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ESSAY / ESSAI

Flagging Enthusiasm

By ANTHONY (TONY) BURTON

Vexillologists recognise that their study and engaging passion entails more than mere “flag-spotting” or rummaging in the arcana of particular flags. More than a decade since Peter Orenski asked whither vexillology (Quo Vadimus), perhaps it is time to acknowledge how widely both the symbolism of flags and flag-like symbolism has permeated contemporary culture, not only in the West, but in an emerging world techno-culture.

This essay considers the civic function of flags while challenging both the necessary link between flags and patriotism and the myth that flags are sacred. It alludes to the role of design in traditional flags, but postulates for them a role in civic pageantry as opposed to political polemics, a joyful aesthetic that transcends the aggression often associated with flags. Interwoven themes will emerge, including that of changing perceptions and uses of symbols. Considering the return of vexilloids of various forms that perform the signal functions of flags, this essay asks a question, possibly uncomfortable for traditional vexillology, that justifies the triple meaning of the title: do traditional flags really matter? The philosophy—or vexillosophy perhaps—invites discussion, and thinking outside the usual rectangle.

Who’s a patriot now?

Do flags matter? Does the flag matter? Countries and nations, like individuals, with all their symbolic projecting and acting-out, come of age on independence and hopefully mature with it. North Korea comes immediately to mind. For individuals, the challenge is for a life well-lived, in a civic and social context, unfurled with confidence based on a healthy self-esteem. For countries, the challenge is to make it possible for citizens to live that good life as their sovereign right. Again, North Korea?

Linked with this individual and collective challenge, the symbol of national self-esteem is the flag. The question can arise, as it did last century for South Africa and the Balkans, and might one day in Australia and New Zealand, as to which, or even what sort of flag, best reflects and builds national self-esteem.

Such questions reach beyond individual nations, states and countries. Each generation is obliged by the new challenges of their age to examine entrenched world views, values and, not least, religious and other dogma.

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Introduction

IT IS MY TREMENDOUS PLEASURE TO INTRODUCE THE INAUGURAL ISSUE OF *Flag Research Quarterly*. This new publication of the North American Vexillological Association promotes the interdisciplinary study of flags by providing a forum for a wide spectrum of short-form vexillological writing.

Our writers and our readers come from many different backgrounds and bring a wealth of unique experiences to flag studies. We celebrate this multiplicity by providing a place for expressing different points of view and describing experiences both individual and universal, for examining flags from all angles as historical, social, political, material, artistic, symbolic, and semiotic artifacts. As this is a quarterly publication, the FRQ editorial board continually accepts submissions and pledges to work with authors to support the writing of meaningful and engaging scholarly articles, personal essays, and book reviews.

As editor, I offer a sincere thanks to the writers who contributed to this first issue, whose individual works not only stand on their own, but taken together embody the *Quarterly's* vision of big-tent vexillology. In his provocative think piece, "Flagging Enthusiasm," Tony Burton muses on the eternal questions of vexillology: what is a flag and what does it do? While not avoiding the simple answers, he unfurls the flag as a symbolic and material object, allowing it to reveal itself as a complicated, challenging, and controversial creature. Todd Sentell's personal essay, "Don't Wave the White Flag Too Soon," describes his successes with bringing vexillology into the classroom. For his students, flags become tools for expressing a sense of self and understanding the wider world. Xing Fei's concise yet illuminating look at eighteen centuries of Chinese flag culture not only recounts a history new to many if not most of our readers, but demonstrates the cultural significance of flags in societies the world over. Lastly, a selection of abstracts from recent scholarship in flag studies symbolizes the encouraging future of vexillology as a broad-based and ever-changing dialog.

Though *Flag Research Quarterly* is a new publication, it could not exist without the dedicated work of Peter Ansoff, outgoing editor of *NAVA News*, and Ted Kaye. Their professionalism and hard work has a lasting legacy in the issues of *NAVA News* they nurtured, and is an inspiration as we move forward into this new era of publishing. In this publication we seek not to replace but to add to what has come before. We look forward to hearing from you, our readers and writers. We gratefully acknowledge that it is you, not us, who produce *Flag Research Quarterly*; we eagerly await your submissions.

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Burton: National flags are summary symbols of perceived values

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Along with these, the deeper meaning of symbols, such as flags, comes into question. In evolving their own identities, tomorrow's adults, pledging allegiance (or not) to the flag, will shape the identity also of their nations. The age of empires is over—for now.

Patriotism and flag-waving are frequently, and sometimes conveniently, confused. Does that make patriotism a dirty word? Australian political philosopher and commentator Tim Soutphommasane, arguing for its rediscovery (Reclaiming Patriotism), doesn't think so. However, patriotism runs deeper than the kind of flag worship promoted by some national flag associations, including some in my own country of Australia, via indoctrination in schools and public liturgies surrounding National Flag Day. Elsewhere, in a more sinister way, despots co-opt the national flag to endow their regimes with a semblance of legitimacy. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a more patriotic German than any swastika-waver, and more a citizen than any Westboro evangelical.¹

Of course, national flags are more than propaganda props. They are meant to be summary symbols of values perceived as decent and inclusive of a civil society. Yet national flags as such are fairly recent. The age of nation-states is barely 500 years old and may yet prove to be a transient—or even a transitional—phase in world order. For now at least, the important thing about national flags is that they represent and are accepted symbols of a cohesive nation rather

than merely the emblem of an artificial or puppet state. The flag is, or should be, a symbol of the people united, as opposed to a prop to expressions of jingoistic nationalism (and not overlooking the kind greeting of the unmournable death of Osama bin Laden). As for symbolic analogues (this paper discusses several), gun ownership might be postulated as a symbol of independence and freedom, as is the flag. However, the one doesn't justify wrapping misinterpretation of the Constitution in the other (NRA). Hanging out more flags, perhaps intentionally, muddies this fraught issue. The linkage, attempted by vested interests playing on citizens' fear, soils the flag.

Statutes alone do not make a nation, or even a viable nation-state. The connection between coherence of a nation-state and civic identity, integration and involvement, especially of minorities, is a key to true patriotism. While a few democracies appear cohesive, the number of nation-states lurching toward failure increases—the panoply of their flags at the UN no disguise. National pride, expressed in a showy but shallow way with flags is not a sign of strength, but neither are civic apathy and complacency.

