

Base text

Our flag is one with colors every so bright
A symbol of goodwill and all that's right
It is a beacon for those who are oppressed
Who pine to live in the land of the blessed

It represents a dream to those from afar
That things can be much better than they are
They look upon our flag as an emblem of hope
When from their oppression they wish to elope

Our flag stands for freedom and basic human rights
It serve as a rally when against tyranny we must fight
It was conceived in battle when our country was young
And many have defended it since our liberty was won

It represents a place where dreams can come true
Where men and women can live the life they chose
Without fear from some maniacal regime
Standing ready to crush their dreams

Our flag stands for liberty and justice for all
It stands for a country ruled by law
And when in a parade I see it passing by
I cannot hide my patriotic pride

Part 1 – Complex Transformation

Our flag is one with colors every so bright
A symbol of the disparity between black and white
It isn't a beacon for those oppressed
Instead reminding them of their distress

It represents danger to those from afar
That things can't get much worse than they are
Another school shooting that steals all hope
A society from which we wish to elope

Our flag stands for white supremacy and wealth
Ignoring the poor who suffer ill health
It was conceived in battles still fought today
Though has done little for the state of disarray

It represents a place where homelessness prevails
Where men and women seek shelter by rails
Living in fear of the maniacal regime
Shaking their heads at the 'American dream'

Our flag stands for prejudice against the poor
It stands for a country unequal by law
And when in a parade I see it passing by
I shake my head at the American lie

Part B – Defense

For many decades America has been regarded as one of the strongest, wealthiest and most powerful nations in the world. Perceived as the 'land of opportunity,' (Romney, 2012) means that many may fail to delve into the countless problems prevalent in American society. The invited reading of Ellen Bailey's 'Our American Flag' portrays the country as a beacon of hope, a land whereby humans enjoy equal rights and justice for all. The base text silences certain issues, constructing a particular representation of American society. Through the lenses of several text and world-centered theories, an in-depth analysis and transformation of the text will take place in order to produce a new invited reading that addresses issues of key significance suppressed in the base text.

Textual features within the poem endorse the notion that America is the greatest nation in the world, one without flaws or troubles. The text promotes the invited reading that those who reside in America enjoy basic and equal human rights and are devoid of any suffering. These notions enforce the binary between American civilians and those who live in other countries. A binary opposition "is a word or concept that a community of people generally regard as being opposed to each other." (Moon, 1992, pg. 3). Binary oppositions are incredibly prevalent in texts, creating a "violent hierarchy where one of the two terms govern the other." (Derrida, 1992). In the case of 'Our American Flag,' the language applied to the base text promotes Americans as the dominant civilization. Below is a table of binary oppositions present in the text. (See Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

Superior	Inferior
Bright	Dull
Right	Wrong
Dream	Nightmare
Hope	Despair
Freedom	Incarceration
Liberty	Imprisonment
Justice	Injustice
Equal	Unequal
White	Black
Rich	Poor
Pride	Shame
Equity	Inequity

Derrida explains, "Western philosophy decrees that in each of these binary operations or opposing centers, one concept is superior and defines itself by its

opposite or inferior center.” (Derrida, cited in Bressler, 2003, pg. 109). Thus, the binary oppositions used promote America as the leader of the Western World, furthering affirming the belief that Americans are superior. For example, the presence of binaries in the base text such as freedom/incarceration, justice/injustice and hope/despair promote the ideology that Americans enjoy the privileges of freedom, justice and hope and that those deemed ‘oppressed’ are exposed to the inferior of the pair. Another element assisting in a text centered analysis is that of semiotics.

Semiotics are “a major tool of literary criticism that connect a text to the universe of signs, imbuing the text with its particular, historically based meanings.” (Matthews, 2017, pg. 2). It is a crucial element in literary analysis, subtly convey the ideals and values of the text. Referred to as a linguistic sign, semiotics consists of a signifier and a signified. Abrams (2009) elaborates on this concept when he writes, “A linguistic sign consists of the signifier, which in language is a set of speed sounds or marks on a page, and the signified, which is the concept or idea behind the sign.” (pg. 357). Through the analysis of ‘Our American Flag,’ many signs that influenced the invited readings and ideals promoted became apparent. Below is a table demonstrating the semiotics present in the base text which will be referenced further throughout the analysis. (See Table 1.2).

Table 1.2

Signifier	Sign (meaning)	Signified (meaning in the context of the poem)
Flag	Marker of a country or institution	Nationalism/patriotism
Beacon	Light or warning	America is portrayed as a shining light among other nations
Liberty	The state of being free	Those who reside in America live a life of freedom and luxury
Justice	Just behavior or treatment	America is a fair country whose residents are fairly treated
Parade	Celebration	Marching, flags, cheer

Through the analysis of many signs, ‘Our American Flag’ clearly connotes that American society is fair and just, and that those who reside in America achieve any dreams and aspirations that they hold. The inclusion of terms such as ‘liberty’ and ‘parade’ signify celebrations of freedom, while the signifier of a beacon suggests

that America is a shining light among other nations. These semiotics further reinforce the binary between America and other countries.

