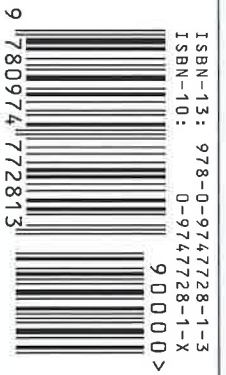


“GOOD” FLAG, “BAD” FLAG

How to Design a Great Flag



These principles of good flag design distill the wisdom of many people who have written on the subject, including Philippe Bondurand, Frederick Brownell, William Crampton, Michael Paul, Jim Ferrigan, Richard Gideon, Kevin Harrington, Lee Herold, Ralph Kelly, Rich Kenny, David Mantucci, Clay Moss, Peter Orenski, Whitney Smith, Steve Tyson, Henry Untermyer, and Alfred Znamierowski.

What is NAVVA?

The North American Vexillological Association (NAVVA) is an international, nonprofit, scholarly organization dedicated to vexillology, the study of flags and their cultural, historical, political, and social significance. With members across North America and around the world, NAVVA comprises flag scholars, designers, collectors, conservators, educators, merchants, manufacturers, historians, and hobbyists. For more information about its activities, publications, and membership, visit www.nava.org.

Note:

Design principles are guidelines, not rules—they help designers create flags that will be effective, widely adopted, and loved. In some cases it makes sense to depart from the guidelines to reach a creative, compelling, or politically acceptable solution.

Like all fields of design, flag-design (vexillography) has a rich and complex history with many nuances. Any full account is beyond the scope of this booklet. Interested readers should seek out the many excellent and informative papers and perspectives in periodicals such as NAVVA's *Raven* and *Vexillum*, along with the flagdesign resources and case studies on www.nava.org.

It can be tempting to use these principles to denigrate poorly designed flags. The specific examples here only serve to illuminate the principles by showing flags that fail to follow them.

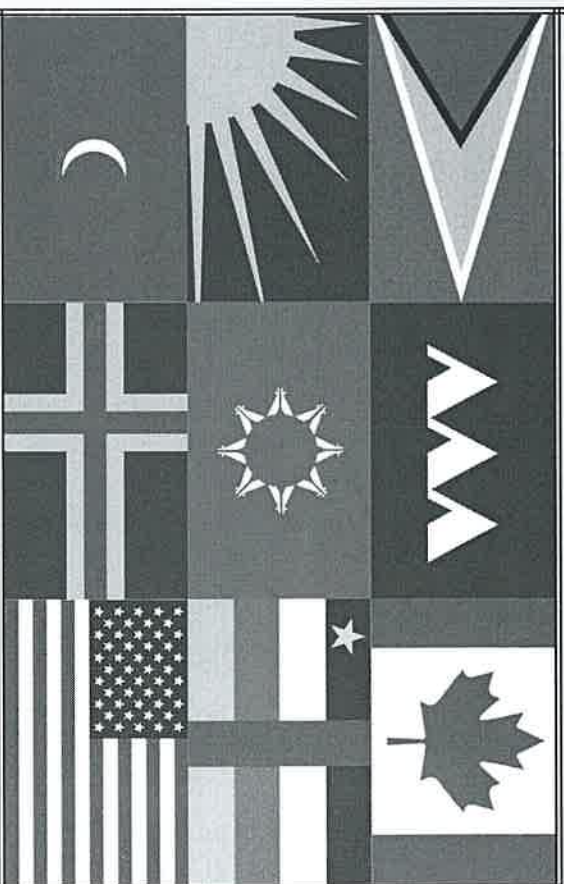
ISBN-13: 978-0-97477228-1-3
ISBN-10: 0-97477228-1-X

Designed by Melissa Meiner
© 2006, 2020 North American Vexillological Association

“GOOD” FLAG, “BAD” FLAG

APR 26 2022

How to Design a Great Flag



USE 5 BASIC PRINCIPLES TO CREATE AN
OUTSTANDING FLAG FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION,
CITY, TRIBE, COMPANY, FAMILY, NEIGHBORHOOD,
OR EVEN COUNTRY!

COMPILED BY TED KAYE

North American Vexillological Association
The World's Largest Organization of Flag Enthusiasts and Scholars

1. KEEP IT SIMPLE

THE FLAG SHOULD BE SO SIMPLE THAT A CHILD CAN DRAW IT FROM MEMORY . . .

Flags flap. Flags drape. Flags must be seen from a distance and from their opposite side. Under these circumstances, only simple designs make effective flags. Furthermore, complicated flags cost more to make, which often can limit how widely they are used.

Most poor designs have the elements of a great flag in them—simplify them by focusing on a single symbol, a few colors, large shapes, and no lettering. Avoid the temptation to include a symbol for everybody.

Ideally the design will be reversible or at least recognizable from either side. Don't put a different design on the back.

YES



BANGLADESH

With two strong colors and a single symbol—the rising sun of independence (slightly offset to the hoist), this flag succeeds admirably.

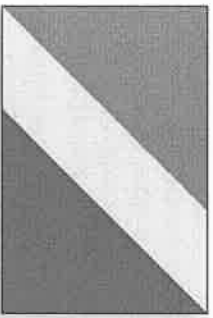
NO



TURKMENISTAN

This very complicated rug contains 5 traditional patterns! Better to leave it off and keep the moon and stars.

YES



REP. OF THE CONGO

With bold, contrasting colors, large shapes, and parallel lines, this flag is also easily recognized when reversed.