As the highest and most visible symbols of the nation-state, however, national flags seem here to stay. In 1930 there were around sixty independent states. Today there are two hundred, all allegedly “sovereign.” Whether all the associated national flags will retain their present status is another question. If states must have such a symbol, what will be inspiring enough to draw citizens truly together? Many, indeed most, citizens have deep affection for their country and its flag, while others, ostracized or alienated for whatever reasons, may feel ambivalent about the flag.

There is a difference between civic respect and unreserved acceptance. The flag may be respected but if it is not accepted by everyone, or promoted for more than it really is—a symbol, but not the substance—can it truly be the nation's “principal symbol?”

What then is a flag?

A flag is an image, and a conventional design or logo. Artists might argue about the design, as in my country, but the conventions of flag design are, or ought to be, solidly grasped by vexillologists and are summarized elsewhere (Good Flag, Bad Flag; Burton). But what are flags for? Why are they useful?

As even professional designers, careless of those conventions, sometimes fail to grasp, flags ultimately are a form of semaphore. They send signals. Traffic signs are flags of a kind. We even use the verb: they flag a message. And as outlined below, there are many other flag-forms in the contemporary world, even things we would not consciously salute, but which in fact we do in the way that we use them.

A close analogue of theatre in their special quality of adding to the pageantry of life, flags portray and display, attract and instruct, proclaim and alarm.

Apart from the physical and visible, the symbolic nature of flags indicates a more numinous dimension, a manifestation of, or at least an attempt to articulate, the subliminal. All symbols are a projection of conscious reflection and wonderment over the vaguely troubling nature of the cosmos and our place in it.

Flags or their solid equivalents (vexilloids) have been used throughout history to demarcate territory, to denote authority, to signal danger, distress or surrender,

1. *But see* Mike Davis, *Hillsboro Church's Welcome in Bethalto, Ill.* (Jan. 9 2011), <www.gomestic.com/homemaking/hillsboro-churchs-welcome-in-bethalto-il/>.

and to express the pageantry of sheer joie de vivre (and therein may lie their future usefulness: if language began as imitation of bird-song, perhaps flags are their borrowed plumage).

The best recognized flags are arguably the Union Flag and that of the United States, both the product of different imperial styles. Both instances suggest usage as the complement of familiarity, and perhaps longevity, and an obvious link to advertising and propaganda.

Yet familiarity can also encourage complacency. The history behind flags and their evolution is often complex, and too often a closed book even to their subjects, which leads to ...

Happy Tacky,

Or the recent trend to display national emblems on car stickers or as part of a living canvas, as individuals adorn (or disfigure) their own bodies, which are more perishable than a symbol that needs no such reinforcing when ideally it should float free above us all.

This expanding (and costly) tribal practice pays strange homage to the flag. Wearing the national symbols doesn't make any one more patriotic than those who don't. Still, the unprecedented vulgarizing of its display does endow the flag with a new graphic power. It also prompts wonder: is the flag not sufficiently established without the need of such supplemental reinforcement? The comparatively sudden appearance of the flag as a personal badge may be spontaneous, or simply herd behavior. Grass-roots promotion of "Caesar's image" may conveniently mesh with policy, the one phenomenon feeding the other.

Flags in an age of transition and transformation

As social artifacts, and taking cue from flag displays at the Olympic

Games where it seems kudos is now to countries even more than to individual athletes, national flags have been democratized and internationalized. They are used as props in protest (as in the Arab Spring), in signage as direction finders and language indicators, and vulgarized (some would say desecrated) as props in pornography (patriotic porn or pornographic patriotism?)

The global convergence under way—something quite distinct from cultural uniformity—opens another perspective in considering what flags really convey and how useful they still are. Why the need for flags at all in an interdependent world? Is there a patriotism and loyalty higher than simply to local patches on the planet? Will what are now regarded as flags of "sovereignty" (a convention, after all) become the equivalent of luggage labels or tourist souvenirs of visits to exotic places?

Vexillo-Techno: Return of the Vexilloids

If linear simplicity is the hallmark of familiar fabric flags, what can be said of various emerging analogues also of interest to vexillology which also manifest semaphoric variations?

The earliest flags were solid vexilloids—usually staffs of office, military, secular or religious, or portable totems. If flags as we know them operate chiefly as mobiles, they are being replaced in modern culture by other attention-getters that encourage the same tribal habits that flags exploit.

Not everything is a flag. But anything can be.

Consider:

- Fashion and other dress codes (tuxedos to gothic, national costume). Like codpieces in the 16th century, men's ties send various signals, including subtle attempts at alpha male domination.

- Tattoos, face and body paint (sometimes of actual flags) all proclaim a kind of vexillism.
- In a hyper-visualized multi-media world, medieval-style communication by graphics is unrolling, appropriate for populations illiterate then and, after television, now.
- Social media all use vexillo-graphic "icons."
- Commercial advertising also presents its own livery and heraldry—a pageantry of the marketplace.

Not waving, just texting

Foremost among the new vexilloforms, part of a trans-national transformation of allegiances, are cell-phones, their more recent and evolving embodiments decorated with icons—protoflags all. The argument is by analogy, but bears reflection. Like flags, cellphones are highly portable. Like flags, they send signals and graphic signs, and in the sending, make emotional and informative contact with the recipients. Mobile phones are as much vexilloids as those of the pharaohs, or the vexilla of Roman legions.

The analogy is not as fanciful as may seem. At the 13th International Congress of Vexillology in Melbourne, Whitney Smith drew attention to a third dimension to traditional fabric flags beyond length and breadth: their thinness. Apparently, he was referring to the fact that a flag conveys its signal by its very motion.

The new mobilia bring yet a further dimension, analogous though it be. They can be "unfurled" to flip and slide, as flags might dip and glide. They get waved about. Their screens light up with all the winking livery possible to plasma. Ring tones mimic the anthems associated with national flags, fanfares securing attention—all a sign of a supranational state, or at least an



LEFT: The flag of Jamaica in food: black beans, callaloo and bananas. SUSANNA FIERAMOSCA NARANJO
RIGHT: The flag of France in food: red grapes, Brie cheese, crepes with jam. OKTAY ORTAKCIOGLU

emerging state of affairs. The Nokia chime is recognized around the planet.

