The President of Liberia, William R. Tolbert, Jr., has come out with a public announcement to the effect that he thinks Liberia's flag should be changed. Not only that, but he would also like to see the country's constitution, national anthem and national slogan--"Love of Liberty Brought Us Here"--changed.

The reason for these proposals, he said, is that the present symbols no longer "reflect appropriately our national aspirations and concepts."

Liberian youth in recent years have been demanding that the present flag should be discarded. The flag, as every vexillologist knows, was adopted by freed American slaves and based on the American flag, but with only one star in the canton.

The President did not say what kind of flag the country should have.


UPDATING THE FLAG CODE

by Michael E. Tancey, Jr.

The Congressional Research Service has updated their report on selected questions and answers regarding proper display of the U.S. Flag and have added recent judicial actions to the original (1971) report. The new version contains 31 pages and is designated as JC 346 US (1973).

Although the report could not be considered a "break-through on the topic of The Flag, it is worthwhile to anyone interested in the most recent judicial and traditional interpretations of the U.S. Flag Code, state laws, etc. Some of the subjects updated include: The Flag Code, 24-hour display, flying at half-staff, flag emblems and jewelry, and also state and federal anti-desecration laws. A copy may be acquired (apparently at no cost) from the Library of Congress, Reference Department, Washington, D.C. 20540.

Member John Mokler has provided us with a copy of Senate Joint Resolution 91, authored by Senator Edward Gurney, which proposes amendment of the U.S. Flag Code. John indicates that as of November 21, 1973, the resolution had been referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee, but no hearings had been scheduled at that point.

Some of the noteworthy changes included in the bill are: (cont'd on next page)
1. Permissibility of flying the U.S. flag at night "if properly illuminated."

2. "All-weather" U.S. flags may be flown on days when weather is inclement.

3. Flag patches (embroidered emblems) may be worn on uniforms of (only) military personnel, firemen, police and members of patriotic organizations.

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NEW BOOKS ON VEXILLOLOGY

Two new books of interest to vexillologists are:


The first is a handy reference work containing color pictures of every state flag and a two or three-page write-up on details, history, significance of design, etc.

The second is No. 21 of the Smithsonian Studies in History and Technology. It has to do with actual existing 13-star flags; their design in the 18th century, their fabrics and stitching methods, description of documented flags, identifying unknown flags, and analysis and estimating dates.

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INTERNATIONAL FLAG SALUTE

A pledge of allegiance suitable for any country is being promoted by an international travel trailer club prominent in the northwestern United States:

"I pledge allegiance (sic) to the flag of my country, and to the country for which it stands, one country under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

(from: Trailer Life Publications, contributed by M.E.T.)

BICENTENNIAL LICENSE PLATES

On the horizon of the immediate future are new auto license plates commemorating the Bicentennial of the United States. These will be standard size with some sort of design motif connecting the state with the celebration. Pennsylvania has already led the way with the issuance of a tag with a cracked Liberty Bell design, yellow on black. South Dakota has issued a red, white and blue plate with a design featuring the monumental Mt. Rushmore statues. The District of Columbia's new plate is already being seen on the streets. It has a Capitol dome design with 1776 - Bicentennial - 1976 in blue letters on white, separated by two red lines. Other states are planning to issue special plates soon. All plates are designed to be used until after the Bicentennial, with space for yearly stickers to be placed in one of the corners. In addition, a special national tag is being considered by the Bicentennial Commission, not as a valid tag, but as a national souvenir. All these plates bid fair to become collectors' items. Hopefully, they will bring all Americans together in the "Spirit of '76" (19, that is!).
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From William C. Spangler, Oaks, Pennsylvania:

I have read Mr. Halmstad's objection to the brochure about Freedoms Foundation which was distributed with the September NAVA News. (See NAVA News, Vol. VI, No. 4, December, 1973, page 7). Quite frankly, I couldn't care less about Mr. Halmstad's political views, warped though they may be. On the other hand, I can't let his comment pass by without explaining that the literature was included so that our members would have an idea of the facilities available and the location of the site of the NAVA convention. Unfortunately, this was the only piece of literature which I was able to obtain. Perhaps if member Halmstad had read the entire NAVA News, his sensitivities would not have been as grossly injured. . . . Incidentally, when it comes to propaganda, member Halmstad's letter is a masterpiece.

