

Good Flag, Bad Flag, and the Great NAVA Flag Survey of 2001

Edward B. Kaye

Flag Design

Vexillology—the *study* of flags, often overlaps with vexillography—the *design* of flags. It’s no wonder, since most of us who look at thousands of flags in the course of our study cannot help but form opinions about their design as well. The flag community accepts this shift from the *descriptive* to the *prescriptive* as long as the boundary is clear: those who *document* flags should accept all flags as meriting study without regard to their quality, while those who seek to *create or improve* flags should disclose that their agenda is not scholarly but activist.

As Whitney Smith has noted, the allied field of Heraldry does not differentiate between the descriptive and prescriptive, it combines them; in fact, its avowed purpose is establishing, maintaining, applying, and enforcing its rules for the design of coats of arms and documenting the results [“American Perspectives on Heraldry and Vexillology”, *Raven* 6 (1999), p. 52].

Peter Orenski has gone so far as to propose a new role: the *vexillologue engagé* [engaged vexillologist], or the more dashing term *vexillonnaire*, to describe a person actively addressing poor flag design or inaccurate flag renditions in actual flags, as well as promoting broad usage of flags, enhancing their appreciation, and teaching their history.

I commend this effort, and consider myself a *vexillonnaire*. However, in observing flag design discussions over the 15 years since I first participated in the Flag Design Contest at the San Francisco County Fair, I noted that we in North America lacked a standard presentation of guiding principles. While many wiser and more experienced colleagues had created some form of guidelines (most specifically William Crampton's excellent *Flag Design*, a Flag Institute Guide), they needed to be combined into a "how-to" focus that would enable the novice to apply them in a short, usable format.

In my work on *Raven 3/4* "Flags of the Native Peoples of the United States", I noted the poor design of most of the over 100+ tribal flags documented, nearly all adopted in the past 20 years. Most showed a lack of understanding of sound flag design principles, probably due to emulating many poorly designed U.S. state flags. However, this *vexillonnaire*, before attempting to help a tribe with a new flag or a re-design of an old flag, needed a tool to educate, influence, and guide the participants in the process. This spurred me to create *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, a 16-page guide to flag design.

Good Flag, Bad Flag

While *GFBF* is original in structure, most of it represents a compilation of sound flag-design principles and concepts as described by colleagues in papers, seminars, guidelines, and conversations. Its intended audience is the person standing at the flag-store counter wanting to design a flag, a state legislator or county commissioner considering a constituent's flag proposal, a designer pondering a commission to create a flag, or a member of a flag-design committee for any organization.

I believe it condenses the best thinking on flag design into five basic principles in a short, usable format that can guide the novice to create a

great flag. The principles are generally non-overlapping as well as all-encompassing.

The Five Principles:

1. *Keep It Simple* (The flag should be so simple that a child can draw it from memory...)
2. *Use Meaningful Symbolism* (The flag's images, colors, or patterns should relate to what it symbolizes...)
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...)
4. *No Lettering or Seals* (Never use writing of any kind or an organization's seal...)
5. *Be Distinctive or Be Related* (Avoid duplicating other flags, but use similarities to show connections...)

GFBF does allow that all rules have exceptions. But it says to depart from these five principles only with caution and purpose.

The key innovation of *GFBF* is its unapologetic use of examples of flags that *follow* the principles and flags that *violate* the principles. Illustrating “good” *and* “bad” flags can provide the reader with a better sense of sound design than showing just “good” flags.

Good Flag, Bad Flag is downloadable free from the NAVA website (www.nava.org). It can help any organization, tribe, company, family, neighborhood, city, county, state, or even country design a great flag. Already several cities, counties, and other groups are using *GFBF* as they pursue new or revised designs.

The Flag Survey

While developing *GFBB*, I envisioned a survey of NAVA members' opinions of U.S. state flags as an entertaining exercise and an external validation of *GFBB* principles. It would also provide the NAVA consensus when identifying "good" flags in *GFBB*.

With the encouragement of NAVA officers Peter Orenski and Dave Martucci, and the competent web wizardry of Dick Gideon (funded by an anonymous donor), we designed a survey form for NAVA's website. It went on-line February 14, 2001, and stayed up until the end of May. Casting our net wide, we asked respondents to rate 72 different flags, representing states of the U.S. and provinces of Canada, as well as some current and former territories.

The instructions stated: "Based on their design qualities, rather than any political, historical, or geographic considerations, please rate each flag from 0 to 10, where 0 is the worst score and 10 is the best. Use your personal opinion about what constitutes a good flag design." One reason we asked people to exclude political/historical/geographic considerations was to prevent them from downgrading good flag designs that used controversial symbols, such as the Confederate flag. *GFBB* and its principles were not yet available. The survey form took 10 to 20 minutes to fill out, so it represented a significant investment of the responder's time.

Responses came in from 100 NAVA members and 337 members of the public. They came from at least 20 countries (as indicated by their e-mail address suffixes). NAVA members favored strong, simple, distinctive flags, choosing New Mexico, Texas, and Québec as the top three, all with scores above 8 points. They scorned the "seal-on-a-bedsheet" design common to more than half of U.S. state flags, forcefully relegat-

ing all those flags to the bottom of the heap with scores averaging 3.6 points. [see Appendix 2 for full scores.]

For a brief period in March, Texas led the rankings after NAVA president Dave Martucci mentioned the survey in a radio interview on Texas Flag Day. But the subsequent three-day flurry of responses (likely from Texans) was eventually diluted by other responses and Texas fell back into second place. Others betrayed their partisanship in their comments, such as “Long live the green flag” from a *Washingtonian*.

