Oh Say Can You See

Hello! Remember me? Some people call me Old Glory, others call me the Stars and Stripes; also I have been referred to as the Star-Spangled Banner. But whatever they call me, I am your Flag, or as I proudly state, the Flag of the United States of America. There has been something that has been bothering me, so I thought I might talk to you about it. Because it is about you and me.

—Opening section of essay read by Representative Nichols of Alabama in Congress on Flag Day, 1967

Emerson Moran, a Seneca County resident with media access and savvy, subscribed to Alice Larsen’s and Father Shamon’s theories about the peace camp women. “I think,” he said, “that a lot of American women were duped; I think they were infiltrated by forces that were subversive to their main cause.” The proof of infiltration was the method they used: “Their method definitely was tied in with an international movement which everybody knew was sponsored and encouraged by the Russians.”

If he began from the starting point Larsen and Shamon supplied, however, Moran moved past it, devising additional elements of plot and characterization that clarified and solidified the developing narrative. What is significant about Moran is not that he had remarkable personal influence over the events of the summer but rather that he made possible the implementation and circulation of a stereotypical but very desirable generic plot line.

In 1983 Emerson Moran was seventy-three years old, a retired businessman who had recently moved back to Seneca County after having it in his youth to work for nearly fifty years in the meat-processing industry. A few
years before the incinerator developed, Emerson (then sixty-seven) had been relieved of his responsibilities as the general manager of the Los Angeles plant of the Vienna Sausage Manufacturing Company. Although promoted to the position of West Coast vice-president, Moran lost much of his meaningful decision-making responsibility and became, as he called himself, “pitiful,” or, according to his wife, “a doleful mess.”

Carolyn Moran, his wife, was concerned about her husband’s melancholy, but she also had a practical consideration: she knew, as he reminded her, that she needed to “find something to keep you busy after I’m gone, something that is going to bring in a little money” (Moran and Moran 1979:3). Thinking that she lacked marketable skills because most of her work had been in her home and in volunteer activities, Carolyn saw the solution in opening her own business. She decided on a mail-order jewelry business that she and Emerson named Moran Power, which, they said, expressed “the strength of our little branch of the family of God” (ibid.: 19). They sold jewelry based on a helicopter part called the Jesus nut, which keeps the rotor blade attached to the helicopter. The Morans wrote a joint autobiography titled Grandma, Grandpa, and the Jesus Nut to explain the significance of this jewelry/ helicopter part.

Despite various technical, physical, financial, and bureaucratic difficulties in getting the business going, the Morans persevered and today sell about forty different versions of the Jesus nut as tie tacks, key chains, rings, pendants, cuff links, and money clips. The Jesus nut is not a charm, the Morans say, but a reminder that there is a source of meaning, a way to make sense of the trials we all have to face. It does not solve problems; it just represents the idea that there is someone—Jesus—“holding the whole thing together.” It is a symbol that instills a confidence that problems can be faced and dealt with creatively if we only trust and believe in this “other power” which does not reside in and is not controlled by the individual human being. The Morans believe that many problems originate precisely in the unwillingness of the individual to recognize and obey a higher authority. Once people accept this authority, they achieve a confidence that enables them to understand the cause of a problem and thus to understand its meaning. Understanding provides a sense of security even if the problem is not solved. One at least is on the right track and the solution may eventually be uncovered. This approach seemed to serve Emerson Moran well in all his dealings—business, religious, and personal.

The Morans left California in 1982 and settled in Romulus, Seneca County, New York. Because they would be able to bring Carolyn's ideas...
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ness with them and also be closer to treasured East Coast relatives, they saw the move as most logical:

It all makes such sound common sense that we should have thought it out and done programs by ourselves, starting with the miniatures Jesus Nut and Moran Power two years back.

