



**THE JOURNAL of
FLAGS AUSTRALIA
VOL. 37/1, NO. 149
JANUARY-
MARCH 2024**



**"Behold!
an eight-
pointed
Star"**

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CONTACTS

Crux Australis

PO Box 233 MILSONS POINT NSW 1565

Editor, *Crux Australis* Correspondence as above. Phone 0425 376074

Corporate Secretary

PO Box 5245 PINESWOOD Victoria 3149

(Public Officer) Melbourne

Enquiries Sydney

Phone 03-9884 4434

0411 237 998

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COVER: School children in Minnesota get acquainted with the state's new flag, its design simple and subliminal - the North Star guiding the state, its outline symbolised shown as two oblique lines. The flag is also unusual in opting for two shades of blue, the innovation derived from the colours and stripes of the winning design submitted to the Selection Committee - a procedure parallel with the way in which the Australian flag was chosen in 1901. Photo: Minnesota State Emblems Re-design Committee (SERC)



While there is obviously a thing about stars on flags (a third of UN Members, 50 on the US flag alone), bookends to this edition are two articles on flag changes in the United States, drawing together reports from vexillological circles, local press and other commentaries, the Minnesota narrative uses section headings. In the US the trend spreads for the revision of State and other civic flags - Maine in 2023 and Illinois maybe in 2025. (Or even other regional flags, if obvious deep political divisions lead to a second collapse of the Union itself). Putin and puppets may so hope - ironically: the Russian state collapsed twice in the last century, and might again when, the generational cost is revealed.

The first article outlines the remarkably speedy process in 2023 (and with hints to emulators), by which Minnesota adopted new State symbols, an outcome sought by many Minnesotans over several decades (and still with a star, BTW). The edition closes with arrangements for possible change of flag for another North Star state: the current flag of Maine, adopted in 1909, is one of around 30 US State flags basically a badge on a dark blue background, the badges so complex that one flag is hardly distinguishable from another (25 even add labels and dates). The proposal is that Maine return to its short-lived flag of 1901, or rework 350 suggestions received in July: after all, beige is an odd background for a flag.

Even vexillologists can be surprised. See the Minnesota result. Overall, a move towards simpler flags is possibly the result of wider acquaintance with Roman Mars' TED Talk in 2015 on guidelines for practical design, or at least the three essentials: graphic simplicity, few but contrasting colours, an economy of symbolism (why two symbols, if one will cover both?)

That flag fiddling can be overdone for the sake of designers' idiosyncrasies or the mistaken idea (in flags) that *more* is more, is illustrated in reports on political and sporting symbols (Portugal and United Kingdom respectively), especially if the fiddling had a commercial or political woke motivation in the first place.

Matthew Renzelmann examines whether Artificial Intelligence and Flag Design are compatible. To date, hardly, in evidence of a flawed feed of symbols and thinking outside the square - itself a sign of natural human genius. Inadequate - and even wrong - input will always hatch a parson's egg, "good in parts." Renzelman's reservations on a role for AI in flag design are vindicated - for now. Social media deliver their own mock salute in weird homage to a sausage sizzle.

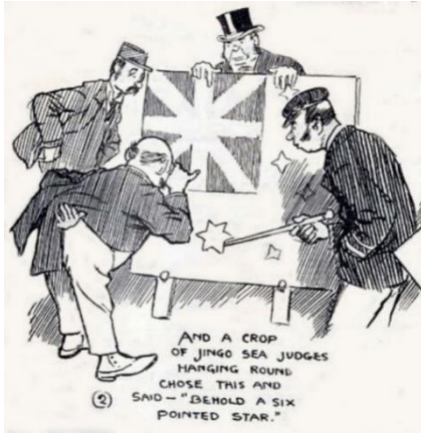
Real-life experience and cold data processing might one day fuse, but so far AI is a clumsy instrument (at least in good flag design). To pretend otherwise ignores humanity as we know it - unless we can be duped, catatonic, to accept another understanding of human emotion and talent. Meanwhile, the serendipity often found in actual human experience quietly glows in Joseph Staub's modest account of *How I Became Interested in Vexillology*.

Tony Burton Editor

THE RIGHT STAR MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

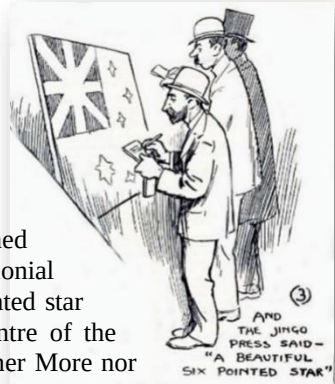
*... And a crop of jingo sea
judges hanging round chose this,
and said: "behold -
a six pointed star."*

*And the jingo press said
"a beautiful six-pointed star"
- The Bulletin, 21 September 1901*



In 1901 a public competition was held for a flag for the new Commonwealth - a federation of the six existing self-governing British colonies.

With three of the colonies already displaying the Southern Cross on their flags, the judges determined that the design least dissimilar to the entrenched colonial ensigns was "sufficient" by adding a large six-pointed star below the canton, but pointing directly to the centre of the Imperial banner - an instance where Less was neither More nor less confusing ...



... AND FROM 1908, A SEVEN-POINTED STAR!



If Texas is the Lone Star State in the US, and Minnesota, Maine, and Alaska the "North Star States," what to make of the lone six-pointed star on the flag designed for the new Australian Government?

In 1908 the Commonwealth flag acquired a seventh point for its hoist-side star after Australia acquired administration of British Papua (and after 1918, ex-German New Guinea as well). While six of the points were interpreted to represent the six founding states, the seventh point now representing various other territories, two continental, the others maritime. Eight-pointed stars are also found on the historically significant Eureka Flag raised briefly in December 1854 on the Victorian goldfields and still regarded as an authentic Australian icon.



FOR MINNESOTA, THE BRIGHTEST STAR MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE:

**BEHOLD! ...
AN EIGHT-POINTED STAR!**

**INTRODUCTION:
THE STRUCTURE AND CONDUCT
OF FLAG DESIGN COMPETITIONS**

Tony Burton, Flags Australia

Australians especially can relate to the headlines above. A similar, indeed, pioneering, process was adopted (at first reluctantly) in 1901 by the new Federal Government as a model for taking (or making) an aggregate of 32,000 design suggestions to influence their own preconceptions and perceptive skills.¹ There were no “vexillologists” in those days, but at least the Melbourne team had access to centuries of heraldic conventions and practice. The Minnesota Committee, possibly unaware of the pioneer experience, followed a similar path.

The 2023 Minnesota competition considered a much smaller number of alternative designs, some still rough around the edges. Of these the Committee took note, but did not consider any workable in other wise than to assist their own discretion, and from the advised grasp of the dynamics of flag design, the ability to derive a new design - and leaving their choice of finalist without hard feelings in their taking his design further, to unwrap a revolutionary design.

The final design is more than merely a common denominator - though in the Australian case in 1901, there were some criteria considered not negotiable: the retention of the Union Jack, and the use of the Southern Cross, a symbol at the time unique to British colonies in the Pacific (and from 1889, Brazil).

As in the Australian and other flag design contests since, Commission members (the judges) don't have to take any design as is. They can tweak the “winning” flag and Seal design, potentially incorporating an idea from others that didn't make the final cut.¹ In the Minnesota experience three designs were accepted as capable of further work. The North Star survives from the previous overdecorated State flag and other new proposals - notably the blue, white, green, gold star designed in 1989 by Lee Herold and William Becker.

1 See RD Kelly, *Crux Australis* Vol. 37, No 148, Oct-Dec 2023, a detailed outline of the process by which an Australian flag designed and chosen in 1901, slightly amended in 1908, was formally made the national flag (Flags Act 1953).

VEXO-PUNDIT PONTIFICATES

Source: YouTuber's critique of Minnesota state flag finalists draws 1 million views, after Stephen Swanson, **CBS Minnesota**, 19 December 2023.

A video posted - just hours before the Minnesota State Emblems Redesign Commission (SERC) published its final recommendation - the prolific American educational YouTuber, podcaster, and live-streamer based in the UK, CGT Grey gave his take on the three finalists, his video attracting nearly 1.3 million views.



In his animated reaction to the three, Grey had a clear favorite, **(left)** which he called "Polaris Tricolor." Here's how he described the design:

Starting with a hoist design in the simplified shape of Minnesota, an 8-pointed star is centered inside with more of a twinkled look. From that feature, tricolors extend for the lakes, land, and snow.

"The white stripe on top makes it more distinct from some of the most well-known tricolors. And the slightly muted colors convey a northern kind of cold coziness and look better together than brightening the blue ... The design is so strong it would survive small changes, but they'd hurt my heart a bit ... It's awesome!"

He goes on to say it stands out not only among (US) State flags, but also world flags. And it looks "great" both horizontally and vertically. *"It's a unique design element, not just among state flags, but world flags. I can't believe no tricolour hoist has inverted a triangle before because it looks so truly traditional."*

(Well, CGP, in 2015 John Bond in Australia did just this, as had others before him, thinking boomerangs. See *Crux Australis* Vol. 37 No.48 Oct-Dec 2023, p199: Ed.)



Grey has less to say about the design he calls "Star Rise" **(left)**. Here's his description: *Star Rise centers (?) the North Star, here with eight points to distinguish it from the standard State stars. The blue is the sky that gives colors to Minnesota's 10,000 lakes, with a rolling green landscape for the forests and farms, and a bit of snow up top because it's cold up top.*

He calls this design "fine," and "mediocre good." "My main complaint is that it's so good at evoking the idea of a landscape that it looks odd when hung vertical."



Grey focuses most of his energy on annihilating his least favorite finalist, **(left)** which he calls "Old Wavy." Here's his description: *An approximate shape here again is a North Star, this time distinct as four points in yellow. On the upper fly, swirls described as wisps of snow, clouds, and an Aurora, are reflected along the bottom half as the head of the Mississippi River. You might discern even a Loon, the State bird. You might not, but it's there.*

Grey calls this last one "easily the awfulest," and (*ironically, given the final product, Ed.*) so "painfully modern" that it's "destined to date in under a decade." He says he even prefers Minnesota's old flag in comparison, which he believes was the worst State flag in the Union.

Interestingly, and perhaps for designers to take to heart, he adds: "**I think (Old Wavy) really represents the potential danger in flag re-designs. Maybe it can serve as a warning to any States who might want to go next ... The goal of a flag is not to use pre-existing symbols but to become a symbol of its city, or state.**"

Alas, the non-Minnesotan American expat in the UK concedes his opinions ultimately don't matter. "I'm just here because I can't stop myself from being on the edge of my seat to see what Minnesota selects for herself," he said. "Please pick **Tricolor Polaris**, though."