'Our American Flag' can be further interpreted and analyzed through the lens of post-colonial criticism. Emerging in the mid 1950s following World War 2, post colonialism "analyzes literature produced by cultures that developed in response to colonial domination, from the first point of contact to the present." (Tyson, 2015, pg. 398). Furthermore, the application of postcolonial criticism "represents an attempt to investigate the complex and deeply fraught dynamics of modern Western colonialism and anticolonial resistance, and the ongoing significance of the colonial encounter for people's lives both in the West and the non-West." (Prasad, 2003). One of the primary aspects of post-colonial criticism is that of an 'Orient.' Proposed by Edward Said, the Orient refers to Eastern countries deemed primitive and irrational by the West. According to Said, Orientalism's formation of the Orient served in defining the West as the contrasting image, idea and personality of the Orient. Thus, the construction of the Orient 'linked the West with the superior pole of these binaries, and relegated the non-West to the inferior pole.' (Said, 1978, pg. 62). In the base text, language has been used to promote America and the culture of the West, relegating other civilisations to a position of inferiority. In the poem Bailey states, "It (the flag) is a beacon for those who are oppressed, who pine to live in the land of the blessed." Thus, the text demoralises Eastern countries and people by promoting the belief that they are discontent with their lives in the Orient. The use of the word blessed implies religious connotations, whereby it is both a privilege and honour to live in America under God's blessing, further reinforcing the superiority of America. The poem further states, "Where men and women can live the life they chose, without fear from some maniacal regime." This extract promotes the reading that other countries are simply maniacal in comparison to the safety and surety of America. According to Said, the world is "divided into mutually excluding opposites: if the *Self* is ordered, rational, masculine, good, then the *Other* is chaotic, irrational, feminine and evil." (Griffiths, 2002, pg. 96). Thus, America is identified as the *Self*, perceived as a rational and structured society, while other nations are viewed as maniacal and threatening. The base text lends itself to be further analysed through the lens of Marxism.

'Marxism,' a literary analysis theory constituted by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "analyses society in terms of class conflict and sees history as a revolutionary struggle between those who have power and those who don't." (Bressler, 2003, pg. 166). Marxism can be used when analyzing the base text in order to criticize the base text's marginalization of the oppressed. Though the base text promotes the invited reading that all residing in America live a fulfilled and prosperous life, "The United States is in fact a society riven with deep class contradictions." (Peterson, 2014). While 'Our American Flag' does not explicitly detail the conflict in society,

the views presented are incredibly narrow-minded, centered around specific political and social values that may be at odds with the lived experiences of many Americans. Pope (1998) discusses the role of the reader in recognizing elements of Marxism in a text; "The role of the critical reader is to search for the 'gaps and silences'; the figures and events that have been quickly glossed over, marginalised or ignored." Marxist theory overlaps with the critical practise of 'deconstruction,' whereby the focus is on, "the contradictions and inconsistencies within a text, what the text excludes as much as what it includes," (Herrett, 2003, pg. 42). By harassing the base text, it has become evident that the poem has excluded and marginalized those struggling and oppressed in American society, instead deeming all residing in the United States as 'blessed.' Pope (1998) further states, "Every text can be characterised not only by what it does talk about, its expressed subject matter (its presences) but also by what it repressed or suppresses (its absences)." The base text clearly ignores the societal inequity prevalent in American society, suppressing the homeless, the poor that are unable to gain leverage in society and the innocent victims of gun violence.

Lois Tyson has expanded on these misleading ideals in America when she states,

"Marxist analysis reveals that the American dream is an ideology, a belief system, not an innate or natural way of seeing the world. The American dream blinds us to the enormities of its own failure, past and present: the genocide of Native Americans, the enslavement of Africans, the abuses suffered by immigrant populations, the widening economic gulf between America's rich and poor, the growing ranks of the homeless and hungry, the enduring socioeconomic barriers against women and people of colour." (Tyson, 2015, pg. 55).

By analysing the base text through the lens of Marxism, it has become extremely evident that 'Our American Flag' has suppressed many of the issues concerning American society by privileging capitalist views held by those in power.

Following the analysis of 'Our American Flag,' it can be ascertained that the base text explicitly supports the notion that America is the strongest, fairest and most powerful nation in the world. However, according to Derrida, "no text is fixed, stable, and completely circumscribed by its predetermined standpoint. Deconstructive writing actively disrupts the insistence that a text be read in a prescribed manner." (Derrida, cited in Silverman, 2004, pg. 11). Therefore, it is possible to challenge the invited reading by transforming the base text into a poem that instead highlights the prevalent issues and blaring inequity in American society.

In order to construct a resistant reading, "micro and macro linguistic changes are made to the base text." (Pope, 1995, pg. 2). A widened vocabulary and the

implementation of a number of text and world centered theories assisted in challenging the invited reading of the base text.