It always looked that way after the Lord says, 'Do,' and then the Lord says, 'Go,' and we answer, 'We will!' (Moran and Moran 1979:128)

Emerson Moran followed the motto "What is right must be done" in making these decisions, and he carried this motto into his interactions with the women's peace encampment in 1983. What had to be done when Emerson Moran first heard of the upcoming peace encampment was to find out "just what sort of folks were moving in down at Art McGrane's place?" The "natives were anxious" about the camp, Moran said, and so he made several attempts to acquire the means of judging the women's character and motives. Moran was able to contribute to the characterization of these women through several encounters he initiated in June and through letters to the editor and interviews on television and radio and in the newspapers.

Moran first met the protesters when he visited the encampment in early June. He brought over a list of local churches and "undertook to invite them to attend church services in the area." In an interview broadcast on WSWJ-136, Seneca Falls, on July 29, 1983, Moran explained:

I have made two gestures towards the campers. On the day following the announcement of the purchase of the old Art McGrane place I wrote to nine churches in the area requesting their permission to list them on an invitation to the campers to attend worship services with their neighbors. I spent several hours over a two-week period preparing the invitation, which included a scale map of the county on which the churches were located with the distance of each from the camp. Several women reported to have accepted the invitation—Moran and myself have attended the same church as do Carolyn and myself. We also spent over fifty dollars for the printing.

The maps read, "Come summer campers to worship with your neighbors at the church next door." As Moran described, the maps showed the churches and asked, "How far is it to church?" The thousand or so map invitations were to have been used, but Moran reported that the encampment requested more in July.
Moran's second gesture was the offer of an American flag. On June 9 he visited the encampment and spoke to some of the women:

I don't really know how I got into this but apparently it had occurred to me that I could get some kind of statement from the women if I went down and offered to give them a flag if they'd put it up. So I did. I went down, and I had a meeting in the yard there with three of the girls, and I told them what I wanted to do, give them a flag. Two of them thought it was a good idea; third one thought, well, we have to take this up with the national committee.

Moran sent a note the next day confirming his offer. "Dear Ladies," he wrote,

This is to confirm the offer to Michelle yesterday at the campsite to provide you with an American flag for display on the porch of your house.

My reasons for the offer were discussed with Michelle and others during my visit. I'll procure the flag immediately on receiving your acceptance of my offer.

As he explained later, what he said to them was, "I want to give you a flag," and I said, "If you take it, why, I've already arranged for a press photographer to come and take pictures of it being put up, and if you don't take it, why, I'm gonna tell the people you wouldn't take it, period." He waited for their reply.

By this time the focus of activities for the peace encampment organizers had shifted from Philadelphia, New York, and Geneva to the peace camp land itself. Three of the organizers (Jody, Shad, and Michelle) in a 1985 interview recalled their early encounters with Emerson Moran and the American flag. They had perceived Moran's two "gestures" as hostile tests of their legitimacy:

Michelle: Eventually meetings started to shift to the hub [the peace camp land in Seneca County] because we wanted to centralize the activity, it had always been in New York or Geneva or around, and this was going to be the first meeting at the house itself on the land. I believe it was June, the beginning of June. I go to that party a few of us had been having lunch outside in the community, going to the bar, having a beer and a good time, not really trying to be too serious. And the next day we'd have a meeting with Emerson Moran and the American flag. They had pressed between the two gestures as hostile tests of their legitimacy.
Jody: In our best voices mind you. Because we're the representatives who are at the encampment, the only ones there, so we have to go because the fire chief had been by twice to invite us.

Michelle: So we were doing this kind of outreach to public meetings and then emerged this guy named Emerson.

Jody: Emerson Moran.

Michelle: Emerson Moran.

Jody: Now this goes back to what Shad was talking about, having to discuss the fact of agents and spies and the FBI and all those, being set up—because we get set up all the time.

Shad: I'm sure this is a classic example.

Michelle: So Emerson Moran starts dropping by. We had set the house up, where the front room would be, where the pamphlets were, and we encouraged community people to come and ask about what was happening. And good old Emerson was always pulling up in his big, old eight-cylinder car and getting out of his gold whatever, and Emerson Moran was about fifty-six years old and pontificating as hell and he'd come over to see what we girls were doing. And we would spend countless hours talking to this man, I mean in a really nice way.

