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Pillory Revisited

When 17-year-old Martha Meyers of Arlington, Mass., set fire to her country's flag, serious questions should have been asked about the causes of an alienation that led to so offensive an act, even amid the emotional confusion of a political protest. Young people ought to be able to disagree vehemently with their country's policies without stooping to the desecration of symbols which stand not for those policies, but for ideals and visions that transcend any era of momentary conflict.

But how much understanding of those ideals and visions can be claimed by the judges who punished the offense, at first with a six-month jail sentence and subsequently, in what was to be a show of mercy, a year's probation on condition that the culprit carry a large American flag on a three-mile march through town?

Martha may wonder how far the courts of her community have progressed from the days of stocks and pillory. The judicial minds in the case might ponder whether the exposure of heretics to public scorn is the best way to create love and respect for the flag and the principles for which it ought to stand.