

Local
Red, white and blue -- all shades of splendor
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I know this may sound corny and old-fashioned to some people. But I think the American flag is beautiful.

I'm not just talking about the ideals the American flag stands for, or the glorious and troubled history that it represents. I mean it's beautiful in color and shape and form: The 13 red and white stripes, the 50 white stars in a blue field, waving in a breeze against a bright blue sky. It's a work of art.

In fact, while I may be a bit prejudiced on this, as I scan the "Flags of the World" in the encyclopedia I can't see another nation's flag that compares. The French tricolor, the blue cross of Finland, the sword-carrying lion of Sri Lanka -- no other flag quite matches the beauty of the American flag.

And that raises the question: If American flags are so beautiful, how come there weren't more of them on display in Orange County on Independence Day?

Oh sure, compared with a normal day there were a lot of flags flying on the Fourth. Some cities put them up on utility poles, and some businesses hung them out front. There were American flags on graves at cemeteries, and in one neighborhood I noticed that every single house had a small American flag planted on a stick in the front yard. Unfortunately, affixed to each stick was the business card of a real estate agent -- which kind of makes you wonder if the primary motive was patriotism, or entrepreneurship.

Anyway, yes, there were more flags than usual. But as I drove around on the Fourth I couldn't help noticing how relatively few private homes had American flags on display. Maybe it's just a matter of perception, but it seems to me that people don't fly the flag on the Fourth of July as much as they used to.

For example, on Michel Place in Placentia, a street of some two dozen pleasant, well-maintained middle-class homes, only four American flags were flying. Just four.

"I really couldn't tell you why that is," Michel Place resident Jim McMullen, 61, who was flying one of the flags, told me. "I believe it's important to show the flag on the Fourth of July and Memorial Day and the other holidays. I think it looks real nice, too."

Exactly.

Now, I don't mean to single out the good folks of Michel Place. Although I'm sure it varied widely, from what I could see, Michel Place's one-in-six flag-to-no-flag ratio was about average -- maybe even a little better than average.

And I certainly don't mean to imply that people who didn't fly a flag on the Fourth are somehow lesser citizens than those who did. This is, after all, America, and if you can't or don't want to fly a flag, that's up to you. Nobody's going to make you.

Still, like I said, I think an American flag is a beautiful thing. So anyone who wants to add to the collective beauty of Orange County on Independence Day or Memorial Day or Veterans Day or Flag Day -- or any day, for that matter -- can do it easily enough.

Just take that red, white and blue American work of art.

And run it up a flagpole.

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