There is another dynamic that traditional flags do not have. Rather than dividing nations, as national flags have done since their inception, mobile phones unite people across continents—albeit individually or sometimes, collectively for political purpose (the Orange Revolution in Kyiv, and more recently, the Arab Spring). In fact, they go beyond the limited delineation and purposes of national flags. Goodbye nation state: welcome to one world. These “smart” telebots are the practical, really useful, flags, the vexillovectors, of the electronic age.

In an electronically connected world, the technorati (they are not necessarily young) are more concerned and interested, it seems, in these real working models than in the badges of previous nationalisms and tribal allegiance. After all, a traditional flag is simply a piece of cloth. It will not wink at you, except in the mind’s eye.

The dark side

If traditional flags are pieces of cloth, so are blindfolds. Our brave new world is not all positive semaphore. The gaudiness of flags, mo-

biles of whatever form, can excite giddy and powerful emotions. Nationalism of the jingo kind might be fading, but the pace is uneven. Thuggery still masquerades as sovereignty.

Dictators and demagogues have long appreciated the power, and exploited the dark side, of flags. Massed flags can be mesmerizing, and youth is impressionable. Where ideologies and promises of nirvana beyond verification are at play, flags and their panoply can incite extreme adventures. In the getting of wisdom, a culture of discovery and communication needs, or uses, flags and their analogues, but when the message is massage, critical faculties can go off-line.

Flags to tattoo to

The link between flags and other accoutrements of culture is all the closer when the national flag appears in secondary applications, as a car decal (very personal property)—or tattooed on symbolically significant parts of the body.

Like graffiti, tattoos are flags of a kind. Part sign among those impressionable of bravado, tattoos flag a sense of individual and societal anxiety. For example, though denied, the slightest suggestion to many, ironically inked with the

Southern Cross, that Australia should change its flag often elicits vehement opposition. Flags and tattoos seem often associated with testosterone (why are there so few female vexillologists?), and at certain tea parties, carry a message of implied aggression: “Don’t Tread On Me!”

On one level, a meeting of heraldry and advertising, the recently fashionable urge to get decorated (actually, branded—a mark of servitude) amounts to desecration of the primordial and most beautiful vexilloid of all. To what and to whom is this common but arguably masochistic genuflection?

There may be something more than youthful rebellion and assertiveness here—perhaps a deep disturbance. A climate of pessimism is unsurprising given the apocalypse² delivered on 11 September 2001, while the cataclysm continues by proxy across the world. As Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe saw, governance collapses when too much change too fast op-

2. “Apocalypse” seems the right word as the revelation of things hidden but planned from a decade before.

presses the individual³—except today his subjects are reversed: the West is in neurosis, the rest not far behind.

The tribal or team (read, national) flag, as a symbol of the community, ideally should float serene in the background and above us all. It fulfills its function when left in that zone: all is right with the world. It is when all is not right with the world that tribal symbols are dusted off, polished, proclaimed, celebrated, sacralized, and proselytized—the recipe for xenophobic riot anywhere.⁴

Are flags in fact sacred?

No, but what they represent can be, or be claimed to be.

The totems of aboriginal peoples are to them sacred and to observers constitute an ancient flag-form. It is also commonplace for flags of more allegedly “civilized” peoples to be seen as “blood-banners,” i.e., “our fathers and sons fought and died for the flag.” The flag is co-opted to eulogize the notion of military sacrifice. To give one’s life for a just cause can also be the ultimate form of jihad or moral struggle (a Christian concept absorbed by Islam), though a sad reflection of the still evolving human condition. But to turn blood-sacrifice into the cornerstone of a religion is bad and primitive theology, little short of superstition. Ideally flags might be aloof from such abuse. Indeed, obsessive flag-waving, the vexophallicism of ever higher flag poles, or

the parade of symbols taken from the flag—any flag—verges on the neurotic, to the extent that it is a sign of “protesting too much,” a need for reassurance of who we are. Those who know who they are do not need labels or badges.

When food is depicted as flags (or vice versa), as in international food fairs, at one level this is simply chefs at play and clever advertising. At another level, physics and metaphysics seem to merge. Is the consumer meant ritually to commune with what is symbolized? “This is your National Symbol, Take It and Eat” and be patriotically nourished, comforted and transformed.

Desirable as transformation of the status quo might be, flags in themselves represent the power, force and authority of this world that we know, not that which is mystically aspired to. To treat flags as anything more than secular artifacts may be seen as a kind of blasphemy.

What is it that associates nationalist flag-waving with every kind of local “patriotism” to make either a virtue? The last century amply demonstrated a link between flag-gery and false patriotism. To the extent that flag-waving reinforces that perception, are flags things we should put away as relics of humanity’s childhood? Would the ultimate flag perhaps be one implied by its absence? Perhaps not, or ever, for as a species we are tool-makers and also symbol-makers, to the point where billions postulate deity with no proof beyond the prompting of wishful thinking.

More prosaically, despite flags being turned into tourist trinkets and fashion accessories, the dignity of the nation-states they represent remains intact, at least for a while yet. Tribes there will always be, and just as we make gods in our own image, humanity shall continue to make symbols. But in the end, flags

are symbols, not ends in themselves. It is the apotheosis of these and cognate symbols that cause problems. A more peaceful world would avoid the ideological extremes that flag-waving risks fomenting, and focus on the pageantry of flags, for beauty is its own most powerful advocate.

Whatever the future, flags have become more than flexible artifacts of colored fabric. Vexillology might take cognizance to avoid a traditional but too-narrow definition of this expanding aspect of human culture, leaving the study of flags and their functions marooned in a conceptual strait-jacket of a former age.

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3. Its title adapted from W.B. Yeats’s “The Second Coming,” Achebe’s 1958 Nobel Prize novel *Things Fall Apart* dealt with the impact of western culture on traditional life in Nigeria. Today, the grievances of the developing “Third” World are delivered to the doorstep of the “First” or “developed” World.