When Minnesota's new state flag starts flying (in May 2024), it will almost certainly incorporate hues of blue and white and the symbol of the North Star. That imagery rose to the top as the State Emblems Redesign Commission (SERC), reduced more than 2,000 public submissions to six - and then to three.

The Committee also zeroed in on five favorites for a new State Seal, gravitating toward representations of snow, forests, the North Star and a Loon, the State's bird.

SELECTION OF A STATE SEAL

Why no Loons on the new state flag finalists?

Grey says the **State Seal** is where you should "stick all the stuff of the State ... like the Loon and the Mississippi and the, ah, Aurora?" By the way, he's a very big fan of Minnesota's new Seal (**right**) - "a total banger!"



Left: The Star, even in filigree, in the end gave way to a more detailed stylizing of everything.
Above: The Loon has landed.

SENSITIVITIES

Briana Biersbasch, *Politics and Government reporter, The Star Tribune*

When Minnesota's new state flag starts flying (in May 2024), it will almost certainly incorporate hues of blue and white and the symbol of the North Star, imagery that rose to the top as the State Emblems Redesign Commission (SERC) winnowed the more than 2000 public submissions to the three on page 6, and five favored for a new State Seal, gravitating toward representations of snow, forests, the North Star and a Loon, the State bird.

"We are distilling a wealth of excellent ideas," Luis Fitch, the chair of the Commission, said at the start of a public hearing that stretched late into the evening. **"We are in the process of crafting - not just choosing - a new flag and Seal."** (cfr compare fn 1, p5 this issue)

The SERC was created by the State Legislature last session to take on the daunting task of redesigning the flag and the Seal in a matter of months to meet a 1 January 2024 deadline. (A similar Commission in Utah had more than a year, and half a million dollars to aid in the effort to redesign their State flag).

The Commission was flooded with submissions from the public, including designs with wintery imagery, pine trees and representations of the State's streams and 10,000 lakes. A few people submitted the current State flag, indicating they don't want change.



Left: Shelley Buck, of the Prairie Island Indian Community Tribal Council, spoke of the importance of representing, or not offending, Native people with the flag choices. (Glen Stubbe, *Star Tribune/The Minnesota Star Tribune*)

Right: Secretary of State, Steve Simon checked the votes on the back of State Seal designs. (Glen Stubbe, *Star Tribune/Minnesota Star Tribune*)



The Commission favored submissions that followed key design principles, including use of only a few colors and imagery that can be recognized from a distance and drawn from memory. Blue, white, green and yellow dominated in the finalist flag designs, as they had been in the Herold-Becker 1989 flag design. And in the context of the flag change in Minnesota, Lee Herold, who owns Herold Flags in Rochester, and knows which designs are popular with customers puts it: *"A good flag gets used a lot ... When they come in, you can see in their eyes if this means something to them and they are buying something special."*²

2 For Australians, that means the Southern Cross? *Ed.*

The final design must also consider the State's history while representing "Minnesota's enduring values and aspirations," according to a design brief from the Commission. In fact, Commission members saw the North Star as the most unifying symbol for the State. Many flag submissions also included loons or other State symbols, such as the Lady's Slipper flower or the pine tree. But neither of these made it into the finalists for the flag, partly as those symbols carry less meaning in certain regions of the state.

"While loons may be beautiful, and Lady's Slippers and pines also, they don't represent us down here," said Anita Gaul, a Commission member and community college history instructor from southwest Minnesota. "The people of rural Minnesota, the southern part, might favor a different design other than loons."

However, the top vote-getter for the State Seal does feature a Loon, which Committee members thought appropriate as a symbol for the official Seal.

In any case, Commission members don't have to take any design as is. They can tweak the final flag and Seal design, potentially incorporating an idea from a design that didn't make the final cut.

As the Committee narrowed the field, **many members said whatever they choose must be relevant for years to come. They warned against choosing a design that looks "too modern."**³ "In 100 years, will this still look good?" asked Secretary of State Steve Simon, a member of the Commission. "If it screams 2023, do we want to do it?"



Commission Chair Luis Fitch started the discussion of the highest-ranked flag designs, some shown behind him at Tuesday's meeting. Source: Glen Stubbe, *Star Tribune*, ***The Minnesota Star Tribune***

"Having sat on tenterhooks" CGP Grey compared the backlash in Minnesota to the fierce debate in Canada in the 1960's when it adopted its now-iconic Maple Leaf flag. "People went crazy ... and now it's considered one of the best flags in the world, so I have a feeling Minnesota, with some time, will love this new flag."

3 EDITOR'S NOTE:

Bold type above: whatever "too modern" means. Does not age well?

Like the complicated design the new flag replaces? Beware also of archaisms, retained for their nostalgic sentiment: cfr at the end of this edition about the original State flag of Maine. Note also CGP Grey's observation above, and his remark about the Canadian experience. Will the flag of two blues flag age well? It should, as the best flags favour simplicity over clutter, a quality the new design displays, unmistakably the shape of Minnesota in the primary design zone in flags, while the uncomplicated fly end is easily repaired after the inevitable wear and tear in the wind.



STRATEGIC ANTICIPATION - MERCHANDISE READY

The Committee did not leave much to chance. Preparation was key. Not long after the flag was approved, the website *Flags for Good* opened up pre-orders for the new flag. According to the website, *Flags for Good* is waiting on the Commission to "make clear some things before we begin production."

Even so, numerous items with the new flag were already on Etsy, including

- Flags
- Mugs
- Hats and beanies
- Shirts and sweaters
- Blankets
- Tote bags
- Magnets
- Wrapping paper

ENERGETIC

The State Emblems and Recommendation Committee (SERC) first met in mid-September 2023, so they started and finished the work within four months. Members often noted that the timeline was quick given the scope of what they needed to do: change both the Seal and the Flag and make them distinctive. In comparison, in Utah, a panel took 18 months and nearly \$500,000 to design the new flag, according to a CBS affiliate in Salt Lake City.

It is unclear how much it will cost Minnesota to replace the current flags with new ones on state government buildings. WCCO Media has sent questions to relevant state entities. The Secretary of State's office responded that it was unsure of the cost related to replacing items with the Seal on them. The Law says the current Seal - often displayed on official government documents - can be used until the supply is exhausted or until January 2025, whichever comes first. Information about the current Seal will be retained in a collection kept by the Minnesota Historical Society.

Overall, Minnesotans seemed in equal parts transfixed and vexed by the vexillological quest to pick a new state flag design.

Flag experts agree: a simpler design is more eye-catching and memorable.

SERC members are big fans of CGP Grey: "Polaris Tricolor," (Submission F1953) was their ultimate selection for the new flag. However, the Commission then modified the original design, removing its three stripes - a move CGP Grey was adamantly against.

THE TOUGHEST CRITICS: FOURTH GRADERS

Estelle Timar-Wilcox, MPR News, 25 April 2024

The students in Jason Benjamin's fourth-grade class at Burroughs Community School, Minneapolis, are no strangers to the flag selection process. In December, Vice-Chair of the State Emblems Redesign Commission Anita Gaul had come to the class to give a presentation about the process.

At that point, the Commission had yet to vote on its final design. Gaul fielded comments from the kids and took their feedback to the Commission meeting. The class's top pick was ultimately turned down. In December, the students gave mixed reviews of the flag that ended up on top: one deemed it "too flaggy."

But then the Commission modified the original design, removing its stripes.

Gaul then returned to Mr. Benjamin's class to tell them about the end of the selection process. She asked for the class's honest opinions.

"Too simple," one student said. "I don't like the star that much," another added. Several bemoaned the loss of the three horizontal stripes that adorned the initial design of this flag. The white, representing snow, was now gone, as also the green, representing land and forests.

It wasn't all bad, though. Some kids spoke up to defend the colors. Some liked the simplicity of it. "*I like the star,*" one student said. "*I like how the darker blue looks like Minnesota.*"



After two lengthy deliberation sessions on the Class rug, marked by a distinct lack of decorum and no small amount of yelling, they admitted the Commission had a hard task of narrowing more than 2,000 submissions to a final flag. "I think if it were our class, it would take five hundred days," one student estimated.

Above: Flag Commissioner Anita Gaul presents Jason Benjamin's fourth grade class with the new Minnesota state flag and Seal.

Left: Students rush to hang the flag on the door of their class-room on Thursday.

Nicole Neri, MPR News

Despite the critics, the students - or most of them - gave a round of cheers and applause when Gaul gifted them their own flag. Kids jumped up from the rug to help Benjamin hang it on the door. "It looks simple, I know," Gaul told the class, "but it has lots of beautiful symbolism that is meaningful to our state and who we are and what we're all about."

They'll see it on their way in and out every day - and maybe remember the little role they played in getting it here. "To be part of a little bit of Minnesota history - that's just awesome," Benjamin said.

The new flag will be raised at buildings across Minnesota on 11 May 2024, Statehood Day.

OTHER CRITICISM *Nicole Neri for MPR News*

The fourth-graders aren't alone in their skepticism. Minnesotans leveled a variety of critiques at the new flag, from complaints about the final design to complaints that the old flag was replaced at all. The chair of the Minnesota GOP put out a statement denouncing the design; a handful of counties passed resolutions expressing their dissatisfaction with the redesign process.

Gaul has been busy educating people about the flag. She said she's travelled to historical societies and museums across the state to explain how the commission picked it. Education seems to help.

"There's a lot of resistance to it because people don't understand," Gaul said. "You can see light bulbs go off."

For the fourth graders, she points out the North Star, the shades of blue symbolizing a river, and the outline of Minnesota. Plus, she notes, its simplicity can be a good thing.

Flag experts agree: a simpler design is more eye-catching and memorable.

Some of the fourth graders had that light-bulb moment; some weren't convinced. But they mostly agreed that it's a step up from the old flag.

CGP Grey, again, from p7: **"I think Old Wavy (his least favoured of the three finalists) really represents the potential danger in flag redesigns. Maybe it can serve as a warning to any states who might want to go next,"** he said.

"The goal of a flag is not to use pre-existing symbols but to become a symbol of its city, or state." (*Emphasis added - but why not pre-existing symbols? - Ed*).

"... BUT NOT OVER TILL THE FAT LADY SINGS"

Could Minnesota lawmakers change the new state flag and Seal designs?

Some Minnesota Republican lawmakers announced earlier (in December 2023) they wanted to halt the flag's roll out and give Minnesotans a chance to provide more feedback on the design. "Minnesotans deserve the right to vote for what represents them. If that flag is this one or if that (other) flag is the new one, it's a Minnesotan's right to vote," said Rep. Bjorn Olson, R-Fairmont. Republicans introduced three flag-related bills, including one pushing for a referendum on the design that would be put to voters.