And we had women from Philadelphia who are in like corporate America, we have women from New York City in War Resisters League, we have a broad range of people sitting in the circle. We explained to him that this operates through consensus and he just happened to arrive at a time when everybody was represented in the encampment and our process was to bring it to the circle, talk about it, consensus about it, and that wouldn't take a day or two and we would get back to him. He said to us: "Well, I really hope you take the flag because if you don't everybody's going to hear about it."

Jody: "I'm going to tell the media," laughing as he drove off. And he had never said more true words. Ever.

Although the organizers did not agree with all the things the flag traditionally symbolized, they felt it would be politically wise to accept
and by the flag. They took the issue to a group of women who met for several days in order to create a policy. The women discussed the symbolic content of the flag. They mentioned the association with violence and militaristic nationalism that they found unacceptable as well as the idea that the flag stand for the good things about the United States. Since the women could not reach consensus, they could not decide to accept Emerson Moran's offer. They did decide that any woman coming to the encampment could create any kind of flag the size of a pillowcase and hang it on clotheslines on the front lawn. Throughout the summer participants made flags covered with drawings, words, and symbols. Some women flew pillowcases that were precut to resemble the American flag. The flag decision became a part of the encampment's "respected policies," but the issue was periodically raised at evening meetings that summer and for years to come.

Some of the organizers who were living at the encampment when Emerson Moran made his offer were frustrated that the consensus procedure had prevented acceptance of the flag:

Michelle: The group would not let us take the flag and of course they all go home and we were stuck with having to write him a letter, why we didn't want to take the flag. But we wrote him a letter saying all the reasons why we couldn't take the flag, and sure enough the next day in the Fenny saver is this big article about how we didn't take the flag.

Michelle: [as if reading headline]: "Romulus women refuse flag."

Michelle: Which of course meant we were commies, right? And it escalated from there and we really wanted to take the flagging flag, but we wrote him a letter saying all the reasons why we couldn't take the flag, and sure enough the next day in the Fenny saver is this big article about how we didn't take the flag.

Judy (in reading headline): "Romulus women refuse flag."

Michelle: Which of course meant we were communists, right? And it escalated from there and we really wanted to take the flagging flag, but we wrote him a letter saying all the reasons why we couldn't take the flag, and sure enough the next day in the Fenny saver is this big article about how we didn't take the flag.

The formal reply to Moran's flag offer came in the form of a letter signed by six of the Encampment organizers.
On behalf of everyone involved in the Seneca Women’s Peace Encampment, I would like to thank you for your gracious offer to donate an American flag for the encampment. We were heartened by the show of support we have received from you and other citizens of Seneca County, and we wish to continue a friendly and supportive relationship. For that reason, I’m writing to explain why we will not be able to accept your donation and fly the flag.

Like many symbols, the flag means different things to different people, so that there was a wide diversity of opinion on this issue. Some of the women at our national meeting this week endorsed the flag as a symbol of their love of country, and therefore they supported flying the flag. Some women felt that flying the flag would communicate to everyone that we are loyal United States citizens expressing our constitutional right to influence the decisions of our government.

Other women felt that there were other symbols that more accurately portray what the Peace Encampment is all about. The women who did not want to fly the flag said that national flags are often a symbol of military victory, a symbol of conquest. Since we have a message to communicate to the whole world, and since our encampment is a gesture of support to the women’s peace camps in England and other European countries, some of us expressed that the American flag is not an appropriate symbol for the work we are doing.

Much of the decision not to fly the American flag was based on the spirit and tradition carried over the centuries by many respected religious and secular groups. There is a tradition within the peace movement of using international symbols of peace and justice rather than national flags, which emphasize boundaries between people.

I hope that you will accept our refusal of your donation in the spirit of American political dialogue. We believe that our actions here speak strongly for our concern and commitment to America: our openness about decision-making process, the hard work we are doing on the land, our participation in local town gatherings, our eagerness to comply with all local and state codes and regulations, our commitment not to interfere with the rights of other citizens, and our expression of our constitutional right to protest.