4. In December 2005, the Australian flag was used as a rallying prop in notably anti-Muslim beachside riots.



Fig. 1 (LEFT): The pennons in hands of Soldiers, 2d century. Fig. 2 (ABOVE): Mausoleum fresco from the Tang Dynasty, C.E. 820. THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

ARTICLE

A Look at Traditional Chinese Flags Across Eighteen Centuries

By XING FEI

In China's long recorded history, flags appeared very early. Three thousand two hundred years ago, King Wu of Zhou used a white banner as a commander's flag when he conquered the King of Shang (Muye). Around the same time, the character Lü (旅), which was related to military flags, appeared on inscriptions on oracle bones. However, these historical records are not yet sufficient to meet the requirements of archeological studies. Not until the 2d century C.E. is there enough reliable documentation—written text, drawings, and other archaeological evidence—for Chinese people to research traditional flags (Fig.1).

Although traditional Chinese flags have a very long history, the historical record limits initial research to the 18 centuries from the 2d century to the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 are the topic of this study.

These eighteen centuries can be divided into the first 15 (2nd through 16th) and the last three (17th through 19th) centuries. The first 15 centuries wit-

nessed the creation, growth, and decline of about fifty centralized dynasties and locally autonomous powers. These rises and falls were related to about ten ethnic populations, including the Han, the Huns, and the Mongols. The use of flags grew and developed during this period into a complicated system. Waving flags could be seen everywhere from royal processions to army battles, and from commercial advertisements to cultural performances.

After the 5th century, frescos and picture scrolls depicting flags became more prevalent. Most frescos have been discovered in mausoleums (Fig. 2), but some have also been found in the famous Dunhuang Grottoes (Zhang). Picture scrolls became common after the 10th century and drawings of all types have valuable historical relevance (Fig. 3). Historic written records became more descriptive and accurate. Voluminous official historic records offer detailed descriptions of the flags used in the emperor's processions

Fig. 3 (RIGHT): Southern Song Dynasty Picture Scroll, Wenji's Return to Han, The Fifteenth Beat of Hujia Eighteen Beats, Early 12th Century. Fig. 4 (BELOW): The Manchu Eight Banners, 1644-1912. THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION



and also of the rules governing the use of flags by the imperial family.

There are also military manuals that recorded the various types and formats of military flags, offering detailed instructions on how flags were to be used in training and in battle. In well-known poems and novels, there appear many descriptive passages about flags. Flags even became an important part of the vernacular language.

Throughout these fifteen centuries, traditional Chinese flags

were relatively uninfluenced by external cultures and developed along a relatively steady path.

The last three centuries (the 17th to 19th) marked the pinnacle of development for traditional Chinese flags, after which came rapid decline. This period also marks the founding of the Qing Dynasty by the Manchus and their subsequent decay. By the beginning of the 1800s, the Manchus of Northeast China had already established the "System of Eight Banners, (Eight

Banners System)" which governed both politics and the military (Fig. 4). The Eight Banners divided military and peasantry into eight groups. These groups were productive forces during peace and battle-ready battalions in war. This is the highest degree of integration between flags and society.

When the Manchu soldiers conquered all of China, the rule of the Eight Banners spread further. It gradually became an effective, though very strict, system of gov-



Fig. 5 (TOP LEFT): Guangdong Customs in Qing Dynasty, 1760. Fig. 6 (LEFT): The Qing Dynasty national flag, 1889-1912. Fig. 7 (TOP RIGHT): The three flags of the Chinese Republic, 1912. THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

erning China. To expand the foundation of power, the Manchus later established the Mongol Eight Banners and the Han Eight Banners. The latter was a small group of Han ethnicity who supported Manchu rule early on. Qing emperors continued and further expanded the use of royal flags from the Ming Dynasty. In many picture scrolls depicting the procession of the imperial guards, the Eight Banners, as well as other flags, are prominently featured (Yun).

Brave and capable soldiers and officials of the Eight Banners were

all noted in special record books. The country provided their entire families with all their needs. The officials' and soldiers' official duties of training, guarding, and fighting in times of war were passed from generation to generation. There was no need to secure employment or establish a livelihood. After 200 years, with no wars to fight or need to work, their offspring became useless individuals who only cared about enjoying the luxuries of life. In China, the term "Children of the Eight Banners" is used to describe those who were

born into luxury, but were lazy and had no ambitions.

The poor records of the soldiers under the Eight Banners in both internal and external battles in the latter part of the Qing Dynasty, was an indication that the System of Eight Banners was coming to an end. Besides the Eight Banners, the Qing Dynasty established the Han ethnic-focused "Green Standard Army," which employed the use of green flags. There were also local militia that employed flags of various types, such as the Xiang Army the Huai Army and the Black Flag

Army among others. Flags were also commonly used in everyday life. Tall, Chinese-style flag poles with specialized flags stood in front of many government buildings, temples, and ancestral halls (Fig. 5). Although the Qing Dynasty's system of flags was widespread and sophisticated, its demise began with the Opium Wars in 1839.

The Qing Dynasty viewed itself as representing the "Kingdom of Heaven," and looked down upon other countries as "barbarians." They also looked down upon the flags of Western merchant ships and trading posts. When British cannons blew down the doors of the Qing Dynasty, the various Western powers began building trading ports, establishing concession and constructing churches; Western flags were flying in China's sky. Qing officials and civilians were shocked. By the mid-1800s, as a result of the need for improving navigation and coastal defense, the triangular yellow dragon flag rose on the ships of the Qing Dynasty. Later, these yellow dragon flags were rectangular. This marked acceptance of the reality that the "Kingdom of Heaven" was just another country. It also reflects the influence of Western flags.

In 1889, the Qing Dynasty issued the "Beiyang Navy Regulation (Yi)," officially designating the rectangular yellow dragon flag as the national flag and also as the military flag (Fig. 6). At the same time, it created a system of flags for naval use. Later, the Beiyang Navy imitated Western navies, creating flags for naval officers. During this time, the Qing Dynasty started training a modern army, and used new Western-style military flags. However, it was too late to prevent the collapse of the Qing Dynasty. The System of Eight Banners, the yellow dragon flag, the royal flags, and the Qing military flags were all abandoned. The foundation of China's tradi-

tional flags had been destroyed. Western flags and culture had a profound impact on China.