"Our current flag is problematic. I think we all know that. We've evolved into a more diverse state and I think it's more reflective of that," State Governor Walz said. "While Republicans are talking about this, I am going to be making sure our kids are eating and we're creating jobs. So they can debate it in the legislature, we will see where it goes."



**FINAL WORD:
DESIGNER OF MINNESOTA'S NEW STATE
FLAG ISN'T BOTHERED BY CRITICISM:
"IT'S AN IMPORTANT CHANGE"**

Stephen Swanson, David Schuman,
Caroline Cummings, CBS Minnesota, 25 April 2024

Some love it, others hate it. In 15 days the new Minnesota state flag will be raised across the state.

The Minnesotan behind the design, Andrew Prekker, spoke with WCCO on Wednesday about the achievement. "It is such a privilege and an honor and I'm so excited to be able to be a part of such an important process," Prekker said.

The Luverne native doesn't have a design background, but says he did a lot of studying. "Vexillology research, which is about experts in flags," he said. "Polling on different websites to see what people wanted to see on the flag, and I also did a lot of research into Minnesota history and culture."



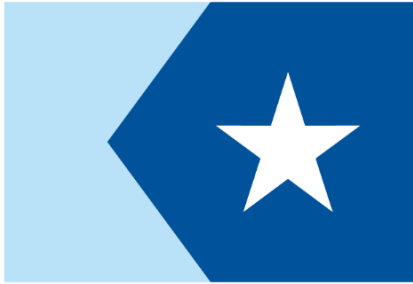
Prekker's original design (**left**) including three bands was modified by the State Commission (SERC), keeping the North Star and abstract shape of Minnesota, but nixed the stripes and opted for all blue, which Prekker says represents water. (The State has thousands of lakes, and locates the headwaters of the Mississippi).

It's gotten pushback from some who wanted more of a say on the new flag. Prekker says he doesn't take the criticism personally. "For me, it's an important change that is necessary to be inclusive to all people in Minnesota, especially our Indigenous communities and tribal nations."

The stripes in Prekker's design announced as one of the three finalists prompted some to allege connections with the star and light blue field of the flag of Somalia - but this anxiety was overcome in the subsequent refinement of Prekker's design.



The Redesign Commission spent four months considering more than 2,100 submissions from the public. Flag expert Ted Kaye, Secretary of the North American Vexillology Association, told WCCO in December he gives the final design an A+. "It's different from all other US state flags and actually, most flags that I've seen," Kaye said. "This special stylized form of the state is a very unusual flag design element."



An abstract representation of the shape of Minnesota (minus the Northwest Angle), in light blue that is reminiscent of ice and snow.

A large star, a direct reference to "L'Etoile du Nord" (Star of the North), which is the state's motto.

The dark blue field stands for all of our lakes and rivers, of which the state gets its name from the Ojibwa word for "Land of Sky Blue Water."

Following the simple guidelines from the North American Vexillological Association, this flag is:

- 1) Simple to draw from memory
- 2) Uses meaningful symbolism
- 3) Consists of 2-3 colors
- 4) Has no letters, words, or seals
- 5) Is distinctive.

New Flag for Minnesota Proposal

Design by Steve Robbins, 2018
www.steverobbinsart.com

Left: A blast from the past?
Minnesota Dreaming
Steve Robbins, **Reddit, 2018**

Unbiased judges of design competitions have a habit of using all sources, including the subliminal - the Sydney Opera House is a famous example).

The curiosity is that this entry has a date line of 2018. Was it among the 1200 submitted in 2023? Is this where the kinky K came from? - Ed.



A STRAIGHTFORWARD EXPLANATION AND DEFENSE OF THE NEW STATE FLAG AND SEAL

Aaron Wittnebel, *The Minnesota Reformer*

Aaron Wittnebel is a member of the Red Lake Nation (Ojibwe) and lives in Becker County. He served as a commissioner on the State Emblems Redesign Commission. He is a former legislative aide with the Minnesota House to both parties. He is also both a former political party leader and mayor. He has worked to improve the quality of life for those living in rural and tribal communities throughout greater Minnesota, serving on various State boards concerning policy and oversight of human services and health care.

Amanda Johnson,
The Minnesota Reformer
March 8, 2024



The State Emblems Redesign Commission voted Tuesday, Dec. 12, 2023 to adopt this design for the new state flag.
Photo courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society.

RED LAKE - In December 2023, the State Emblems Redesign Commission, created by the Legislature, adopted the new Minnesota state flag. The new flag is brilliantly blue - like the sky above us and the waters around us.

The color “Minnesota Blue” was chosen for the abstract shape of Minnesota as part of the new state flag. No other color could be more appropriate. “Sky-blue” is the color used to represent our sky-blue waters; after all, we are the Land of 10,000 Lakes and the source of the Mississippi River.

The white, eight-point star was turned from its traditional depiction of two points on each side, so that one point faced up to make it also representative of the North Star. The white color is closer to what we see in the sky at night as opposed to the outdated use of gold. White is also a nod to ancient cultures that used it as a symbolic representation of water.



While a *selburose* - a typically knitted rose pattern, seen by some as a broken star, in the shape of an octagram - is commonly used in quilting, it doesn't hold the cultural significance of the eight-point star, as in the style that Cass Gilbert chose for the (State) Capitol rotunda. Gilbert's use of it was influenced both by the Dakota peoples here and the Karanga peoples in Africa (chiefly Zimbabwe).

Andrew Prekker of Luverne was the creator of the final design concept selected by the commission. **Prekker's concept was utilized as a starting point for the Commission to design the flag.**

A hard part of flag design is that depictions in graphics can use a multitude of colors, but we needed to be sure the colors can be replicated across a range of mediums and still look the same. The textile industry can only use a limited number of colors that are able to look the same no matter the medium. It is hard for the public and the media to understand this until they can touch or observe the new state flag once it has been produced in varying mediums. A simple graphic illustration doesn't provide the complete picture.

The concept of the new Great Seal, or State seal, was designed by Ross Bruggink of Minneapolis. It features a nature scene of Minnesota that utilizes official state symbols. There's water; wild rice, (our official State grain); State bird the common loon, in an art deco style that includes its notable red eyes; a contemporary North Star; and land with a couple of red pines, (green on the Seal!) our State tree.

The imagery is centered perfectly on the blazon (!) of the Great Seal, without looking cluttered. The annulus of the Great Seal keeps the former font, and the same style of outer and inner border of the annulus as the old Seal.

The Great Seal was removed from the state flag because they serve different purposes. The flag is used to identify a group - in this case, Minnesotans - from a distance; the Great Seal is a functional tool of State government and is a symbol of its power and authority.

Statehood Day

Although you can view the new State flag on the State Emblems Redesign Commission's website, people won't see it unveiled on State buildings until it is raised over the Capitol Building and on the Capitol Mall at the Peace Officers' Memorial at the same time on Statehood Day, May 11.

Cities and counties are encouraged to hold retirement ceremonies, if possible, on the same day at the same time. This could involve local law enforcement or veterans' groups to lower the old flag and hand it over to someone from a local or county historical society for preservation, and then raise the State flag.

This would make a fitting tribute to Statehood Day across Minnesota. Although it will be a Saturday, it will also be the first day that the Great Seal will be in use. Certain state officials with a duty to use the Great Seal will have until January 1, to replace their Seals; this also includes county recorders who have a duty to use the Great Seal as outlined in statute.

Lawmakers may introduce bills that contradict the Commission's decisions. We understand from legislative leaders that significant changes are unlikely.

However, Bills to amend the Great Seal - eliminating the unofficial language from its blazon and reinserting the year of statehood into the annulus - have already been submitted to avoid a costly court battle later, given the threats of litigation over those issues and their apparent noncompliance with laws.

During our deliberations, a common question arose: Why did the previous flag and seal needed to be replaced?

In short, the old flag of Minnesota was designed in a way we would never consider acceptable now, or even 50 or 60 years ago.

The old Great Seal memorialized "Manifest Destiny," according to Gov. Henry Hastings Sibley, who had it designed without approval from the Legislature.

When the time came for the Seal to be retroactively approved by the Legislature more than three decades later, and a need for a flag was also on the table, they slapped them together.

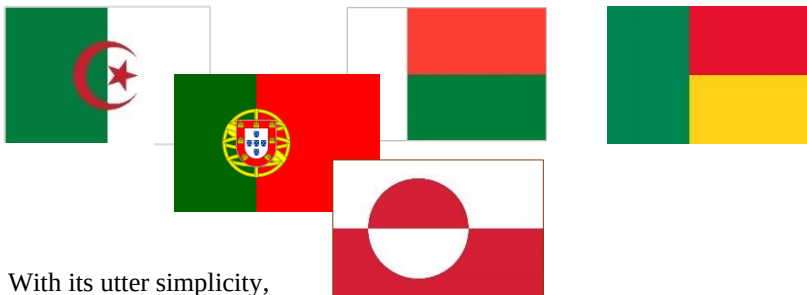
A flag is meant to symbolize a common group - in this case, Minnesotans - and be recognized at a significant distance. The old flag failed on both counts.

The old Great Seal was an eyesore to many, as well as a symbol of the horrors that came during the period in our nation's history known and excused or claimed as "Manifest Destiny."

EDITOR'S VEXIBIT

“Polaris Tricolor” - one of the three front-runners in the Minnesota flag stakes - was also CGT Grey's favourite. However, something stranger and more wonderful emerged in the final furlong.

Vexillogically though, this is not the first time that kink has conquered. Consider these other vexe-gems of minimalist design, where Less is indeed More:



With its utter simplicity, Greenland's flag consists of two lines - one straight, the other a circle, closer to the hoist than the fly. Yet the symbolism is deep: a locally sovereign territory of Denmark, snow and ice, the Aurora Borealis and the summer sun. The flags of Madagascar and Benin also have a focal weight closer to hoist, red and white the colours of the former Merina monarchy. The national symbol of Algeria and Portugal unites the two parts of their respective flags.

CORRECTION: CRUX AUSTRALIS No. 148, p196.

Right: This photo of the Inaugural Australian Citizenship ceremony in 1949 was wrongly captioned as a later event in the Illawarra, NSW, that photo also supplied by Ralph Kelly but not used.



Left: The clue to this photo is in the back row, third man from the right, holding his new Citizenship certificate. The photo is shown at right also for as it illustrates an interesting aspect of vexillology: how should flags be correctly displayed? See p24, this edition.