This letter was addressed and sent to Emerson Moran directly; it did not appear in local newspapers, but Moran responded to it with an open letter that was published in the last week of June in several newspapers.
This is an open letter to the Women’s Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice, located in Romulus:

Your letter of June 13 in which you refuse my donation of an American flag to fly over your encampment stares back at me from my desk. It takes more than one reading to begin to understand the reasons, to me specious, for spurning the flag as a suitable symbol of peace and justice. You write that the rejection was by committee. The majority obviously grew up alongside a knee different than did we. Here at our house we fly the flag daily. Do you think that it is our symbol of militarism and conquest? No!

Our reason for flying the American flag is expressed in two quotations. One is from Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address: 

“... the last best hope of earth ... . The way is plain, peaceful, generous and just—a way which if followed the world will applaud forever and God must forever bless.”

The other is included in the Pledge of Allegiance:

“... the Republic for which it stands, ... under God, ... with liberty and justice for all.”

Your decision to turn your back to your flag does not advance your cause. The real world that you come to influence begins at your doorstep and your decision has placed you at odds with your neighbors who believe that their country truly is the last best hope of earth.

Yet you write that you have more appropriate symbols of peace and justice. We at your doorstep will be interested to see the banners under which you have intruded among us.

We will watch especially for your international symbol guaranteeing the phrase with which your rejection ends—“our constitutional right to protest”!

Emerson Moran’s careful response to the encampment’s “rejection” letter helped set up more guidelines for interpretation of the women’s actions and words. He claims that “it takes more than one reading to begin to understand” what the women were saying about the flag signaled the reader of his letter that the women were not really being open and forthcoming about their intentions. If something took several readings to understand, apparently it was not being presented sincerely. Moran called the type of language and argument used in the women’s letter “specious,” suggesting that although the words might sound good, they were actually wrongheaded.

Moran also referred to the women’s rejection of the flag as a “spurning,” a term that indicates emotional contempt, not logical decision mak-
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ing. This emotionalism fits with a representation of the women as not living in the real world—the world they "come to influence." The women were seen as functioning outside the bounds of logic in an imaginative world often associated with women and children. In the real world people believed that "their country is the last best hope of earth," not an advocate of "suffrage and service." Obviously these women could not be from this "real world"; in Moran's ironically poetic words, they "grow up alongside a knee different than did we."

Moran's letter introduced the important question of difference into the developing narratives. In the women themselves sound, "like many symbols, the flag means different things for different people." This was a serious point of contention for Moran because from his point of view the flag had very specific meanings for people who were not different, and these meanings were thought to remain stable over time, despite changes in context and challenges to these connotations. The interpretation of the flag was allowed under this scheme; its meanings were set and always true. Rejection of these meanings, these well-known and widely accepted connotations, was a sure sign that something was, indeed, "different" and therefore wrong.

This position—that the flag should be taken literally as a sign for all that is good and true about America and that it be interpreted in this light—was not new or unique to Emerson Moran. Indeed, as many Seneca County residents would note, this flag incident seemed similar to the last major national confrontation over the flag, which had also involved the question of who had the right to determine the content of this symbol. During the antiwar protests of the 1960s and 1970s, the American flag became a central symbol through which to express the disagreements of the era. These various stances seem to have been inspired in May 1966 when, it was reported, an American flag was burned during an antiwar demonstration in Central Park in New York City. Reaction was swift and widespread in the media and among the general public. One's relationship to the flag became a measure of one's patriotism. Construction workers, proclaiming their loyalty to America, began to wear flag symbols on their hard hats while antiwar activists and antiestablishment protestors criticized, ridiculed, and manipulated the image by utilizing it in clothing, body decorations, artwork, and in protest. In 1979 the district attorney in New York City closed an art show called the People's Flag Show, in which well-known artists used flag imagery for political criticism, and several artists were arrested for flag desecration. For the artists, Lucy Lipard explains, the main issue was "the extent to which the state can compel..."
The veneration of a state symbol and compel it to be treated as a sacred object without violating the First Amendment” (1972:51). Years later, in 1989, an art installation titled “What Is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag?” caused a furor in Chicago because it included an American flag placed on the floor.

