to internment camps.

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Tolerance, these days, seems to be extended only to those who choose to wave their flags along with all the rest of us. The fact of the matter is freedom of speech is the freedom to say or print for anyone else, even if your message is the one that most people seem to agree with. Imagine that the flag posted over that common entrance was a swastika. Would you be so quick to allow your neighbor to speak for you then?

Keep in mind that those who choose not to display their red, white, and blue are not less patriotic. In fact, it’s heartening to see some of the most seasoned students and professors become less indigenous. In what way does this mean to them and whether or not they want to express the ideas that it symbolizes. Their decision not to post the flag involves a lot more than the vast majority of flag wavers have given to what they’re doing, and to criticize or censor them for simply wanting to express a different idea violates the very American way of life that we are supposed to be so proud of. Rather than attacking others for not wanting to allow the flag wavers to speak for them, we should reflect on exactly why we are waving our flags in the first place. Before we decide to get out the stars and stripes, we should search for the reasons why we are doing so. Otherwise, patriotism is nothing more than a fashion statement.