In 1911, with the collapse of the Qing Dynasty and the establishment of the Republic of China, new flags appeared (Fig. 7). Choosing a new national flag was a point of contention among various political groups. Most favored a flag consisting of five colors (red, yellow, blue, white, and black). The Group Wuchang Uprising favored Tiexue's 18-star flag. The provisional president, Sun Yat-Sen, strongly advocated for a red flag featuring a blue sky with a white sun (Sun). In the end, the moderate five-color flag was chosen. Although all three flags were designed for the republic, the flag with the blue sky and white sun emphasized the core leadership of the revolutionary party. The five-color flag emphasized the equality of society, ethnicities, and people. Although the 18-star flag also advocated revolution, the unity of the provinces is akin to the unity of the states in the stars of the American flag. The use of the new republic's flag indicated the deep influence of the new thought and culture of flags on the Chinese. The use of the new republic's flag also represented a new era where traditional flags were decisively abandoned and a strong push was made to build a new flag culture.

One can see that traditional Chinese flags have the following special characteristics.

1. In the evolution of China's long history, traditional flags developed into a sophisticated, widely used system. They are an important part of China's historical heritage.
2. Traditional flags came in all shapes and sizes and served multiple purposes. They were also deeply integrated into the lives of officials and common people. Under centralized rule, it was difficult for local and

tribal flags to develop and grow.

3. The design, materials, form, decoration and crafting of traditional flags are all representative of Chinese cultural heritage.
4. In the process of developing modern flags, too much Chinese cultural heritage has been lost and traditions have been too quickly abandoned. At the same time, the understanding of Western flag culture is shallow and incorporation of modern flag design incomplete.

It has been some time since traditional Chinese flags were a key part of China's flag culture. As China's economic revival brings a cultural revival, traditional flags are regaining attention. Historical films and folk activities were the first to embrace traditional flags. The academic study of traditional flags has just begun and only minor progress has been made.

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ESSAY / ESSAI

Bold Beginnings

By HUGH L. BRADY

Although this is the first issue of the *Flag Research Quarterly*, it's been in the making for some time; its parentage reaches back to late 1987 when Grace Rogers Cooper took over as editor of *NAVA News*.

Begun as the *NAVA Newsletter* in 1967, it mostly featured reprints of popular media articles about flags, items of Association business, and short pieces directed primarily to collectors. Grace began featuring longer articles of original scholarship timely produced. Successive editors such as James Croft and James Liston continued Grace's aim of featuring original works, each taking the publication closer to the issue you now hold in your hands. David Martucci was the first editor to produce all-color issues. Peter Ansoff, aided by Ted Kaye, then-editor of *Raven: A Journal of Vexillology*, and the editorial board of Martucci and John Lowe, continually edited high-quality issues that featured many contributions to flag knowledge.

However, editors and editorial boards have been precluded from fully realizing the potential for a quarterly flag research publication. It has been hard to recruit contributions from outside scholars who, looking at the name *NAVA News*, concluded it was nothing more than a club newsletter. The continuing need to publish business items and other matter tended to crowd out scholarship of varying length because of space constraints. And, frankly, it was thought by some that to feature more original scholarship outside of *Raven* would hurt our annual journal.

The need for a quarterly research publication to complement—not compete with—*Raven* has been evident for some time and the Board decided to review the publications program. Consultations with past officers, editors, and Whitney Smith and his son Austin were held. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive for the establishment of this quarterly.

The Board's action was motivated by three concerns: the loss of vexillological publications in the last three years, respect for the Association's traditions, and the promotion of vexillology as the scholarly study of flags. The number of North American publication outlets for vexillological scholarship in shorter articles is diminishing, not increasing. *Flag Bulletin*, *Flagscan*, and *Flagwaver* have ceased as ongoing publications; others are issued irregularly. Launching a new publication avoids a debate over whether we are discarding the *NAVA News* name and retains it for its intended

historical purpose (as discussed below). And including the words "flag research" in the quarterly's name indicates its subject matter immediately to all of those interested in vexillology even if they aren't aware of the word, including researchers and librarians.

By focusing on news and information about vexillology and vexillologists with articles and commentary on all aspects of the discipline, including new research and how vexillology is used by nonpractitioners, the *Flag Research Quarterly* makes an immediate contribution to vexillological understanding.

The Board believes this reorientation of our publications program will allow the Association to continue to lead in the publication and dissemination of vexillological scholarship. This represents a significant step forward for the Association as we prepare for the 50th anniversary of our founding in 2017.

As alluded above, the Board decided to return *NAVA News* to its original function as an Association newsletter, e.g., meeting notices, minutes, nominating committee's slate for the Executive Board, and as place to summarize current vexillological information appearing in other media. It becomes a hybrid electronic/print publication on an as-needed basis; when printed, it will appear as an insert to the *Quarterly*, much as the Flag Institute's *Gazette* is packaged with *Flagmaster*. *Raven* remains our pre-eminent publication and will continue to appear annually, and *Raven* will continue to have the right of first refusal on printing papers presented at the annual meeting and other events sponsored by the Association. Just as *Raven* did not spell the end of the *Flag Bulletin*, this quarterly does not equal a loss for *Raven*.

The *Quarterly's* editor brings excellent credentials to the job. Kenneth Hartvigsen is currently serving a predoctoral fellowship at the Smithsonian Institution and is finishing his dissertation for his Ph.D. in art history at Boston University. Those of you who were at the International Congress of Vexillology in Alexandria, Va., in 2011, will recall that he won the Driver Award for his presentation "Picturing Flag Violence in Civil War Sheet Music: The Case of 'Down the Traitors' Serpent Flag'." Kenneth represents our emerging scholars and his willingness to take on this task benefits us all.

A quarterly forum to regularly engage vexillologists and other scholars is critical to advancing vexillology by improving the quality and expanding the scope of

its scholarship. I would argue that, in recent years, scholarship in our discipline lacks a compelling direction. It usually fails to examine the literature of the field, such as there is, and regularly tends to presume no prior work on a subject. Use of archival resources that are not available on the Internet is rare.

Often, it is not adequately sourced so that the underlying material can be located and evaluated. Authorship credit is not allocated by objective standards; minor acts of compilation and technical assistance are inflated far beyond the value of the contribution. Statistical work of dubious value is touted to support weak claims. Finally, it often misapplies evidentiary standards by confusing the existence of a fact for the truth or falsity of the event or phenomenon the fact represents. This all adds up to impede needed critiques and refinements of theories, concepts, and arguments in the discipline.