From Frederick Patten, Culver City, California:

Yesterday's WALL STREET JOURNAL contains an article on Laos that makes mention of the Laotian flag. It's of interest principally because of the manner in which it is phrased. It could have been written for a vexillological audience:

"...No worries for flag fanciers. Laos will retain its national flag, probably the world's prettiest, which is bright red with a white, three-headed elephant standing under a white parasol."

It's also a more accurate description than that given in the FLAG BULLETIN (Vol. XIII, No. 1, Spring, 1973, page 9) which describes the flag as depicting three elephants rather than one three-headed elephant.

(Editor's note: According to the Royal Laotian Embassy in Washington, the design is described as a "tri-cephalic elephant (singular) representing the ancient Kingdom divided into three principalities which have since been unified...").

From Martin O'Malley, Pittsburgh, Pa.:

...I am a member of NAVA and attended the last convention. I have started a vexillological organization here is Pittsburgh called the Pittsburgh Order of Vexillology. Could you include a mention about the Order in the next issue of NAVA News? I have enclosed a newspaper article about us. (The Pittsburgh Press, Thursday, Jan. 31, 1974). Please make it known to the members of NAVA that they are eligible for social membership in the organization, which entitles them to all publications of the Order, including our newsletter, "The Order Quarterly." Dues are $2.00 annually. Social members are also entitled to participate at our annual meetings.

From Michael E. Tancey, Edwardsburg, Michigan:

...I would hope that NAVA News is not subject to political editorials as occurred in recent Flag Research Center publications. I do not disagree with the premise taken, but simply the vehicle used.

(more letters on p. 6)
A rather rare book entitled *Flags of All Nations*, published in Brooklyn by Charles Tollner, Jr., about 1880, came to my attention recently. It helps to make clear several points members of NAVA may find valuable to keep in mind as they proceed with their own work in vexillology.

Frequent as errors are in flag books and charts, this volume seems to have more than the normal share. Leaving aside questions of color shades, proportions, faithful rendition of official illustrations, and similar details which--after all--are part of the recording of accurate flag knowledge, we find an incredible number of errors, many of them rather inexcusable. The triangles which form the border of the personal standard of the Emperor of Austria are black-yellow-red-green (instead of white) on a page that shows the flag of Belgium as vertical stripes black-white-red.

Abandoning centuries of heraldic tradition, the artist has shown the royal standard of Spain as if it had been made of miscellaneous pieces of cloth from the flag-maker's scrap-box. Among the notable "improvements" are a blue field with diagonal stripes of yellow-black-yellow (perhaps from a regimental tie) and a black field with a red beast which looks as if it may have had a llama in its ancestry. The flag of Columbia (sic) is upside down; the yellow and green stripes of Bolivia have been bleached to white; the historic Sword of Ali on the flag of Morocco has been turned into a pair of scissors; etc.

Actually, the reason for the errors is rather simple to explain, if hardly justifiable: the author has simply taken his material, flag by flag, error by error, from "National and Commercial Flags of All Nations" published in 1868 by G. W. and C. B. Colton and Company, New York. The coincidences are impossible to explain as anything but plagiarism. This is evident in minor items, such as the white harp on yellow in the shield of the flag of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, the imaginary coat of arms in the flag of the Danish High Admiral, and the misplacement upwards of the badge in the fly of the British Customs Flag.

Perhaps all of this could be dismissed with a sigh as another example of cheap commercialism and the willingness of the public to accept whatever it is given, were it not for the self-serving "Publisher's Notice" which prefaces the book.

With an arrogance and disregard for the truth that remind one of certain contemporary government officials, Mr. Tollner states:

A book of the "Flags of All Nations" besides being a convenient work for sea-faring men, is also a very satisfactory companion for those who go on foreign tours, and a useful publication for the instruction of the young; but it loses much of its value if it is incorrect and cannot be relied on. In the preparation of this volume it has been the aim of the Publisher to be absolutely correct, pains having been taken to submit it to the Consuls of the various nationalities to obtain their endorsement of its accuracy, and in this it has the advantage over every other book of the kind; even the publication issued by the United States Government cannot in all cases be implicitly depended on....

The Publisher is satisfied that he has compiled the most complete, authentic and convenient book of the kind ever offered to the public.

Fortunately, the number of flag publishers and authors who take this approach is
not great, but even honest errors are errors. On the other hand there are ways of avoiding them and of correcting them when they have been made and when set forth these points constitute a partial list of the fundamental rules of vexillology. These are:

1. Because vexillology is, or aspires to be, an auxiliary to history, a part of the social sciences, not a business or a patriotic undertaking or a simple hobby, its purpose is the discovery of the truth about flags--objective knowledge for its own sake, not profit nor personal glory, nor greater love of country, nor any similar motive.

