The History of American Flags

The American flag's first maker is unknown. The legend of Betsy Ross began around the 1870s, but at the time of the American Revolution, there were 17 flag makers in the city. The Americans tried to unify under the Albany Plan of Benjamin Franklin with the "Join or Die" flag. The colonies were not ready for unity at the time, but that changed in 1775–76. The Continental Congress appointed George Washington as commander of the Continental Army. When he arrived in Boston to take charge of the Army, the flag the troops held was the British Crosses of Saint George—blue signifying England; St. Patrick, white signifying Ireland; and St. Andrew, red signifying Scotland, with seven red stripes and six white ones—13 in all.

By the 1860s, the flag was displayed on government buildings and ships. The Military carried their regimental colors and were not allowed to carry the American flag into battle until 1834, when artillery units could—the Marines were allowed in 1876 and Cavalry in 1887. To lose a unit's colors was a disgrace, and a national disgrace if the American flag was lost in battle. Stephen Crane's book *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) tells the story of the battlefield and the colors.

The flag has been a symbol for communicating the identity of American forces throughout the world. It represents the ideas and values of the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. Over a million Americans have died defending the American flag around the world.