The question is not whether “vexillology [has] made an inroads as [a] field of study,” as Dr. Scot Guenter asks (2), because the answer is a qualified “yes.” Work that “tell[s] us not only about flags but about people—about the social groups that use them or have used them in the past,” has been on the increase (3). Using Whitney Smith’s Vexillological Classification System, Guenter assigned all papers presented at the most recent International Congresses of Vexillology (1987, 1999, and 2011) held in North America to one of the system’s 10 categories. This showed that the number of papers dealing with history declined from about one-half of the papers presented in 1987 to one-third in 2011, while the number of papers examining usage grew significantly in the same period. Thus, Guenter concludes, “vexillology is growing and evolving” because its scholarship has expanded beyond history (3).

Perhaps. Closer examination of recent papers suggests that progress may be illusory. Arguably, some papers do not even represent vexillology.

Smith published his “Fundamental Theses of Vexillology” in 1982, in part to combat “random or purposeless” activity by vexillologists. Thesis No. 18 is particularly instructive:

The designing and making of flags, the display of flags, promotion of flag usage, collecting of flags, the use of flags to achieve certain ends, and analysis of the relative artistic merits of . . . flags are not subsumed in the study of flags, although the study of any of the above activities is (33).

Accepting the thesis as true—and for this essay, I do—narrative papers of an individual or collective experience in setting up a flag exhibition, holding a flag contest, and designing a flag, for example, would fail this test. Even if the papers made recommendations for best practices in holding exhibitions and contests, that does not make them vexillological ones. What is missing is any explanation of how these activities help us “understand more accurately and more completely the nature of human society” (Smith 32) or whether these activities as currently conceived and executed can ever aid in that understanding. Of course, authors are welcome to argue that the thesis is wrong or imperfectly expressed, but currently, there is not a publication that can host or foster the kind of dialogue envisioned by Smith for both present and future generations of vexillologists.

Members of the Association have a responsibility to both “read[] the literature of the field and research[] and specializ[e] in some area of it not well known” and “shar[e] discoveries and the results of research with other by contributing to . . . vexillological publi-

cations” (Responsibilities 3). Thus, the Board’s expectation is that this quarterly will provide that opportunity and further vexillology by adhering to the Association’s founding purposes: “promotion of research into the origins, history, and symbolism of flags [and issuing] publications on flags and vexillology” (“Articles of Incorporation”).

As a regular forum to engage the scholarship published by other journals and presented at Congresses and meetings, the *Flag Research Quarterly* will help expand our understanding of the human need to create and use symbols to express political, cultural, and social ideals. To provide a rigorously edited and timely selection of works that explore vexillology in unexpected and illuminating ways, to me, is an exciting development.

At the beginning of this century, one author examining vexillology asked Quo vadimus? (Orenski 7) or “where are we going?” This quarterly replies, in the words of Virgil, audacibus annue coeptis or “look with favor upon a bold beginning.”

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ARTICLE

Don't Wave the White Flag Too Soon

By TODD SENTELL

All my life I've been fascinated with flags. As a kid I looked at pictures of them in books and wondered what the colors symbolized, or why they put a bird there and a cross over there. It may seem impressive to be interested in vexillology as a kid, but then again I was also just as interested in shooting passing cars, or my friends, with my BB gun. Which I did. A lot. Still, I believe that flags can teach powerful lessons, no matter a vexillologist's age.

Working at schools in Georgia for students with a wide range of learning, behavior, and emotional disorders, I have enjoyed sharing my love of flags through a two-week lecture series on vexillology. Vexillology wasn't a formal part of the curriculum in these schools, and in fact, although I've always been surrounded by some mighty educated fellow teachers and administrators, no one ever knew what the word vexillology meant. In courses on U.S. history, civics, Georgia history, world cultures, or fine arts, with students from 7th grade all the way to seniors, I've taught a two-week lecture series on vexillology that includes a final exam as well as a project where the students make their own flag. I called it the "Flag of Me" project. Introducing vexillology to social studies students is not only obvious to me, but necessary. I have taught the lecture series to my fine arts students because I wanted them to fully understand that flags are also art—they are a deliberate attempt by someone to make something aesthetic. But, in a flag there is meaning in everything. The color, the charge, the position of the charge, everything has meaning determined by a person or group, sometimes under tremendously difficult circumstances such as war or the development of a new country. In most every case, I teach them that the meaning is so deeply serious that it verges on sacred. My students always respond positively to these lectures as flag study is so new and fascinating to them. In all cases my students said they'd never look at a flag the same again.

One recent experience with this lecture series sticks out in my mind. I cannot tell you how moved I was, as well as amused, at what the students revealed during this project. Because of these wonderful moments, because of a piece of fabric that waves in the wind, I'd be happy to teach vexillology to my special students every day.

I started in on the scholarly study of flags with passion and spirit in my voice and soul. I began unfurling

all kinds of flags I've collected in my days on Earth and gave them a look-see at flag books I've collected. I told them what they'd need to know for my infamous vexillology examination while they gazed, and became dazed, looking at my vexillology handout. So many questions!

- What are the two main things flags do?
- Graphic elements in flags usually do what? The word starts with an "s"
- The earliest known cloth flags were thought to have come from where?
- There are how many recognized countries in the world?
- What's the name of the dude or chick who carries a flag?
- What do you think is the ratio of our national flag?
- What's the ratio of a square flag?
- When was the last time the United States flag was changed?
- Can you burn the United States flag and not get in trouble?
- What's the protocol for when and how you should burn the United States flag?
- Why did the United States flag go through so many changes?
- If I leave the United States flag up during the night, then I should do what to it?
- The study of flags is called what?
They were truly freaked out. Then they discovered there was a lot of class time left, and there was no sign of stopping. We continued with basic flag types:
- What's the name of a flag that has a strip of color that runs along the outer edge of the flag?
- Two bands of color either horizontal or vertical?
- Three bands of different colors either horizontal or vertical?
- A field divided into four different quarters?
- A center cross that divides the field?
- A cross that divides the field where the vertical is to the left of center?
- An X-shaped cross?
- A complete cross surrounded by the field where the arms are equal?
- A triangle of any size or shape?
- A narrow band that acts as a border between two colors?
- A zigzag edge like the teeth on a saw?
- What's the name of the type of flag ... the flag itself

... that's triangular? (a trick question ... had to)

- What's the name of the most famous pirate flag?
- What type of animal does the word "pennon" come from? And did they think they were going to get away without talking about flagpoles? I think not!
- What's the ornamental knob on top of the flagstaff called?
- What's another name for the pole?
- What's the round mechanical device called that allows the flag to move up and down?
- The rope or cord used to raise the flag is called what?
- The metal ring used to secure the clip to the flag is called what?
- The inner, lower left portion of the flag nearest the flag pole is called what?
- The top quarter of the flag nearest the flag pole is called what?
- What's the outer part of the flag called?