DON'T MESS WITH THE FLAGS

REPUBLIC OF CONGO FLAG PRANK GONE WRONG

<https://www.adomonline.com/>

[schoolchildren-arrested-for-swapping-national-flag-off-mast/](#)

Congo-B: Reopening of a High School Closed Due to Students Replacing National Flag

On 12 February 2024, the “5th February 1979” Technical High School in Brazzaville was closed by the authorities until further notice and its registration for state exams suspended, after 17 students on 5 February had lowered the national flag at the school and hoisted a “different” one. Local media described that as an unidentified black flag. Another source has the “flag” as of dark *blue* fabric, the colour of the students’ uniforms. The Government condemned the students’ act as a violation of the symbol of the Republic and a “serious act of unpatriotism,” and took “necessary measures in response to the crime,” Education Minister Ghislain Thierry Magessa Ebomé was quoted as saying.

According to a judicial source close to the case, on the same day, Tuesday, 14 adult students appeared before the Correctional Court of the Brazzaville Tribunal to answer charges of “degradation of an object intended for public utility or decoration.” Meanwhile, two students aged 15 and 16 will be heard at the juvenile court the following day for “association of wrongdoers,” while several hundred students enrolled in this establishment will return to classes.

At the trial on 8 March, State Prosecutor in Brazzaville, M. Jean-Fortuné Bassinga, requested two months in prison and a fine (for each?) of 50,000 XAF (around 75 euros). The two students above were released, for lack of evidence.

On resumption later in March, State Prosecutor M. Jean-Fortuné Bassinga at first requested two months in prison and a fine of 50,000 XAF (around 75 euros) for the others in a matter of “extreme gravity”, having defaced the Congolese flag.

This demand for such a harsh sentence surprised Defense lawyer Haris Kissouéssoué, who highlighted the lack of evidence against the accused and pleaded for their release in order to allow them to concentrate on their baccalaureate exams. “This case has hit the headlines. The Public Prosecutor, from the start of these proceedings, has spoken of an extremely serious case. Today, he has come to request two months of imprisonment. We believe this court will not follow the Public Prosecutor” he declared.

In response, and suggestive of the parties’ lawyers conferring in the judges’ chambers, for his part, Bassinga requested that the students be sanctioned symbolically by the State - stressing that the State had shown leniency by only requesting a penalty of one XAF (Central African Franc) franc and taking account of their student status.

“The State that I represent was nevertheless kind enough to ask the court to sentence them to just one symbolic XFA franc, taking into account their status as students” he said. “The question is also to allow them to resume their classes; provided that this serves as a lesson to them” he indicated.

CONCLUSION

The concern about disrespect of the national flag is a bit inconsistent when the official ceremonial flag itself is defaced by the name of the country and its motto are stitched into the (reverse?) green and red segments of the national flag.



CONTEXT: There are two separate and distinct Congos. Both use French as an official language. On the right bank of the eponymous great river, its capital Brazzaville, is the Republic of Congo, a former French colony, now Equatorial Africa, that achieved independence in 1960. A People’s Republic endured 1970-1991 under a red flag modelled on that of China, and the green flag of the contemporaneous People’s Republic of Benin. Small wonder that the present government quails at flag incidents, especially if generated among the rising generation.



On the left bank, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, capital Kinshasa) is nearly eight times the area of Congo (Brazzaville) with a history of Royal and colonial abuses, transferred in Trust to the Belgian government in 1908. With independence from 1 July 1960, the country was engulfed in immediate civil war fostered by external powers. A dictatorship from 1970-1997 under Mobutu Sese Seko, who renamed the country Zaire, followed by another civil war, its natural resources still exploited by external powers.



PORTUGAL'S VISUAL IDENTITY

Portugal's new conservative government (April 2023) restores state symbols on logo - SWI swissinfo.ch



REPÚBLICA PORTUGUESA

The government logo (**left**) restored by the new government elected this year, is based on the flag of Portugal adopted a year after the monarchy was

overthrown and replaced by a republic in 1910. The two panels, hoist and fly, are bound by a stylization of the national device - a shield in the original blue and white colours of the monarchy on a red shield bearing seven castles, all placed on an astrolabe - a reference to the age of Portuguese exploration in the 15th century down the African coast, opening a new route to India and eventually an Empire in Brazil and around the world.



GOVERNO DE PORTUGAL

In 2023, this simpler, radical, logo was adopted to represent the then Portuguese Government. It was widely derided as taking minimalism to the extreme with three geometric lumps of kindergarten Play-Do green, yellow and red. It got panned and cancelled by the new government elected on 2 April this year. Stylised to utter simplicity, but also simplistic, as its critics swiftly asserted, with a suggestion that it closely (?) resembled the Mexican flag.

The outcry culminated with the new Prime Minister, Luís Montenegro, in April ordering the Play-Do logo withdrawn. Its designer, **Studio Eduardo Aires**, was indignant. "People are saying that a 5-year old could mock it up on Microsoft Paint, "but these are people totally ignorant of design. All design is about synthesis ultimately," Aires says.¹

In his defence, Aires' trademark graphic simplicity - "suggestive of either brilliant understatement or laziness" from his critics, has won numerous international awards. (The example of his style in the Portuguese tradition of *azulejos* - painted tiles - at right is just one among the thousands in the city colours, his major work in redesigning a brand for Oporto, Portugal's chief port and second city since Roman times).



1 – Romualdo Faura, *Oporto tiene nueva marca-ciudad*, in **Brandemia - Diseño de Logotipos**, January 2024. Whatever Aires' last sentence actually means: "*All design is about synthesis ultimately.*" Maybe that his three simple shapes do resemble and represent the main design features of the official national flag. Go figure - Ed.

More relevant than what the new Government logo looked like, however, is what it stands for. As politics across Europe grow more polarised, so too are national symbols increasingly politicised. These power perceptions play out with particular vehemence on the political right. For those of a conservative, nationalist ideology, the use of national symbols in any administrative setting is inextricably tied to “control,” Aires argues. He adds: “Critics of (his) new Portuguese Government logo have resorted to a nationalist and populist rhetoric, ... which portrays the government’s previous designs as the “correct ones” and symbolic of what “represents our past the most.”

That the new centre-right Social Democratic Party has made *banning a logo* rather than making a signature policy its inaugural announcement, may be explained by the rapid rise of Portugal’s far right. The Chega party quadrupled its standing in the March 2024 national election, winning 50 parliamentary seats, making it a powerful opposition for a government without a parliamentary majority. Its charismatic leader André Ventura (who claims to wear underpants printed with the Portuguese flag), was first to publicly attack the new logo as a “negation of our whole history.”

Ventura’s politicising the image ensured it became a “projectile weapon” in the election campaign, Aires maintains, claiming he had received death threats and a “huge volume of on-line hate” from far-right supporters, his attempts to clarify that the redesign leaves the national flag itself untouched falling on deaf ears. Such is the political and emotional capital attached to national symbols that any move to toy with them can be deemed intrinsically provocative.²



Portugal’s outgoing (April 2023) Prime Minister António Costa with the flag and the symbol in their separate settings.
EPA Photograph by José Sena Goulão

The overt symbolism of Portugal’s *flag* adds fuel to the fire. In contrast to the plain tricolours of many European countries, the Portuguese standard carries long-standing heraldic insignia, with small blue shields, symbolising victory over Moorish forces, which have white bezants (literally coins, but generally interpreted as the Wounds of Christ) - emblems of the country’s expansionist history and Catholic origins.

2 - *A bit like insisting on the Union Jack on Australia’s flag?*
Or indeed, removing it? Ed.

Gabriele Maestri, an expert in comparative public law and political symbols, issues an additional warning to designers based on the different functions - and therefore design priorities - of national symbols versus government branding. While the former exist primarily to unite, he says, the main goal of the latter is to communicate: “And communication has different rules, one of which is to simplify messages to carry them better.”

Brand designers therefore find themselves in a bind. On the one hand, flags help mass communication because of their recognition value; on the other hand, the need to communicate demands that designers reduce those same recognisable symbols to their most basic elements. The original and continuing purpose of flags is that they change shape in the wind.

Back among his newspapers, Porto-city logo designer Aires is resistant to the concluding logic of Maestri’s warning - namely, that designers may be safest to steer clear of national symbols altogether. “I think flags can be revisited, why not?” he reflects. “If a country like Holland can change its name to The Netherlands, why can’t a nation like ours rethink its flag?”

“This spat [over the logo] is definitely not a question of design. It all has to do with the geo-political time in which we are living and perceptions of power,” says Sérgio Magalhães, a Portuguese architect and designer. These power perceptions play out with particular vehemence on the political right. For those of a conservative, nationalist ideology, the use of national symbols in any administrative setting is inextricably tied to “control,” he argues. Critics of the previous Portuguese government’s logo have resorted to a “nationalist and populist rhetoric,” he adds, which portrays the government’s previous designs as the “correct ones” and symbolic of what “represents our past the most.”

OTHER COMMERCIAL HERESIES?

Portugal is not alone in this regard. In Germany, the sporting giant **Adidas** recently received a public lambasting for its use of pink for the national football team’s new Away kit, conservative-minded critics decrying the gesture as untraditional, and worse, “wokery.” Apparently real men don’t wear pink - a very 1950s view.



Similarly, in the UK, the public backlash against **Nike** for its “playful” tweaking of the colour of the flag on England’s new World Cup football shirt was as immediate as it was hysterical.

MORE FIDDLING - ST GEORGE CROSS GOES IRRIDESCENT - OR “BETWEEN PUCE AND THE COLOUR OF GOOSE SHIT” ?

Émile Zola aside,³ manufacturer **Nike** changed the Cross of St George, with its cross-bars now a combination of **blues and purple** rather than the red of the flag of England. To be worn by the English men's, women's and paralympic teams, Nike described it as "a playful interpretation" of the flag, and an attempt to "unite and inspire." (*As if the flag doesn't?* – Ed.)

BACKLASH ... NIKE REDESIGN OF THE ST GEORGE'S CROSS.

by Mallory Moench, 22 March 2024

Nike unveiled the England soccer team's new kits for the UEFA Euro 2024 tournament - and ignited controversy over one detail that led to calls for change, with uproar among some fans, leading to calls to boycott the sports manufacturer and criticism from politicians, including that of UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

However, the BBC reported that **Nike** has no plans to change the design. Meanwhile, replying to TIME magazine's request for comment, the Football Association (FA) said: "*The new England 2024 'Home' kit has a number of design elements which were meant as a tribute to the 1966 World Cup winning team. The coloured trim on the cuffs is inspired by the training gear worn by England's 1966 heroes, and the same colours also feature on the design on the back of the collar. It is not the first time that different coloured St George's cross-inspired designs have been used on England shirts.*"

The FA went on to add: "*We are very proud of the red and white St George's cross - the England flag. We understand what it means to our fans, and how it unites and inspires, and it will be displayed prominently at Wembley tomorrow [Saturday, March 23] - as it always is - when England play Brazil.*"

Nike released the new uniform design on-line on March 18. On the back of the collar, the company made what it called a "playful update" to the Cross of St. George by layering pink-purple and blue stripes into the bands of the cross to "unite and inspire."