The United States Congress reacted to the 1960s flag “desecrations” by passing a federal law in 1967 that would make such acts punishable by imprisonment and fines. The proposal was debated for hours as every politician took the opportunity to make a statement about patriotism and the American way of life. Some of the comments in these 1960s House debates included:

Mr. Kuykendall (Tennessee): Those Americans who have engaged in trampling the flag, burning it, spitting upon it, fail to realize the significance of the act. Throughout the history of nations the flag has been the symbol of the principles upon which the particular nation has been founded. The very act of despoiling the flag threatens the foundations upon which the nation is built.

Mr. Hall (Missouri): In a land composed of all races and creeds from every corner of the earth, the “Stars and Stripes” are a single unifying force, representing the ideals and principles which bind so many diverse people together.

Mr. McClory ( Illinois): The flag is the Government—it is all of the people. It is comparable to the Queen of England.

Mr. Baring (Nevada): As I stood to pay my respects to these fine young men in uniform who have given so much in their devotion to our country [ beings a Flag Day ceremony], I was deeply choked with emotion. But this emotion was turned to anger as a mental picture of those dirty, long-haired, Communist-led 'beats' burning the American flag in Central Park flashed before my eyes. These flag burners were not burning a piece of cloth, they were burning that banner for America and for everything the great Nation stands for. (Congressional Record, June 20, 1967)

After a Supreme Court decision in 1989 that declared laws punishing flag “desecrations” unconstitutional, Congress again attempted to institute federal flag laws. Again, the debates focused on the flag as a symbol, embodying symbol of America. As Congressman Hutchinson (Michigan)
had stated in 1967, "The flag is the symbol of the Nation itself, and
contempt upon the flag is contempt upon the United States themselves"
(Congressional Record, June 20, 1967). If the stability of signs is supposed
to be the hallmark of a well-ordered political system, as Terry Eagleton
maintains (1986:1), their destruction must be an indication that the sys-
tem is under attack.

Difference is precisely the issue and the problem here. If the women
didn't understand or, worse, actively rejected these meanings, they had
not properly learned why Americans fly the flag. Moran provided the
women with remedial civics lessons, explaining that the reason for flying
the flag was contained in two quotations, one from Abraham Lincoln and
one from the Pledge of Allegiance. The Pledge of Allegiance was used to
support the idea that the flag physically stands in for the United States,
that the flag functions as a visual sign of the nation and its way of life. In
the Pledge of Allegiance, the flag is used to represent America as a nation
and as a republic where the supreme power is ultimately in the hands of
the electorate. In quoting Abraham Lincoln, Moran relied on a time-
honored view of the United States as a special, unique nation with a
"manifest destiny," to be a guiding example for the world.

This idea of a nation ordained by God has its roots planted solidly in the
Calvinist ethos of the early New Englanders. They devised an origin story
in which Americans are seen as God's chosen people, who have a compel-
lng divine mission that must not be allowed to fail. This divine mission
was not strictly religious, according to Sacvan Bercovitch, but "enacted a
fusion of secular and sacred history" (1978:9). As Bercovitch explains,
Americans read the country's destiny in its landscape and so, "despite its
bewildering mixture of race and creed, could believe in something called
an American mission, and could invest that patent fiction with all the
emotional, spiritual, and intellectual appeal of a religious quest" (ibid.:
11).