I politely asked them to do some hellacious research on the history of the Gadsden flag and some butt-kicking investigation on the history of the Jolly Roger. Then, we moved onto memorizing the messages of marine signal flags. Next, I encouraged them to spend an enormous amount of time going through the Association's web site, and heck, let's cap it off with a whole bunch of brisk memorization on United States flag etiquette!

One student, Herman, who by then was sweating and sporting a couple of crimson cheeks, took his glasses off and, seeming on the verge of losing consciousness, said "Boy, Todd, we sure do have a lot to learn about vexi-llow-logy!" What I think Herman really wanted to say was, "Boy, Todd, speaking for everyone, we sure do hate your greasy guts and wish you'd drop dead..."

At the end of the lecture series the students took a final-style exam, with all of the questions that

appear above. Everybody did so well—I was actually shocked to tell you the truth. The second requirement was the "Flag of Me" project where the students made a cloth or poster board flag with colors and charges that had to have exact meaning. On the due date the students went up to the front of the class, and as I held their flag, they were required to explain every detail to their classmates.

Snap said the red on his flag represents him getting better at baseball because he's been trying hard. For the charge he used a picture of him in the dugout during a baseball game.

Montene said the crucifix represents her love of Jesus.

Milo said the picture of the nose on his flag represents his concern for his sister who wants to get a nose job. The meaning of a hammer about to smash his alarm clock glaring the hideous time of 6:30 should be pretty obvious.

Hap's flag represented a place he'd like to live in and rule called Haptopia.

Beauregard didn't have a name for a new world represented by his funky flag, but he said it would be more of a kingdom and he'd be the ruler.

Albert had a near perfect flag. It was elegant and simple, the way professional vexillographers like it. He had drawn a heart containing the words, "Brandi + Albert." As simple as that. We asked Albert if he loved Brandi, who goes to another school. He said he did. I asked Albert if Brandi loved him back. Albert said he was pretty sure she did. I asked if he wanted to keep his flag. Albert said yes and he wasn't embarrassed one bit as he carried it back to his desk.

Click's bi-color flag was elegant and simple, too. He didn't have to, but he wrote his explanation out so when he presented his flag to us he would remember all the details and

get them right.

And he did get it right, on a deeper level than he might possibly realize. He said

My flag of choice for this assignment is a two banded horizontal bi-color design. The ratio of my flag is roughly 1:2 because my flag is of a rectangular shape. On my flag I have the colors yellow and green and together they represent my active lifestyle. Green represents my love of the outdoors along with my lifetime wilderness experience and practice of survival skills. The main purpose that my flag serves is that the flag I have come up with represents the things in my life that I enjoy being a part of and experiencing for a lifetime to come. The way I decided my flag to be positioned is yellow for the top color because that is the part of me that I think means the most, and on the bottom I have green for my secondary love for adventure. Yellow symbolizes my friendly, peaceful approach to people and who I respect and care for.

What an outstanding job Click did! He's a whacky 14-year old who I have always liked a lot. He's also a good vexillologist. I'll offer to him what I think might be the greatest sign of respect and appreciation for a flag and that's saluting it. I salute your flag and I salute you and Albert too, my vexillologists.

The students told me that they'd never look at flags the same way again, that they'd pay more attention to what a flag might communicate, represent, and symbolize. It made me tear up, it really did. They said that since they had a better feel for what a well-designed flag looks like they would speak up and tell anybody who would listen what elements of a flag could be changed to make it more balanced, logical, and communicative.

It's what vexillologists do.

Selected Abstracts of Dissertations and Theses Related to the Study of Flags: 2010-2011

War Flags into Peace Flags: The Return of Captured Mexican Battle Flags During the Truman Administration. Anderson, Ethan M. Thesis (M.A.)—Dept. of History, Kansas State Univ. (2010). On September 13, 1950, in a culmination of three years of efforts by organizations and individuals inside and outside the Harry S. Truman administration, 69 captured battle flags from the Mexican-American War were formally returned to the Mexican government at a ceremony in Mexico City. The events surrounding the return of flags to Mexico occurred in two distinct phases. The first was a small, secretive, and largely symbolic return of three flags conceived and carried out by high-ranking U.S. government officials in June 1947. The second large-scale, public return of the remaining flags in the custody of the War Department was initiated by the American Legion and enacted by the United States Congress. Despite their differences, both returns were heavily influenced by contemporary events, primarily the presidential election of 1948 and the escalation of the Cold War. Also, although the second return was much more extensive than the President originally intended, it was only through his full support that either return was accomplished. In the decades since 1950, historians have either ignored the return of Mexican battle flags or focused instead on Truman's wreath laying at the monument to the niños héroes in Mexico City in March 1947. This study, for the first time, provides an in-depth description of the efforts to return captured Mexican battle flags and explains why these war trophies were returned while others have remained in the United States. The goal of this investigation is to present the efforts of the Truman administration for what they truly were: an unprecedented act of international friendship. Although the actions of the U.S. government and private organizations were partially influenced by self-interest and Cold War fears, their primary motivation was a sincere desire to erase the painful memories surrounding the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848 in an effort to improve future relations between the two countries. Many historians point to the Truman administration as the end of the Good Neighbor Policy toward Latin America. This study, however, argues that the return of captured Mexican battle flags represents the true pinnacle of the United States' Good Neighbor Policy toward its southern neighbor.