It's not the first time a designer has played around with UK flags on sports uniforms - and met backlash. As noted by the BBC, designer Stella McCartney's uniforms for Team GB at the 2012 Olympics featured a blue and white Union Jack, without the red, white interlaced crosses.

- 3 Émile Zola, in his novel *Nana*, p45: "She wore a gown the colour somewhere between puce and the colour of goose-shit" ... in *Nana*, G. Charpentier, Paris 1880. "*Vêtue d'une robe sombre de couleur indécise, entre le puce et le caca d'oie.*"

OTHER REACTIONS

Fans left thousands of comments on Nike's announcement of the design on X (formerly Twitter), criticizing the company for being "woke" and calling to #Boycott Nike. Conservative political organization **Turning Point UK** defended their national pride in posts on X and called for a "Rally for British Culture" in London on March 24 in response. However, some on X felt the issue was overblown in light of UK and world crises and the focus from politicians and the media unmerited: "Is the design of the England kit the most pressing issue of the day?" one queried.

WHAT HAVE POLITICIANS SAID ABOUT THE CHANGE?

British Prime Minister Sunak told Sky News on March 22 that he prefers the original Cross of St. George. "When it comes to our national flags, we shouldn't mess with them because they're a source of pride, identity, who we are, and they're perfect as they are," he said.

Meanwhile,
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HANG OUT MORE FLAGS

On a purely vexillological note, the contradictory manner in which the two flags in this Illawarra Citizenship ceremony are displayed is interesting.

The British Union and Australian flags angled on the wall are displayed in the correct order of precedence (it is Australia, after all), but of the same two pinned to the table, hoist edges joined, the Australian flag is displayed seemingly subordinate to that of the United Kingdom. The British Union flag displays its reverse side (the broader white band of St Andrew's Cross of Scotland uppermost when in obverse display. Precedence in the display of flags is determined from the point of view of the surface on which a flag is displayed - thus first place goes to the flag on the viewers' left. The Union Jack in the canton of the Australian flag is correct in the Australian but upside down in the Imperial flag itself. - Editor.



WHAT DOES AI HAVE TO SAY ABOUT FLAGS? QUITE A BIT.

Matthew Renzelmann

from *Vexillum* 22, North American Vexillological Association, June 2023

Greetings, esteemed vexillologists,

I would like to introduce you to ChatGPT, an AI (artificial intelligence) language model developed by OpenAI. As you are well aware, AI has been making headlines in recent years and ChatGPT has been at the forefront of this trend. ChatGPT is a cutting-edge language that has been trained on a vast amount of text data allowing it to generate human-like responses to a wide range of questions and prompts. As a result ChatGPT has become an increasingly popular tool for various applications, from answering customer enquiries to a wide range to generating creative content. I believe that ChatGPT could also be a valuable resource for the study and understanding of flags.

I DID NOT WRITE the previous paragraph. ChatGPT created those sentences in response to a brief prompt from me. As an experiment I thought it would be interesting to ask the head-line grabbing ChatGPT a few queries about flags and vexillology. The questions from the following “interview” are from me, and the responses from ChatGPT are included with edits made only to formatting.

The objective of the experiment was to begin thinking about ways in which vexillology might benefit from this emerging capability. For example, ChatGPT might serve as a source of creative inspiration. With only a few simple prompts, I am possible to iterate and refine an idea, such as a new flag design, as desired. Second, as its training set improves, it is easy to imagine AI becoming a path to find relationships between flags.

As the interview below demonstrates, however, AI is not currently well-suited for this purpose. As time passes the technology will certainly improve, and AI will become an increasingly valuable resource in many contexts, including vexillology.

Q: Are you a member of the North American Vexillological Association?

A: No, I am an AI language model developed by OpenAI, and I am not a member of the North American Vexillological Association. I was trained on a vast amount of text data from the internet and other sources, and so I have information about vexillology and other topics, but I am not an active member of any organization.

Q: Do you find flags interesting?

A: As an AI language model, I do not have opinions or emotions, but I can say that flags can be interesting in the sense that they serve as symbols and representations of countries, organizations, and even individual people.

Flags often carry cultural, historical, and political significance and can evoke strong feelings and reactions. Cue Palestine: Understanding the meanings and significance of flags can provide insight into the beliefs, values, and history of the entity they represent.

Q: Are American city flags well-designed?

A: The design of American city flags can vary in quality, and opinion on their designs may vary. While some American city flags are well-designed and effectively communicate the city's identity and values, others may be poorly designed and/or lack a clear symbol or message.

Well-designed city flags often feature a simple, bold design with a clear symbol or message that represents the city's identity and values. They are easily recognizable and memorable, and their design is appropriate (!) for display on various materials and at various sizes. Given that a majority of the US state flags fail this test makes a mockery of this statement.

However, some city flags may be poorly designed, with a cluttered or confusing design, or with elements that are not easily recognized. A poorly designed city flag may not effectively communicate the city's identity and values and may not be easily recognizable or memorable.

Ultimately, the design quality of American city flags can vary, and opinions on their design may differ. However, well-designed city flags can effectively communicate the city's identity and values and are easily recognizable and memorable.

Q: Can you write a poem about flags?

A: Flags, oh flags, so bold and bright
Each one unique, a symbol true,
waving in the wind with all their might
of nations, states, and all they do.
Some are simple with just one hue,
others complex with stripes and stars anew
some show courage, with lions and shields,
Others freedom with eagles that yield.

From the Stars and Stripes, to the Union Jack
Each one holds meaning that will not lack.
They lead armies and show the way
and at games, they lift our hearts to play.

In times of peace they're symbols of pride
In time of war, a battle cry beside.
They are woven into history's grand design,
and they will continue to wave, till the end of time.

So let us raise our flags high in the sky
and celebrate all that they symbolise
For they are emblems of our lands
And emblems stand,
proud, strong, and grand.

Q: Can you write a poem about the American flag?

A: Oh, American flag so proud and true
A symbol of freedom, red white and blue
With stars and stripes so bold and bright
Waving in the wind with all their might.



From sea to shining sea you fly so high
A beacon of hope and against the sky
With courage and bravery you lead the way
Guiding our nation, day by day.
You have seen battles fought and wars won
And you stand tall under a golden sun
From Valley Forge to Iwo Jima's shore
You've always been there to win the war
You have been there through thick and thin
A constant symbol of hope within
And every time we see you wave
We are filled with pride and we are not afraid
So here is to you, dear American flag
symbol of our country from coast to coast
We salute you with heads held high
You are the emblem of liberty's light.

Q: What national flag is the most unique and distinctive?

A: The uniqueness and distinctiveness of a national flag is subjective and can depend upon personal opinions. However, some of the most unique and distinctive flags in the world are those of Nepal, Switzerland, and Bhutan.

The flag of **Nepal** is the only national flag that is Not rectangular or square. It is a combination of two pennants, symbolizing the Hindu and Buddhist cultures existing in Nepal.



The flag of **Switzerland** is also considered unique and distinctive in its design. It features a white cross on a red background, symbolizing the country's neutrality and peace.



The flag of **Bhutan** is another example of a unique and distinctive flag. It features a dragon, symbolizing Bhutan's identity as the land of the Thunder Dragon and a white circle symbolizing the country's unity and purity.

All in all, flags are symbols of a country's history, cultures, or values and the uniqueness and distinctiveness of a flag can reflect those aspects of a nation.

Q: What are the differences between a well-designed and a poorly-designed flag?

A: A well-designed flag is clear, simple, memorable, and representative of the country or entity it represents. A few key characteristics of a well-designed flag include:

Simplicity: a well-designed flag should have simple, bold, and easy to recognize elements. A flag with too many details or intricate design can be difficult to distinguish from a distance;

Symbolism: rather than literal representations or portraiture a flag should have clear and meaningful symbols to represent the country or entity it represents.

Color: A well-designed flag should have a limited color palette that is appropriate for the symbol it represents and is easily distinguishable from other flags.

Scale: A well-designed flag should be easily recognizable from any distance at any size and should still look balanced and proportionate.

On the other hand a poorly-designed flag may lack some of these characteristics. For example it may have too many colors or elements, be cluttered, or use colors that are not easily distinguishable. A poorly-designed flag can also lack symbols or be difficult to recognize from a distance.

Overall, a well-designed flag is recognizable, easily memorable and representative of the country or entity it represents, while a poorly-designed flag may lack these qualities.

Q: Suppose a new country is formed. Can you propose a description of a flag for this hypothetical country?

A: Sure, here is a proposal for a flag for this hypothetical new country.



The flag features a deep blue background, symbolizing the country's rich culture, heritage, and vast oceanic resources. In the center of the flag is a golden sun, rising above a green mountain, symbolizing growth, prosperity, and a bright future for the country. The sun is

surrounded by eight rays representing the eight regions of the country and their unity under one flag.

The mountain is green, symbolizing the country's commitment to preserving its natural beauty and environment and is surrounded by a ring of golden wheat symbolizing the country's agricultural richness and abundance. The overall design is simple, and easily recognizable and represents the country's values of unity, property, environmental stewardship, and cultural richness.

Q: Regarding the design of the flag for the hypothetical country we discussed above, can you propose a modified design that removes the mountain symbolism and adds something to represent seafaring?

A: Certainly! Here is a modified design for the hypothetical country that removes the mountain symbolism and adds representation of seafaring:

The flag design can feature an addition of a blue and white striped shield surrounded by yellow and green waves. In the center of the shield, there can be a depiction of a ship with full sails, symbolizing the country's seafaring heritage. On top of the ship, there can be a depiction of a rising sun with golden rays, symbolizing hope, and progress. The flag can be charged with the country's national motto, "For Sea and Sun" written in white against a blue background.

This flag represents the country's connection to the sea and its maritime heritage, while also symbolizing progress. The colors blue, white, yellow, and green represent the ocean, peace, prosperity, and growth respectively.



Q: Are there any common design differences between historical flags and modern flags?

A: Yes, there are some common design differences between historical flags and modern flags. Some of these differences include:

Complexity: Historical flags often featured more intricate and detailed designs than modern flags, which tend to be simpler and bolder.

Symbolism: Historical flags contain more symbolic elements and heraldry because modern flags tend to use fewer symbols and more abstract designs.

Size and proportion: Historical flags are often varied in size and proportion, while modern flags tend to have standardized proportions.

Representation: Historical flags often represented individuals, families, Organizations. Modern flags tend to represent countries or political entities.

Color: Historical flags often used a wider range of colors and color combinations, while modern flags tend to have a limited color palette.

Size and proportion: Historical flags tend to be varied in size and proportion while modern flags tend to have standardized proportions.

Overall, while historical flags and modern flags share some similarities, they also some notable differences in their design, reflecting the changing cultural, political, and technological context of each era.