In order to manipulate the binary oppositions and semiotics present, it was required that the language features be subverted rather than inverted in order to reposition the reader to view America as an unjust and problem-ridden nation. Inverting the text would simply involve reversing any binaries present. However, by subverting the binary oppositions, a contrasting rather than opposite view is put forward. This is supported by Hourihan when she states, "The trouble with dualism is that if you simply turn it on its head it is still a dualism. Inversion is not the same as subversion." (Hourihan, 1997). By maintaining some of the original lines of the poem but altering the meaning conveyed, a strong and contrasting message was relayed without simply reversing the original text. The binary oppositions transformed are displayed in the table below. See Table 1.3.

Table 1.3

Original	Transformed	New meaning
Our flag stands for freedom and basic human rights	Our flag stands for white supremacy and wealth	White people rule society with no regard for those of color, while those who are wealthy hold all power.
It represents a place where dreams can come true	It represents a place where homelessness prevails	America is ridden with homelessness that is ever increasing
They look upon our flag as an emblem of hope, when from their oppression they wish to elope	Another school shooting that steals all hope, a society from which we wish to elope	The school shootings prevalent in American society devoid Americans of hope and a sense of belonging.
Our flag stands for liberty and justice for all	Our flag stands for prejudice against the poor	American society is categorized by discrimination against social classes

As a textual intervention "requires writers to rewrite texts that reposition readers from the invited reading of the base text to an oppositional or resistant reading in the transformation," (Johnson, 2001, pg. 51) it was necessary to subvert the binary oppositions to promote an alternate reading. As shown above, in the base text Bailey stated, "Our flag stands for freedom and basic human rights." Simply inverting the text would shift the line to, "Our flag stands for captivity and a lack of

human rights." However, by subverting the base text a new notion was put forward that shifted the ideologies of the text, thus intervening in the text's invited reading.

A fundamental element of post-colonialism is that of "interrupting, intervening and opening up the discourses of the dominant, restoring plurality and tension." (Mishra, 2005, pg. 386). This aspect corresponds with Marxism, whereby the text is analyzed to reveal "the dominant class and its accompanying ideology being imposed either consciously or unconsciously upon the proletariat." (Bressler, 2003, pg. 167). In the base text, no mention was made of those suffering from homelessness, expensive health care and preposterous gun laws. As "successful texts position readers to read in agreement with the invited reading of the text," (Johnson, 2001, pg. 48) it was necessary to draw attention to the prevalence of inequality and fear in American society to promote an alternate reading. The original lines of "It represents a place where dreams come true, where men and women can live the life they choose," were instead altered to, "It represents a place where homelessness prevails, where men and women seek shelter by rails." The invited reading of the base text has been altered by exposing the voices silenced in the base text. By giving a voice to the marginalized, the transformed text provides a resistant reading which scrutinizes America's societal inequity.

In order to promote contrasting values and beliefs, it was necessary to transform the semiotics present in the base text, as semiotics serve to "establish a relationship between the text and certain cultural beliefs and values" (Moon, 1992, pg. 139). Moon (1992) argues, "People make meanings by selecting elements from a system and combining these according to established rules." (pg. 139). Thus, the elements of the text had to be transformed in order to disrupt the invited meaning. Below is a table demonstrating how the semiotics were transformed to produce new meanings. See Table 1.4.

Table 1.4

Base text signifier	Transformed signifier	New signified
Liberty	Inequity	Society in America in unequal and discriminatory.
Justice	Prejudice	Americans are judged based on their socioeconomic class.
Freedom	White supremacy	There is a large divide in America between the black and white. Those in power hold white supremacist views.

Signifiers such as 'liberty' and 'justice' in the base text established a false relationship whereby one succumbed to the belief that Americans enjoy freedom and equal rights. In order to challenge the values promoted, the signifiers were transformed. The original signifiers of 'liberty' and 'freedom' were instead changed to 'white supremacy' and 'inequity,' subsequently challenging the 'signified' meaning in the context of the poem. The poem no longer promoted the signified meaning that Americans enjoy the privileges of liberty and freedom, instead berating the inequity present in American society as a result of those in power.

The purpose of a complex transformation is to undermine and ultimately disrupt a text's invited readings. As "no text is neutral and all texts aim to coerce readers into accepting certain views of the world," (Johnson, 2001, pg. 223), the transformation of a text allows for an alternative reading to be communicated. The base text of 'Our American Flag' promoted the belief that America is the strongest and fairest nation in the world. However, by subverting the text and implementing the use of many text and world centered theories, the reader has been repositioned to view America as an unjust and unequal society that fails to cater for all classes present. Those who were previously silenced in 'Our American Flag' were given a voice in the transformation, exposing the societal classes ignored in the base text. The transformation served to divulge the hidden discrepancies in the base text, completely challenging the invited reading promoted.