Note: A very good read on a little-examined topic that highlights the emotional and practical power of flags in politics and the symbolism of war trophies, particularly flags, in the

identities of nations and their militaries. Mexican national memories of the Mexican War endured into the 20th century; these memories not only characterized Mexican opinion at when Truman returned the flags, but prevent return of flags from Mexico to the U.S. Illustrations: the Flag of the Tampico Battalion, Mexican Guerrilla Flag, Guidon Presented to President Alemán, and a U.S. Flag still in Mexican custody.

"Swear this flag to live, for this flag to die": Flag Imagery in Constructing the Narrative of the Civil War and the Transformation of American Nationalism. Vanover, Eric Thomas. Thesis (M.A.)—Dept. of History, Virginia Tech Univ. (2010).

The Civil War transformed nationalism in American society and created a notion of national identity closely tied to flag iconography. Flag symbolism developed as the prominent visualization of nationalism in American culture during and after the Civil War. The flags of the Civil War - namely the American flag, the Confederate national flag, and the Confederate Battle Cross - grew into iconic images within American communities. Their status as symbols of nationalism, patriotism, and an American historical past often advocated by newspapers, individual citizens, and the soldiers of the war themselves, initiated an American tradition of flag iconography for the purpose of nationalism unforeseen in American culture before the war. After the war, the issues of reconciliation and of what context the war would be placed in American history also became influenced by flag imagery. With the potential for post-war bitterness and lengthened disunity, the American flag offered a symbol that allowed Americans to remember the war as the deeds of patriotic citizens and as part of a continuous American national narrative. In doing so, the American flag became the iconic symbol of American nationalism.

Note: A very thorough treatment, using primary sources and popular reporting of the time, of the development and growth of flag iconography during the Civil War in both sections and the respective roles played by the press and soldiers in encouraging its growth and attendant feelings of nationalism. The three images from the popular press reproduced at the end are adequate for supporting the discussion, but the reader is left wanting more.

Symbol of hate or pride: The ironic effect of exposure to the confederate flag on judgment and behavior. Columb, Corey J. Thesis (M.S.)—Dept. of Psychology, Florida St. Univ. (2010).

The Confederate flag is a symbol rich with meaning. While public debate has focused largely on which per-

ception of the Confederate flag is the most appropriate, it is equally important to understand the consequences of being exposed to this symbol. We predict that exposure to the Confederate flag is likely to lead individuals who associate the flag with racism to engage in more negative judgments of and behavior toward Black targets than peers not exposed to the flag. In contrast, those who view the flag as a symbol of the South should show little to no effect of exposure to the Confederate flag on judgment of and behavior toward Blacks. In study one, participants then made judgments of either a Black or a White male after reading a short story about him. For those who believe the flag is a symbol of racism, exposure to the Confederate flag increased negative judgments toward a Black person, compared to those who believe it is a symbol of the South and were exposed to the flag and those in both groups exposed to a neutral symbol. Study two served as a replication and extension in which we measured participants' aggression toward a purportedly Black or White partner through noise blast task. For those who believe the flag is a symbol of racism, being exposed to the Confederate flag increased aggression toward a Black person, compared to those who believe the flag is a symbol of the South and for those who had a White partner.

Note: The author's work provides an interesting frame for the discussion of how flag imagery may influence individual attitudes and behavior towards others. Because the Confederate battle flag "is a widely recognized and highly visible symbol in the [U.S.]," the research findings that "exposure to the Confederate flag has a negative impact on judgments and behavior toward Black people"—if it holds upon replication—suggests this impact should be considered by policymakers who must determine just how visible the battle flag should be in the modern South. No illustrations.

France and the United States: Borrowed and Shared National Symbols. Crawford, Katlyn Marie. Thesis (M.A.)—Dept. of Foreign Languages, Univ. of North Texas (2011).

This thesis analyzes and demonstrates the similarities and differences between some of the national symbols of France and the United States. This includes the shared and borrowed aspects of each one and the ways in which each culture is reflected through, and built around them. The flags, national anthems, and several national icons such as France's Marianne and Uncle Sam are discussed. This analysis deals with the historical contexts and cultural meanings of the symbols, showing the changes each has undertaken in form and in national and international importance. Through the study of national symbols, this thesis reveals the similarities along with the differences between the two nations, which are often perceived as being highly dissimilar and even opposing in belief systems, cultures, and histories.

Note: Focused on the flags, anthems, and anthropomorphical representations of each country, this is a good discussion of the use of symbols in forming and maintaining national identity. There are clear and concise histories of each and their uses in both past and present; this informs the suggestion that "our modern, abstract national symbols" are more potent during war or political unrest than peacetime, especially considering that the symbols of both countries were born out of armed conflict. No illustrations.

Louis Karoniaktajeh Hall and the Art of Resistance. Cross, Wasoniio S. Thesis (M.A.)—Dept. of Art History, Concordia Univ. (Quebec) (2011).

This thesis examines the artistic output of Louis Karoniaktajeh Hall (1918-1993), a Kanien'keha:ka man who played multiple roles in the rejuvenation of the traditional

Haudenosaunee/Longhouse culture. Hall was best known as a political leader who played an integral role in the revival of Haudenosaunee spiritual traditions in his community, Kahnawake Mohawk Territory. He was also involved in the repossession of traditional Mohawk territory in New York State in 1974. Hall was an avid reader of historical and philosophical texts, and he penned several self-published newsletters and books which were disseminated not only in Kahnawake but to surrounding Native communities. However, with all these accomplishments, his artistic career has been overlooked in the canons of art history. The most recognizable work he produced would be the Warrior Flag, which garnered international attention when it was used during the blockades and protests in both Kanasatake and Kahnawake territories during the 1990 Oka Crisis. However, his work was much more varied than this one piece and his artistic practice deserves special attention. With the exception of the flag, his work has not been shown in any galleries nor does it appear in the several surveys of contemporary First Nations art. The richness of his work, which takes on characteristics of advertising design, political propaganda, and historical painting, should be considered as a unique and integral part of Aboriginal and North American art history.

Note: An examination of how one artist's work of political expression initially took the form of a flag, later widely adopted by Native American/First Nations activists. The statement that the author grew up "passively appreciating a flag she observed "on a daily basis" without knowing the designer's name or the flag's "important message" and her observation that the artist "believed that one important step towards regaining sovereignty was" a flag provides vexillologists with a fertile field for further examination. Good illustrations of the flag.