NO



WEST VIRGINIA (USA)

The seal itself is complex, the white background is boring, and the overall design differs from other state flags only in its blue border.

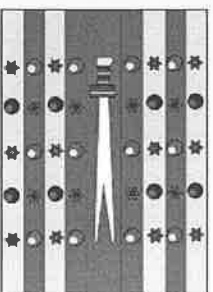
YES



ALASKA (USA)

The stars, a standard U.S. symbol, form the "Big Dipper" constellation and the North Star, representing the northernmost U.S. state.

NO



BEY OF TUNISIA

Replete with stars, crescents, and the Sword of All, this 19th-century design's overwhelming complexity defeats its purpose.



3. USE 2—3 BASIC COLORS

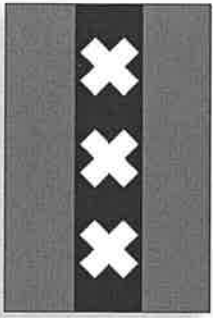
LIMIT THE NUMBER OF COLORS ON THE FLAG TO THREE, WHICH CONTRAST WELL AND COME FROM THE STANDARD COLOR SET ...

The basic flag colors are red, blue, green, black, yellow, and white. They can range from dark to light. Occasionally other colors are also used, such as purple, gray, and orange, but they are seldom needed in a good design.

Separate dark colors with a light color, and light colors with a dark color, to help them create effective contrast. A good flag should also reproduce well in "grayscale", that is, in black and white shades.

More than four colors are hard to distinguish and make the flag unnecessarily complicated and expensive. Flag fabric comes in a relatively limited number of colors—another reason to stick to the basics.

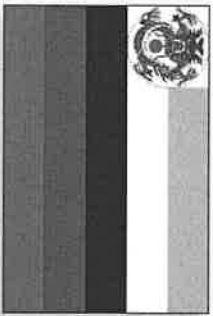
YES



AMSTERDAM
(NETHERLANDS)

These colors contrast well, even though the red and black are not separated by a light color.

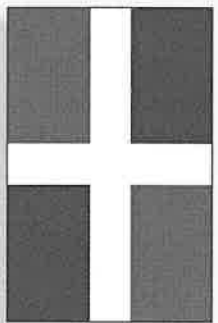
NO



CHINESE ADMIRAL
(1882)

Too many colors! At the least, the yellow and white should be separating the dark colors. While the dragon is in the position of honor, it is very hard to distinguish.

YES



DOMINICAN
REPUBLIC

These colors provide balance and contrast, leaving a white cross as "negative space" in the middle of the flag.

NO



DOMINICA

By using ALL six basic flag colors, this flag creates unnecessary cost and complexity. Who can see the parrot's red and black eye?

YES



NEW MEXICO
(USA)

Red and yellow recall the state's Spanish heritage, while the sun symbol comes from the Zia Indians. This design was voted the best U.S. state flag by NAVA members.

NO



VIRGINIA
(USA)

Imagine, 18 different colors in the official flag specifications! Not only are they difficult to distinguish, but having so many colors drives up the manufacturing cost.

5. BE DISTINCTIVE OR BE RELATED

AVOID DUPLICATING OTHER FLAGS, BUT USE SIMILARITIES TO SHOW CONNECTIONS...

This is perhaps the most difficult principle, but it is very important. Sometimes the good designs are already "taken". However, a flag's symbols, colors, and shapes *can* recall other flags—a powerful way to show heritage, solidarity, or connectedness. This requires knowledge of other flags.

Often the best way to start the design process can be looking to one's "roots" in flags—by country, tribe, or religion. Use some of the many resources available to help you with flag identification and history, such as "Flags of the World": www.fotw.info, or your local library.

YES



GHANA

Using the same colors used by many countries in West Africa, this flag shows a strong connection to its neighbors' flags.

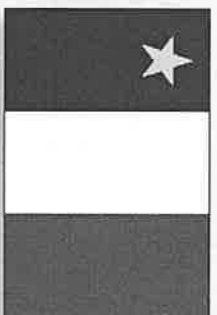
NO



INDONESIA

Except for its proportions, this flag is exactly the same as Monaco's (which had it first), but there is no connection between the two countries. Upside-down it is the same as Poland or as Cantabria, Spain!

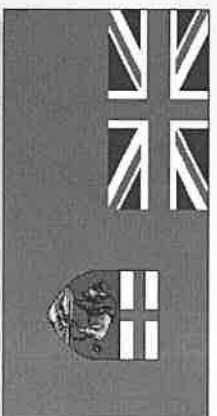
YES



ACADIA
(CANADA)

French-speaking Acadians in Canada place a yellow star for St. Mary, their national symbol and patron saint of mariners, on the flag of France.

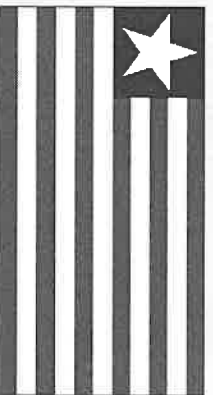
NO



MANITOBA
(CANADA)

While the British "Red Ensign" signifies connectedness within the Commonwealth, the distinguishing feature is the small shield. Better to have used the bison as the main flag symbol.

YES



LIBERIA

Founded by free African Americans, Liberia reflects that heritage with a similar yet distinctive flag.

NO



VERMONT
(USA)

This flag is virtually indistinguishable from 20 other U.S. state flags, all with a seal on a blue field.