Q: How many nations can you think (!) of that include an animal in their flag design?

A: Here are a few examples of nations that include animals in their design.
(Editor's caution: errors)

Bhutan: The flag features a dragon with jewels in its claws, (*but not the circle mentioned earlier*).



Costa Rica: The flag features a blue and white-striped field, surrounded by yellow and red flowers and featuring a golden yellow sun with a face, two rifles and golden yellow scroll with the words *República del Costa Rica*. (*Most of this description relates to the Seal on the flag. There are three volcanoes. The yellow and red flowers are on the arms of Honduras*).

Maldives: The flag features a red and a white crescent moon and five pointed stars topped with a dragon, a green palm tree (*the last half of this description is incorrect*).



Mexico:

The Mexican flag features a depiction of a golden eagle perched on a cactus, holding a serpent in its beak.



Senegal:

The flag features a green star in a yellow circle on a green field symbolizing hope and progress.

AUTHOR'S SUMMARY:

ChatGPT offers considerable promise. At present, it does tend to stating factually incorrect date confidently, as in the flags with animals question. Nevertheless, AI is already good as a source of creative inspiration - an antidote to writers' block. Or a prison of literalism? And it is easy to imagine AI serving an immediate role in creative applications.

My experience with the technology has generally been positive, although it does presently have some clear limitations. I am confident that incremental improvements in the quality of AI will ensure its future pervasiveness. On the other hand mere human governance mixed with emotion to a great record Th alternative is dominion of cyborgs

Matthew Renzelmann has been a flag enthusiast since 1999 when AI was best known for having won a world-championship chess tournament against humans. After finishing his formulation with a PhD in computer science and getting a job in the real word, hastened to join NAVA in 2021.

AI WITHOUT THE I (aka “Artie”)

Tony Burton

Proponents of AI plead too much. However, kudos to Matthew Renzelman for initiative and curiosity about AI CPG graphics as a reliable adjunct and guide in vexillology. So far, as he says, not so much. And by Artie's “own” admission “I do not have opinions or emotions.” (*Except those fed to it*).

Naturally enough, Matthew starts with familiar ground, flags closest to home - especially state and city flags. AI however hedges its bets: such designs of which it is aware “vary in quality” and then through six pages does relatively little to help except note the Ted talk and NAVA-backed precepts for good flag design, concerning colours, simplicity, contrasts.

Invited to devise *poetry* in praise of flags, the best AI at this stage can do is to parrot clichés of the jingo kind - e.g. flags “win the wars” (Korea, Vietnam, Central American banana republics, Cuba, Iraq, Afghanistan?) This is the dark side of vexillology, not so much as the glorification of flags for short-sighted interests. The lyrics in “Artie's” examples are bumpy, lumpy, clunky doggerel.

When it comes to tests of the accuracy of a range of flags, those most familiar or “unique” pass muster, but don't trust vague or contradictory observations of the machine about the flags of Nepal, Comoros, Maldives, Costa Rica, Senegal. AI has to be tweaked to yield accurate and adequate information. Without sufficient, relevant and accurate guidance, it's a dog's breakfast, leading to Renzelmann urging caution in face of gross errors - e.g. Costa Rica confused, Senegal supposed to have a star in a circle. In short, garbage in, garbage out.

As to the two flags made to order, one (**right**) is so bizarre it earns display on this edition's back cover, its colours and slogan a travesty of good and clear design: three colours contiguous - green, blue, three shades. Sea and sun may be, but flatly, no fun. Indeed, is it the sun or a faceless Liberty looming? Fritz Lang's automatrix in *Metropolis*?



If ChatGPT is a cutting-edge language as described, and assumed as evident and accurate, and the cutting-edge tool its proponents prophesy, the shards of dubiously reliable data, as Renzelmann discovered, are at best a Parson's egg - OK in parts. Howlers appear: e.g. "most unique." NAVA and Ted Talk mantras are cited, yet the flags of Costa Rica, Maldives, Senegal are grossly incorrect, as Renzelmann warns.

Just plain misinformation. There is no white circle on the flag of Bhutan, nor roses in the Arms of Costa Rica - just ships and volcanoes. The description of the Maldivian flag is almost completely wrong, a green star for Senegal, yes, but never in a gold circle.

In the section summing up AI's ability to grade various national flags as "unique" and "distinctive," AI explanations are trite: distinctive, hopefully yes, but "unique"? Hardly. Superfluities abound, e.g. "rectangular" [or square] in shape." This fits with the way AI is constructed, fed with a limited vocabulary that can make do, and limp along with unnecessary repetitions. Questioned about what makes a well-designed flag, the best the new robot can do is not any sort of independent thought but "human-like" responses and repetition of the NAVAMANTRA. AI remains a parody of data fed to machinery and thus no kind of real intelligence.

As the author observes, if AI is to be useful and under control of its human creators it needs a lot more sophistication, and that depends not least on the relative sophistication of its creators. To do otherwise may lead to hubris and as often, eventually to a fatal arrogance and mistakes, and as far as flags are concerned, breaching the six commandments of careful flag design.

Sorry, Artie, no cigar, at least not so far - and no real art. It is telling that use of AI automatically disqualifies suggestions for a new flag for Illinois - see pp47-48 this edition. But the best test of AI fumbling is illustrated on social media, fake soldiers, some with three arms, weird salutes - not for the flag floating unattached to anything, but for the main event, a sausage sizzle. Too many snags in AI.

Anyway, what happened to human imagination, creativity and ingenuity? Will these atrophy under the assault of social media and other brainwashing already entrenched?

SALUTING THE SAUSAGES – AI AT A BARBECUE



THE (IM)PERFECT PARODY

Above: Check the anomalies. Two right arms for one, saluting also his nose; another saluting with another right hand in midriff holding a beer.

Left and below: the flag floats in mid-air with no support at the hoist. Another seems to have a window. US salutes, not Australian. Similar posts were located on social media (X - formerly Twitter) but saluting what? Some Bunyip deity? Not to mention the Smoking Ceremony with the flag.



AI will improve perhaps only in the ratio and quality communication of human information fed to the artificial channels - and the current social climate the world over is not disposed to clear or coherent *communication*, *thanks especially to social media* (where the images appeared).

Everyone has an opinion on Artificial Intelligence (AI) - from whether it can be used as a valuable tool or has the potential to be dangerous if used in the wrong way. Not to mention the conspiracy theorists convinced that

AI is designed and promoted to take over the world. Whatever the take, there's no denying AI is getting more and more advanced and here to stay. Images, **Facebook**, courtesy Ralph Kelly

HOW I BECAME INTERESTED IN VEXILLOLOGY

Joseph Staub, Hemet, California, courtesy NAVA *Vexillum*

When I was seven or eight - which would have been around 1970 or 71 - I attended a New York State convention of my father's World War II unit, the famed Fourth Armored Division.

My father, born in 1912, was an "old man" in WWII. He had me when he was 51, so I was probably the youngest kid who was not a grand-child. Still, I got to sit with my father and his friends from the 51st Armored Infantry Battalion and listened to their stories.

During a break, I asked my father about the two flags beside the American flag on the stage. He took me up and showed me the New York State flag. He explained all the symbolism on the Divisional flag: the red and green that showed it was a Division; the red, blue and yellow of artillery, infantry and cavalry respectively, and the armoured force symbol combining the cannon for firepower, the tank tread for mobility and the lightning bolt for communication. (I later found out that the lightning bolt represented striking power.) He also told me about the New York flag.



WE WENT TO THE LIBRARY

I asked him "do all flags have these meanings?" He said, "I think so. When we get home, we can go to the library." And we did. My dad and I went to the library together two or three times a month.

During one trip, we found a book on flags. I devoured it, and the few others they had. The librarian helped me find other sources about flags. I was hooked.



One of my older cousins gave me sheets of stickers that were national flags of the world. I remember sticking them on the side of my bookcase, organised by continent.

Later, in the library of my junior high school, I found a book called *Simple Heraldry* by Iain Moncreiffe and Don Pottinger. I learned about heraldic flags and began to develop an interest in Heraldry, Seals, signs and symbols of all sorts.

A budding semiotician I was, though would not learn that word until high school. In fact during my high school years, I had a conversation with my father about heraldic devices I was designing for some of my friends in my Dungeons and Dragons group. Our talks moved to the power of symbols: the stars and stripes, team mascots, the swastikas he had seen during the war, and so on. He said, “Maybe some ideas are too big for words. Maybe the truth cannot be told, only revealed.” That remains the smartest thing I’ve ever heard about semiotics and the study of symbols.

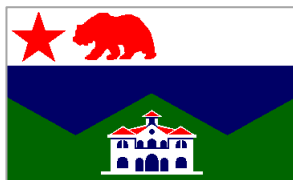
SAN FRANCISCO Skip ahead a few years, to the mid-1980s. I was living in San Francisco, working on Pier 39 at a place that sold heraldic items, tartan scarves, funny tea towels, and that sort of thing. And flags.

My manager asked me to drop by a little store down on Polk Street that also sold flags, to check out its inventory. It turned out that the Flag Store was the retail outlet for Paramount Flag Company, a storied firm and part of San Francisco’s reputation as “the City of Flags.” That’s where I met Jim Ferrigan (now NAVA’s Treasurer). After a few minutes’ conversation I wanted to work for him. He needed a salesman and I soon switched jobs. The two years I worked with him in that cramped and flag-stuffed store was worth a college education. I assisted Jim when he helped host Flag Congress San Francisco NAVA21/ICV12) in 1987, met co-organiser Ted Kaye (now NAVA’s Secretary), manned the Rainbow flag booth at Gay Pride, got to work with Rainbow Flag designer Gilbert Baker, and served as the store’s Heraldry consultant.

CONNECTICUT Family matters took me to the East Coast. I continued designing and writing about flags. I filled in at little flag stores in Connecticut, was profiled in Connecticut newspapers, was interviewed on [public radio program] Fresh Air New England, and visited Dr Whitney Smith at the Flag Research Center in Massachusetts.

SONOMA AND LOS ANGELES

I completed my college education, and headed back to California. I ended up in Sonoma where I again worked for Jim Ferrigan at the relocated Flag Store, assisted him when he helped put on the Sesquicentennial of the Bear Revolt flag¹ in 1996 and I designed the current City flag of Sonoma. I left for Los Angeles when my father fell ill, became a special education teacher and adjunct college professor and wrote some editorials for Los Angeles newspapers about politics, teaching and flags. And the rest is history.



- 1 The California Republic, aka The Bear Republic, was an unrecognized breakaway state from Mexico, that for 25 days in 1846 militarily controlled an area north of San Francisco, in and around what is now Sonoma County in California.

MORE STARS: FLAGS OF THE ROUND TABLE?