This was not, however, the only interpretation of the American republic
that has been important in American history. Arthur Schlesinger (1986)
distinguishes this idea of America as nation with a mission from the idea
that it is a historical experiment. This idea derives from the notion
that the decline and fall of the Roman Empire indicated that republics
were doomed to fail. The founders were thus engaged in an experiment to
test whether a republic could survive in defiance of history. Some feared
the fate of Rome and "passionately ransacked the classical historians for
ways to escape the classical fate" in which "time guaranteed decay"
(ibid.:6, 10). This story of America as an experiment is also based in the

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Calvinist ethos, but it emphasizes a different tenet of Calvinism, the belief
that human beings are and must be constantly tested. The Calvinists
believed that “life was a ghastly risk” (ibid.:6) and considered crisis the
norm. In one sense the American errand or mission was always in process,
always unfulfilled, always liminal, for its fulfillment would mean the end
of history.

Schlesinger sees these two themes—America as a nation of divine des-
tiny and America as an experiment with a questionable outcome—“in
recurrent contention over the meaning of America” (1986:5). To prevent
the divine destiny theme America has evolved two secondary, and Amer-
icans pursue their country “as mankind’s designated judge, jury, and
executioner” (ibid.:5). Once the notion of the grand experiment func-
tioned as “liberation in progress from history,” Schlesinger maintains, “his-
tory commenced on a new foundation and a new American norm” (ibid.:14,
17). The new terms put aside historic determinism and gave America the
status of “this great nation, the experiment nation,” an indication of “God’s
effort to make a new beginning in the history of mankind” (ibid.:17, 18),
to regenerate the world. Various consequences of American and world
history, which thrust the United States onto a position of world power,
“confirmed the hallucination” (ibid.:17). Whether Schlesinger has accu-
curately traced its historical underpinnings or not, the notion of America as
a nation of divine destiny is still important to national leaders. It is evident
in President George Bush’s recent references “God brings us to Panama and
Iraq, and in Ronald Reagan’s remark in 1982: “I have always believed
that this anointed land was set apart in an uncommon way, that a divine
plan placed this great continent here between the oceans to be found by
people from every corner of the earth who had a special love of faith and
freedom” (quoted ibid.:16).

Emerson Moran echoed Reagan and other believers in “a divine plan”
when he tried to explain to the women of the peace encampment the
problem with their rejection of the flag: this nation must stand as a God-
designated example for all the other nations of the earth. To question the
most powerful symbol of this national destiny, the American flag, was to
question both divine and secular order. America was not an experiment
for Emerson Moran and Ronald Reagan; its destiny was not in question.
As Moran saw in his own life, when the Lord says, “Go,” and we answer,
“We will,” everything falls right into its proper place.

The notion of national destiny is a powerful doctrine that assumes an
ordered and predictable universe, which is progressing, in the New Eng-
land Calvinists would have been pleased to see, toward the perfected
human being, the American. Even if we concede, as Bercovitch says we must, that this notion of destiny necessarily entails constant anxiety, unfulfillment, and liminality, it has nevertheless proven useful as an officially endorsed public myth. The nation is seen as an experiment, however, it must be "perceived as one nation among many, liable like all others to angelic impulses and predatory lusts" (Schlesinger 1986:51). Moran logically read the refusal of the American flag as a challenge to the idea of a divine American destiny and the ideal of national perfectibility.

For Emerson Moran, and later for his neighbors, to conceive of America as an experiment would be to allow for the consideration of "different" ideas and actions such as that of the peace encampment.

At some point while he was challenging the peace encampment women to fly the flag, Emerson Moran realized that his own neighbors were not regularly displaying Old Glory. This lapse was certainly not as serious as the rejection by the encampment, but it did present an inconsistency in the image of Americans that Moran was building. He decided that to maintain and strengthen the image he was trying to create, his neighbors would have to be gently reminded to fly their own flags. He took up the issue in a letter to the editor of the Finger Lakes Times, which appeared on June 14, 1983, and he sent copies of it to President Reagan, New York Governor Mario Cuomo, state and federal legislators, the Senior Army Depot, and the American Legion and VFW posts of the area. After describing the potentially large crowds that might come into Seneca County for the summer's demonstrations, Moran asked his neighbors to envision the scene:

There is color in my vision of the scene—red, white, and blue. The citizens of the cities, villages, hamlets and farms have lined the streets and the roads with American flags. There isn't a house or business without our symbol of freedom. Flags fly from the barns.