2. If the subject is flags and the object is knowledge, the vexillological method must be a combination of hard work and open-mindedness. The old saying is still true: creativity is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration. Scholarship is frequently no more than going a single step farther than anyone else has been willing or able to go. In one sense it boils down to asking oneself, when it seems time to write down the results of research, "Have I really read every relevant source and run down every possible lead on this question?"

3. Open-mindedness is needed because everyone is subject to error. No matter how impressive a speech or book, the person making it is susceptible to great as well as small mistakes and criticism is the key to advancement in every science. (In fact, there are few things more flattering to someone who has worked hard on a project than to have intelligent questions asked about some detail, even if they force the author to make revisions.) The open-mindedness, of course, must apply to one's own work as well; particularly in the social sciences it is important to distinguish between blind dogmatism and tenacity to the truth.

4. Regardless of the subject matter, there are a few procedural rules which make research easier that the vexillologist must master:

Outline your specific topic in your mind or on paper before beginning;
Check what existing sources have to say on the question, but also check original materials, especially to confirm theories or claims;
Don't rely on your memory--write everything down;
Keep a record of your sources so that they can be referred to by yourself and others;
Learn to distinguish between quality and quantity of evidence;
When you begin to write your conclusions, indicate how you arrived at them;
Make sure your words say what you mean them to;
Admit when you are unsure of a point;
Proofread what you have written at every stage of its progress;
Footnote your material so that others can check you;
Ask those considered to be authorities in the area to check what you have produced;
Examine their criticisms carefully, being willing both to admit your errors and to hold to the things you are compelled by facts to believe in, even if those opinions are unpopular;

There is one other practical point that should be mentioned, even though vexillology is new and very little work has been done so far. Try to pick an area of specialization and when you have done so, master it. The satisfaction of having a pond all your own is great (no matter how small a frog you are), but more importantly concentration allows for the greatest possible depth of penetration and height of achievement.

Beyond this I can do no better than to refer you to the leaflet attached to this issue of NAVA NEWS, which was written by my friend, Dr. Richard Hale. As State Archivist of Massachusetts, he worked closely with me in revising our flag laws and
As a practical application of the approach to vexillology outlined above, every member of NAVA should make it his business during 1972 to prepare a written contribution for NAVA NEWS or THE FLAG BULLETIN, or an exhibit or oral presentation for the 1974 membership meeting. In order to encourage this, the Executive Board voted at the last membership meeting to establish a theme in anticipation of each future gathering: the theme for 1974 is "City Flags." If every person attending makes a serious effort to research and present material on his own (or another) city flag and coat of arms and seal, it will constitute the most impressive collection of data on that subject ever assembled. John Szala's study of Pittsburgh flags in 1970 and John Purcell's contribution on city flags in general in 1969 are two excellent examples of what can be done.

Letters to the Editor, cont'd.

From Robert Heeter, Atlanta, Ga.:

Received the December '73 NAVA News today--good to hear from you.

If you should learn of anyone or any organization that is sponsoring a contest dealing with the manufacture of the Betsy Ross flag in conjunction with the Bicentennial, please let me know.

(Edited's note: Mr. Heeter makes flags as a hobby for fun and profit. He estimates that he has made one thousand flags since he turned his hobby into a small business three years ago. When not making flags he is an aircraft mechanic with Delta Airlines. His address is 5287 Chantilly Terrace, Atlanta, Georgia 30349).

From Fred L. Cary, DeWitt, New York:

I sent a copy of the enclosed newspaper clipping to Dr. Whitney Smith at the F.R.C. and thought you might like a copy also. Maybe you can use it in NAVA News. It is old news (5/73) but perhaps still timely. (Clipping from Syracuse Herald-Journal regarding the flying of the United States flag by night and the lack of clarity in the Flag Code as to whether it is permissible or not).

Thank you, Mr. Cary! And thank you, all you other NAVA enthusiasts who have sent in articles, clippings and letters! They are much appreciated, even though they are not always acknowledged. Let's keep them coming and make NAVA News a clearing-house for information and discussion!

BICENTENNIAL SYMBOL USAGE A booklet describing in detail the official Bicentennial symbol is available from the American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, 736 Jackson Place, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20276. This booklet gives the official proportions, colors and design, and exact measurements of the symbol. The symbol is protected by law and must not be altered in any way. Only the specific uses detailed in the booklet may be made of it, and permission in advance for any usage must be obtained from the ARBC at the above address in writing.