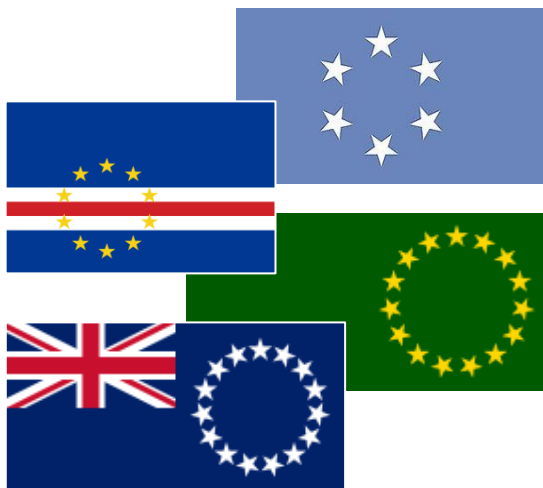
Tony Burton

Circle of stars to signify unity among many

Federations of various city-states are not new. One of the earliest and famous was the Delian League of Greek cities, inaugurated in 477 BC as an offensive and defensive alliance against Persia - a forerunner thus of NATO that may have to review its credentials before long.

A circle represents a whole and the equality and unity among its individual members. The idea also recalls the Round Table of Arthurian legend, and the same has been applied to the Judges period of ancient Israel. Cfr Roland de Vaux, *Was there an Israelite amphictyony?* Biblical Archaeological Society Library.

Vexillologically, the idea of separate members represented by a circle of stars may have been inspired from the establishment of the United States and its flag of now 50 states. The same concept of a unity represented by symbols of its parts can also be found in the national flags and insignia of Australia, Malaysia, the European Union. But there have also been unholy alliances, as now seen.



**From left,
clockwise:**
"Betsy Ross"
Confederate flag
Micronesia
Cook Is green
Ditto since 1983
Cabo Verde
European Union

HOW MANY STARS ON NATIONAL FLAGS?

Flags of 65 nations of the near universal 195 membership of the UN have at least one star as part of their design. The device seems to have originated in Mesopotamia from pre-Biblical times. Today, most of stars on flags have a secular and allegorical connotation, as a kind of badge of power and primacy.



32 flags of the 65 have just one star. Another 15 have more than one, the US flag has the most with 50 crammed into the hoist corner. A further 11 are expressly religious, a star (and crescent), today a symbol of Islam. Of these eleven, 8 have one star, the **Comoros** 4, and **Uzbekistan**, 12. (The 5 stars at the hoist of the **Singapore** flag refer to secular principles, but the crescent alongside subtly alludes to the Muslims of the Republic, between Malaysia and Indonesia.)

ISLAMIC

11 flags (Star within or next to Crescent)

Azerbaijan, Libya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Tunisia, Türkiye - 1 star
Syria 2, Comoros 4, Turkmenistan 5, Singapore 5, Uzbekistan 12.



ALLEGORICAL

32 flags with one star

Angola, Aruba, Burkina Faso, Cameroun, Central African Republic, Chile, Croatia, Cuba, DemRep Congo, Djibouti, East Timor, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Israel, Jordan, Liberia, Marshall Islands, Morocco, Mozambique, **Myanmar**, Nauru, North Korea, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, Senegal, Somalia, South Sudan, Suriname, Togo, Zimbabwe.



This one, not that one.

Multiple Stars

15 flags

Burundi 3 stars, China 5, Cabo Verde 10, Cook Islands 15, Curaçao 2, Grenada 7, Honduras 5, Micronesia 4, Niue 5, Panama 2, Philippines 3, Singapore 5, Slovenia 3, Solomon Islands 5, Tuvalu 9.

ASTRONOMICAL 7 flags

Australia 6, Brazil 27, New Zealand 4, Papua New Guinea 5, Samoa 4, Tokelau 4

Like the flag of Malaysia with its 14-point star, the Australian flag also has a large star (7 points) at the hoist, representing their respective federated states.

QUIZ: BEST DESIGNED STATE FLAGS USA

	ALABAMA
	ARIZONA
	COLORADO
	HAWAI'I
	MARYLAND
	MINNESOTA

	NEW MEXICO
	STH CAROLINA
	TENNESSEE
	TEXAS
	UTAH
	WYOMING
	FEDL. DISTRICT DC

ANSWERS p46



1



2



3



6



4



5

OPPOSITE PAGE

The best of the better designed?

THIS PAGE

From top left, clockwise, the palmetto palm might be more stylised? In No. 10, a bronze star could be better differentiated from the red and gold rays. Bisons (No. 13) don't need badges, or is it mangle? It does at least face the hoist – to show advance, not retreat.



7



8



10

9



11



12



13



ALASKA'S STATE FLAG CREATED BY A 13-YEAR-OLD IN 1926

Tony Burton

Every flag has a story, but few are as endearing as Alaska's, 8 gold stars on deep blue. One of the rare places to have a flag before it was actually a state, the Last Frontier held a contest to design

its territorial standard in 1926-27 - and a 13-year-old won. (The contest was only open to Alaskan children in the 7th to 12th school grades, but still, Benny Benson's was the best).

Benny lived in an orphanage known as the Jesse Lee Home in Seward, Alaska, when he came up with the winning design, which included a description he wrote himself: "The blue field is for the Alaska sky and the forget-me-not, an Alaska flower. The North Star is for the future of the state of Alaska, the most northerly in the Union. The dipper is for the Great Bear - symbolizing strength." Benson's design also featured "1867" in commemoration of the year the United States bought Alaska from Russia, although the dates didn't make the final cut.

In addition to being hailed a local hero, Benson won a watch with his design on it and a \$1,000 scholarship. He eventually used that money to attend Hemphill Diesel Engineering School after moving to Seattle in 1936. He was 45 when Alaska became a state in 1959, fulfilling the hopeful description of his design. Alaska kept its flag rather than adopt a new one, so Benson's work lives on today.

COMMENT

The state flag of Alaska is neat. That doesn't mean that it cannot be enhanced - as shown here - without changing Benny's design. The yellow band at the hoist is a reference to the 19th century gold-rush that put Alaska on its feet. Once part of the Russian empire of the Tsars, Alaska was sold to the United States in 1867 - an expenditure (\$3 million) described by contemporaries as Secretary of State Seward's Folly



A weakness of the present design is that from a distance the stars are difficult to see and the largest so close to the fly that it will not last long in the Arctic winters - prompting this writer's modest suggestion below.

As in Benson's design, the seven small stars still represent the Big Dipper (or *Ursa Major*) the most prominent constellation in the sky, while the brightest star of all for the northern-most state, the Pole Star, is shared only with the old and new flags of Minnesota - and the first flag of Maine.

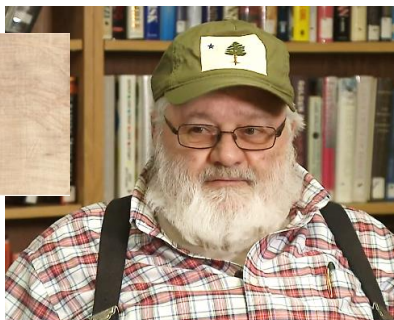
A MAINE EVENT

MAINE'S DEBATE OVER FLAGS THE LATEST CHAPTER IN A LONG STORY

By Don Carrigan, 17 April 2024



Flag expert Dave Martucci,
Washington,
Maine



Begin with a simple, but essential fact: Dave Martucci loves flags.

Perhaps it's because he lives in Washington, Maine. But Martucci, former president of the North American Vexillological Society (vexillology is the study of flags) says flags have remarkable stories to tell.

"The fact that humans feel a need to make and have flags is a fascinating subject," he said. "That includes the topic of changing Maine's current state flag back to the 1901 flag, with the pine tree and star - the first state flag Maine ever had. "The state flag concept didn't exist before that [1901]," Martucci said.

And that's just the beginning.

"When the US became a country in 1776, the concept of a national flag didn't even exist. Kings and armies had flags; nations didn't have flags. Nations didn't, people didn't, that wasn't known."

Early US flags, like the so-called Betsy Ross 13-star flag of the Revolutionary War era, were unusual (although that flag was also used for the Continental Army). "There were different flags for the Continental Army. Washington tried to standardize those, but not 'til the war was over. And it wasn't until the French Revolution that the French said we want a flag like the United States, a national flag," Martucci explained. He said the famous British flag of that era - the Union Jack - was a flag of the British crown, not of the country. Our flag was really the first one to be identified with the movement of people rather than a royal or military situation." Meaning, he says, that the US flag was the first in the world to represent a whole country - "the very first," Martucci said.

From the time Maine became a state in 1820 until 1901, the state had no official flag. There were flags for the militia used by Maine units in the Civil War when blue flags with the state seal or coat of arms were common.

The Maine Legislature decided in 1901 it was time to have a State flag and initially voted to use that militia's flag - blue with the coat of arms.

But the state's Adjutant-General decided it should be changed, to make it simpler to make and more quickly recognized.

General Richards designed the pine tree and star flag, and the Legislature agreed.

Then, in 1909, as a way to honor aging Civil War veterans, the Legislature reversed course and decreed that the state flag should, in fact, be blue with the coat of arms or state seal - basically the flag Maine still has today.



PROSPECTS

Now, the movement has begun to change back to the original flag, with the North Star and the Pine Tree. Simple and distinctive, Martucci says, who has advocated for the change for years.



He also says Maine should not get too worried about exactly how that flag should look. "The state law being proposed is exactly the same as the 1901 law, and says it will be a buff flag with a pine tree in the center and a blue star on the left by the hoist. That's it," Martucci smiled.

He says there are close to a dozen different tree designs already in use by various flagmakers across Maine and in the country. The idea of the pine tree flag seems to have caught on. Beyond that, says the flag expert, keep things as they were in 1901, and let people decide for themselves.



FLAG NOT BEIGE, BUT MAYBE ÉCRU? – Ed.

One of the curiosities already remarked about the original (1901) flag of Maine is that its green tree and blue star devices were laid on a background seldom if ever approved in Heraldry - light dusty hues that might be called beige or ecru - that latter the colours of unbleached silk. Unusual field colours are not unheard of in flags, but not generally recommended due to their lack of precision. Thus the first flag of Maine, but also others flags among the original British colonies, e.g. the flags of Delaware and New Jersey.



THE 1901 MAINE FLAG

DESIGN:

There is no set standard design for the 1901 Maine state flag. Each flag-maker can have their interpretation of the flag as the legislative document simply states “buff charged with the emblem of the State, a pine tree proper in the center and the polar star (a mullet of five points, in blue in the upper corner.” As long as these criteria are met, the flag should be considered a Maine state flag. Some versions

might have a stylized pine tree or various shades of “buff.”