And when, a thought. The red, white, and blue add national eos to make our heart and the mind. The dissidents may have some symbol of their fervent dedication, but we have our own. Let's present it, and proudly.

Come on! The flag is already up over our house. Unfurl yours. Go buy one. They are inexpensive and easy to find. Instead of a roadside debacle on Aug. 1, let us put on one that demonstrates our cultural unity and our flag-strengthening our message of belief. What a sight!
Moran had to exhort his neighbors in this way, he later explained, because it was not always easy for people to do what they should. But flag flying was not a criterion used to judge whether the local people were loyal Americans; their commitment to the American way of life was not being called into question. Perhaps the neighbors recognized, as Moran himself did, that flying the flag regularly was a difficult chore. Moran was sure his neighbors would show their true colors when reminded. Indeed, once they saw that flying the flag would make a point, his neighbors did not disappoint him. Many took the opportunity to display the flag and their Americanism in a variety of ways in the next several weeks. Finger Lakes Times printed a July 4 centerfold of the American flag and encouraged local residents to put it up in their window. Flags started flying on businesses and residences and also showed up as decals in car windows. One resident who noticed the American flags on the beauty parlor, grocery store, and gas station in Romulus thanked the encampment women in a letter to the editor for reminding the locals to be patriotic. A visitor to the area, seemingly unaware of the controversy that had spawned the flag display, expressed her appreciation of the fearful and omnipresent flags in a letter to the editor. The Waterloo VFW post donated to residents in Romulus about 250 of the little American flags that are used to decorate veteran graves.
on Memorial Day. The residents used them to line the road from the peace encampment to the main gate of the army depot. Everyone knew the women were going to protest at that gate, they had to walk a mile or so down U.S. Route 96 between two knee-high rows of fluttering miniature Old Glories.

True to his word, Emerson Moran went to the press with the story of the women’s “refusal” to fly the American flag. In print, radio, and television interviews, Moran explained the incident with great flourish. The stories accompanying the interviews noted how the construction of Moran’s “test” by citing negative local reactions to the decision and by pointing to the flag issue as another ambiguity in the women’s behavior. One article about the flag controversy, titled “Breach of Flag Sparks Debate” (Syracuse Post-Standard, July 9, 1983), quoted Chet Todd, the owner of the barber shop in Romulus: “If we weren’t a free country, they couldn’t do this. If they were doing this in Russia they’d be shipped to Siberia. I imagine if you don’t fly the flag, you don’t have much love for America.”

Accompanying the article was a photograph of Emerson Moran, shown handing out flags in downtown Romulus. The caption quoted Moran: “I told them the flag would communicate to the neighborhood that they aren’t a bunch of crazy communist women, but Americans just like the folks who live here.” Moran could point out, with undeniable logic, that his flag and his refusal to fly it in that way revealed his real nature: “If you don’t respect the flag, you don’t respect America.”

Another article, titled “Flag Issue Raises Romulus Residents’ Ire” (Elmira Sunday Telegram, July 9, 1983), showed a photograph of Emerson Moran with a flag sitting on his knee. The article quoted him: “It was a dandy flag... nice aluminum pole, with an eagle on top, attached to Emerson Moran, the erstwhile donor, "and I sit here, flag on knee, waiting for them to change their minds and call and say they’ll at least fly the flag on the Fourth of July."

This article also suggested that the flag incident helped set the identity of these women: “The town sympathy... one can only conclude what some of them have thought all along. That some of the demonstrators are communists or, at least, being used by communist forces.”

And then there was one more incident to add fuel to the fire. Moran was in the post office when one of the women came in and asked for stamps. He said the woman didn’t want stamps with the American flag on them.
"She said to the fella behind the counter, 'Don't you have anything else?' And he gave her a sheet with Martin Luther King but she wouldn't take them with the flags. Now, I can understand that, that I think she came of three kids not going too far in their thinking," said Moran.

What was interpreted as another damning bit of evidence came in the form of a comment from one of the peace encampment women on why she felt the flag had been rejected. In the first paragraph of the same July 9, 1983, Syracuse Post-Standard article in which Emerson Moran was shown handing out American flags, Dorothy Emerson, an encampment participant, was quoted as saying that the American flag means "terrorism, oppression, imperialism, economic rip-off." Although she was identified as only one of a hundred women at the encampment, her comments were taken as representative of everyone there and were used to justify local concerns. Many letters to the editor in the next several weeks responded directly to Dorothy Emerson's comments. "I was disgusted and particularly distressed," said one writer, "in that, I believe in respect and justice for the American people, and I believe in what the American flag means: liberty, independence, freedom." (Syracuse Post-Standard, July 15, 1983)

Once Dorothy Emerson had spoken, the encampment women suddenly seemed to have a voice, an identifiable position that could be challenged and argued. Others took up the opportunity to address the encampment now that they had a recognizable enemy. In their letters to the editor and comments to the newspapers, local residents phrased more specific concerns about the encampment once they had a clear issue—the rejection and misinterpretation of the American flag—upon which to focus. For example, on July 25 the Syracuse Post-Standard ran a letter under the heading "Our Youth Has Lost Pride in Flag":

After reading the article, "Sparks Debate" July 9, I felt compelled to write in response. Dorothy Emerson was supposed to have stated that the American flag means "terrorism, oppression, imperialism, economic rip-off." I was in school in the early 1940's, in a young man on Quonset Field, Cape Girardeau and Bixby, seeing my friends and comrades give their lives, fight, and be proud of fighting for our democratic way of life. At the age of 60 years, I still retain my nationalistic pride that makes my heart beat faster and my eyes water.
Oh Say Can You See whenever I see our flag waving in the breeze. When they play the national anthem, I still feel so lucky to be living in the United States that my heart feels like it is about to burst.

Now I find myself thinking, maybe we were wrong after all. It seems that we were so busy to get back into the mainstream of life that we failed to instill in our children the pride in God and country that was our way of life in the good old days. We didn’t want our children to know the hard times, how precious a thing was when you had to work and sweat to earn it. We won’t find a generation of young who are used to the good life. If it feels good, do it. If you want it, tell Mom and Dad, they will get it for you. Forget the expense. Live for today. How can we expect them to be any different? They are what we made.

Our public officials have let us down, mostly because we don’t get involved. Let the other guy take care of it. Good, compassion, generosity, love of our land and order have become a way of life. Divorce, abortion, rape, murder, alcoholism, homelessness—the list is endless. One generation it was not respectable for our flag was not respectable for this. We did it ourselves. Now we must pay the penalty.

Until we decide to do something collectively to right these situations, we will have people like Dorothy Emerson damn our God, country and flag. As for me, I might be ashamed, and so should we, to be identified for our flag and our nation’s pride, but until then, I’ll stand up and voice my love for my God and my country. I want my country’s flag draped over my coffin. Yes I love my God, I love my country’s flag, and above all I love my country for giving me the freedom to choose the other two.

Oh Say Can You See

One point that Moran and the women of the peace camp agreed on by the end of the summer was that the flag offer ended up being a test of the women’s character. In a September 22, 1983, “open letter to Emerson Moran” (signed by six women with the disclaimer that they did not speak for the whole encampment), some of the women made clear their annoyance with Moran’s summer-long accusations about flag desecrations at the encampment:

What was in your mind when you offered the flag to the women’s peace camp in the first place? Was it truly a well-intentioned gift? Because your present seemed to be foisted upon the encampment as an attempt to coerce us rather than given with kindness, out of a sense of friendship. By using a confrontatory manner and attempting to force us into a situation of acceptance, you have eliminated the purpose and joy of
receiving, anything. If refusing to accept or acknowledge a present from an obviously unfriendly source with underlying motive (bullying and/or challenging) constitutes desecration, then pardon us.

The women concluded their letter with the question, "Next time, why didn’t you just send a pizza?"