The emphasis on a pine tree in the 1901 Maine flag bears a resemblance to the flag of New England, used to represent the New England colonies during the Revolutionary War. Almost entirely red, that flag features a pine tree in the hoist. The flag was depicted in Jonathon Trumbull’s painting *The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker’s Hill*.

HISTORICAL USAGE:

In 1901, Maine’s first official flag was adopted during the state’s 70th legislative session under Chapter 233, which stated:

“Chapter 233, An Act to establish a State Flag.

The State Flag is hereby declared to be buff charged with the emblem of the State, a pine tree proper in the center and the polar star (a mullet of five points), in blue in the upper corner. The star to be equidistant from the hoist and upper border of the flag, the distance from the two borders to the center of the star equal to about one quarter the hoist. This distance and the size of the star being proportionate to the size of the flag.”

A new law enacted in 1909 revised the original flag and set forth instructions on the design of future Maine state flags:

“§206. State flag. *The flag to be known as the official flag of the State shall be of blue, of the same color as the blue field in the flag of the United States, and of the following dimensions and designs; to wit, the length or height of the staff to be 9 feet, including brass spearhead and ferrule; the fly of said flag to be 5 feet 6 inches, and to be 4 feet 4 inches on the staff; in the center of the flag there shall be embroidered in silk on both sides of the flag the coat of arms of the State, in proportionate size; the edges to be trimmed with knotted fringe of yellow silk, 2 1/2 inches wide; a cord, with tassels, to be attached to the staff at the spearhead, to be 8 feet 6 inches long and composed of white and blue silk strands. A flag made in accordance with the description given in this section shall be kept in the office of the Adjutant General as a model.”*

RESURGENCE:

In 1990 and again in 1991, vexillologist David Martucci of Washington, Maine, attempted to convince the state to reinstate the 1901 Maine state flag, with little success as there was no pressing desire or need then to change the flag.

Currently, there is a small, but growing, grassroots movement to fly the 1901 Maine state flag. Spurred by the success of the Maine Flag Company in Portland, Maine, and news coverage growing since, 2017, the original Maine flag is slowly growing in popularity. The Maine Flag Company has created an Original Maine brand name which they hope to market and promote as the 1901 Maine flag.

In March 2018, the Somerset County Commissioners Office began flying the original Maine flag.

The purpose of this site is to promote the use of the 1901 Maine flag. Currently, only a few businesses are promoting its use. This site is unaffiliated with, and does not endorse, any of these businesses, but thanks them for all their efforts.

MAINE STATE FLAG REFERENDUM WILL WAIT UNTIL NEXT YEAR

A spokesperson for Governor Janet Mills said she will allow a bill calling for a referendum on the state flag to take effect, without her signature, effectively delaying the statewide vote until November 2024.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE Friday, June 14, 2024

SECRETARY BELLWS ANNOUNCES NEW STATE FLAG DESIGN CONTEST

AUGUSTA - In celebration of Flag Day, Secretary of State Shenna Bellows announced a design contest for the model flag of the potential new state flag on Friday 4 June.

“The bipartisan law passed last year to send voters the question of whether to keep our current flag or return to the Pine Tree flag that was our state flag from 1901 to 1909 also tasked me with approving a model flag to send to the Adjutant General,” said Secretary Bellows. “But this duty bestowed upon me by the Legislature is not a job I can do alone. That’s why today I invite every Mainer to consider submitting a design for consideration.”

The submission form, contest rules and design brief are available at ***maine.gov/so/form/flag-redesign-2024***. ***Submissions are due by 5pm on Friday, July 19. Anyone can enter a design.***

BACKGROUND

The 1901 State flag featured a North Star and pine tree on a buff background. It was Maine's first state flag and was in place until 1909. Then, the state flag was changed to feature the Maine state seal on a blue background, matching the blue of the American flag.

"Approving a new model flag is a duty I proudly undertake because the symbols that represent us, the symbols that unify us as a state and nation, matter a lot," said Secretary Bellows. "This is a debate delightfully free of partisan politics, and one that every Maine voter can weigh in on at the ballot box this Fall."

The winner of the design contest will be announced before Mainers start voting in the November General Election.



SECRETARY OF STATE RECEIVES MORE THAN 350 ENTRIES IN FLAG DESIGN CONTEST

Maine Public | Broadcasting Network

Kevin Miller July 19, 2024

Troy R. Bennett, *Bangor Daily News*

In a January 2018 file photo, an original Maine flag design made by the Maine Flag Company in Portland sits on a table in the company's studio. The original flag sported just a green pine tree and blue North Star.

More than 350 people submitted proposals for a re-design of the original Maine state flag that will be the subject of a referendum vote this November.

The so-called Pine Tree Flag, was only the official state flag for a few years in the early 1900s. But the 1901 design has exploded in popularity in recent years, showing up on T-shirts, bumper stickers, hats, lapel pins and, of course, on flagpoles across the state.

After several years of debate, state lawmakers opted to give voters a choice this Fall: either stick with the current state flag, featuring the State Seal against a dark-blue background, or revert to the 1901 version.

But with so many subtle variations out there, Secretary of State Shenna Bellows launched a design contest last month asking Mainers to submit their proposed design for a new take on the old flag.

The contest deadline was Friday at 5 pm, and Bellows said her office had already received more than 350 entries as of Friday morning. "I think that's incredibly exciting," Bellows said. "It tells me that Mainers are creative and artistic. And I look forward to seeing all of the entries."

To be considered, every submission must meet the same basic criteria: a buff-colored flag featuring "a pine tree proper" in the center and a five-pointed North Star in blue in the upper corner. The legislation authorizing the referendum also specified the required distances between the images.

Bellows said she had not looked at any of the proposed designs because she didn't want to prejudice herself before all of the entries were submitted. A group of advisors will recommend finalists, although the decision rests with Bellows, who added that she plans to look at every entry.

"I think this is a really fun opportunity for Mainers to engage in something that is fairly low stakes but still important," said Bellows. "The symbols that represent us as a state are something that unites us. And it's a fun conversation and debate that is free of partisanship or rancor."

She said she plans to unveil the final design in August, in time for the image to be included in the pre-election voter guide published by her office. The winner of the contest will not receive any compensation, however.

The flag referendum will be one of at least two ballot questions presented to voters this fall along with three bond measures. Maine voters will also cast ballots for president, Maine's two US House members, one US Senate seat and all 186 seats in the Maine Legislature.

"My hope is that this will be the easiest decision that voters will make this November."

ANSWERS TO QUIZ pages 38-39

BEST-DESIGNED US STATE FLAGS

LEFT COLUMN	12 - 10 - 4 - 11 - 1 - 5
RIGHT COLUMN	2 - 7 - 9 - 3 - 6 - 13 - 8



ILLINOIS CONSIDERS

ILLINOIS REPUBLICAN CLAIMS NEW STATE FLAG WOULD 'ADVANCE THE FAR-LEFT'S POLITICAL IDEOLOGY'

Patrick Keck *Springfield State Journal-Register*

After rumors of flag change, the Illinois Flag Commission began accepting submissions (**no AI accepted**) of new flag designs from 8 September, opening a process that could change a 55-year-old flag.

The original flag, designed by Rockford native Lucy Derwent in 1915, featured the State Seal placed on a white background. Unchanged since, except for the label "Illinois" placed below the seal in 1969.



State lawmakers could ultimately decide to keep the flag, as Sen. Doris Turner (D-Springfield) noted during a press conference last week in Springfield. After a constituent of hers introduced the idea, she and Rep. Kam Buckner (D-Chicago), led the legislation which created the Commission later signed into law by Governor JB Pritzker.

At the very least, Senator Turner sees the discussion as a healthy way to activate young people across Illinois to get involved in state government.

"I have always said that history is living, breathing and ever evolving, and I think we need to ensure that government is also evolving so people are engaged."

Following a public vote starting 1 January 2025, the Commission will submit 10 alternate designs in addition to the current flag to the Illinois General Assembly by 1 April 2025, expected to vote on the matter during the spring session.

Not all state lawmakers are enthusiastic at the prospect of a new state flag.

Certainly not is Rep. Adam Niemerg, R-Dieterich, who is leading a petition to fight a new state flag. He believes a new flag could "advance the far left's political ideology," while Buckner noted on X (ex-Twitter), the Commission is composed of Republicans and Democrats. *"Will we highlight the Governor's efforts to partner with Chinese-owned companies? Or will the flag become a state-sponsored tribute to the Pride flag?"* Niemerg, a member of the far-right Illinois Freedom Caucus, said in a statement. *"We need patriotic citizens to take a stand against this clear attempt to rebrand our state."*

As for Turner, a change is something she could get behind. *"The Seal represents the government,"* she said. *"And I believe that the flag should be a symbol to represent the people, not the government."* 370 designs submitted so far.

NEW ILLINOIS FLAG CONTEST RILING UP FREEDOM CAUCUS

Justin Kaufmann, AXIOS, 9 September 2024

The state of Illinois is in the market for a new flag, but some lawmakers don't want it to change.

The big picture:

The state's flag redesign is moving forward for the first time in 50 years first after lawmakers create the 20-person Illinois Flag Commission last year to explore changing the flag to "reflect the identity of Illinois"

Driving the News:

The Commission announced last week a new flag design contest, calling on state residents to submit their design proposals by 18 October.

The intrigue: Downstate Republican Rep. Adam Niemerg, joined by the other six members of the Illinois Freedom Caucus, is worried the new flag will be used "to advance the far left's political ideology." Similar objections were levied in Minnesota, where more conservative leaders pushed back on the new state flag.

Reality: The state is run by Democrats, but the effort to redesign the state flag is hardly partisan. In fact, the flag has been widely ridiculed and was recently named one of the worst in the country. Niemerg points to language that Governor JB Pritzker used when signing the Commission into law. She said, "it may be time we create a new one that exemplifies the values of our great state."

Yes, but:

The Governor and Democratic leaders in the General Assembly appointed the Commission, which includes lawmakers, artists and educators. Republicans and downstate leaders have only a handful of spots on the Commission.

No members of the Freedom Caucus are on the Commission. That may be because the caucus and Niemerg are outspoken critics of both the Democratic and Republican parties in Illinois. They have rallied against Pritzker on almost every one of his initiatives and have rallied to replace Republican state leadership in the past to better reflect the MAGA movement and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump.

What they're saying:

Will we highlight the Governor's efforts to partner with Chinese-owned companies? Or will the flag become a state-sponsored tribute to the Pride flag?" Niemerg said. "We need patriotic citizens to take a stand against this clear attempt to rebrand our state according to leftist ideology." Niemerg has launched a petition to stop the state's push for a new flag, telling constituents to "send them a clear message: DON'T MESS WITH OUR STATE FLAG!"