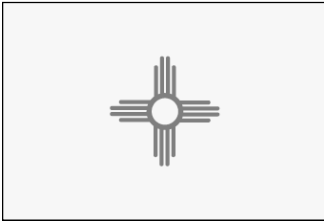
Canadian flags fared significantly better than U.S. flags, with an average score of 6 points versus 5 points, likely because Canada’s provincial flags generally avoid seals and tend towards simpler designs.

I tested *GFBF* by giving each flag in the survey a score of 0, 1, or 2 points on each of the five principles, for a minimum of 0 and maximum of 10 points. The results predicted the survey’s consensus on “best” and “worst” flags with 85% accuracy! That is, those flags ranked “best” in the survey generally also scored the highest on *GFBF* principles, and those ranked “worst” scored lowest, providing a strong validation of *GFBF*.

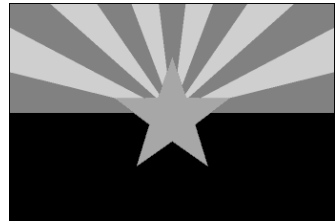
The public’s overall responses paralleled those of NAVA members quite closely, although the public scored flags a half point lower, on average. As might be expected, the public’s scores dispersed a bit more broadly, with a slightly higher standard deviation. However, their insightful comments showed a strong intuitive grasp of flag design and confirmed NAVA members’ opinions on design principles. One doesn’t need to be a flag expert to recognize a good flag design.

In a surprise result, the combined rankings of NAVA and the public handed the top flags a three-way tie, with less than 1/100th of a point

10 Best Flags



1. *New Mexico*



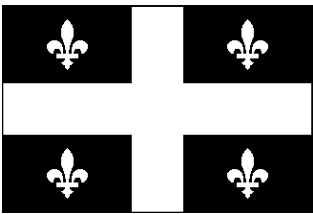
6. *Arizona*



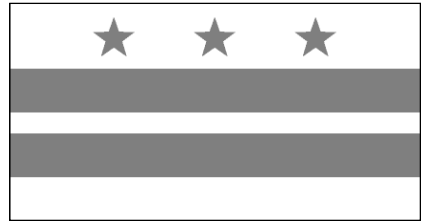
2. *Texas*



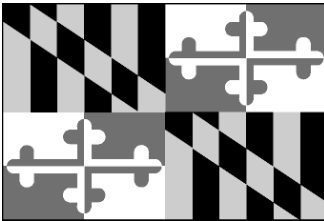
7. *Puerto Rico*



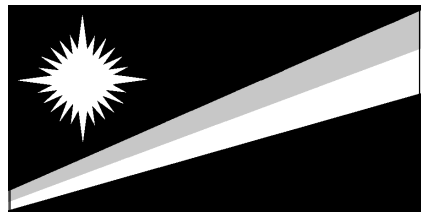
3. *Québec*



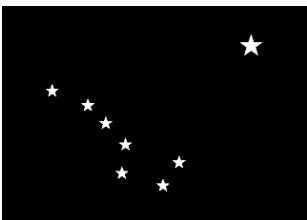
8. *District of Columbia*



4. *Maryland*



9. *Marshall Islands*



5. *Alaska*



10. *South Carolina*

10 Worst Flags



63. *New Hampshire*



68. *South Dakota*



64. *Idaho*



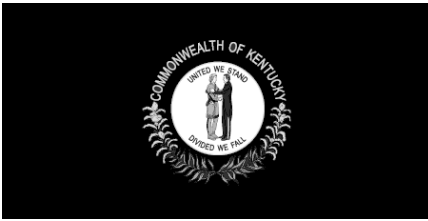
69. *Kansas*



65. *Wisconsin*



70. *Montana*



66. *Kentucky*



71. *Nebraska*



67. *Minnesota*



72. *Georgia*

separating their scores (that margin was so small that one person changing his vote could have altered the first-place score).

The survey also invited comments. A few representative ones:

A flag should be the simplest possible design consistent with bearing a unique, easily distinguished identity...those with complex detail in their composition defeat the purpose of a flag.

The main purpose of a flag is identification. Yet half of the US's states have flags that to the untrained eye, or from a distance, look identical.

Simple flags, clear colors, not too busy. Shields on fields are bad.

... a flag which needs to indicate its significance by spelling out the state signified...is defeating the very purpose of a flag, that is, to signal "visually" without need of written signs.

A 'good' design for a flag, in my opinion, is one that can be identified at a glance (even in a stiff breeze!) and which is easy for, e.g., school students to sketch... everyone ought to be able to draw those flags that have significance for them.

Recognition, simplicity, color, and uniqueness make, in my opinion, a pleasing design.

The whole purpose of flags, I thought, was to distinguish one from another.

Public Response

After closing the survey and tabulating the responses in early June, I summarized the results in a press release for *NAVA News* and for NAVA's

website. We had discussed getting media coverage for the survey, since it promoted an interest in flags and would bring the results to people beyond our website and our other publications. The press release was available a few days before U.S. Flag Day, June 14—an inadvertent but strategic bit of timing.

Coverage began when Lee Hill, an Arizona TV producer, brought the story to local newspapers and TV stations in her state and in New Mexico. Rick Broadhead tackled the Canadian media and the Canadian Press Newswire picked it up, followed by the Associated Press and Reuters. Within a week, the story was running in hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles and radio and TV programs. Those of us listed as media contacts on the NAVA website were giving several interviews a day. National coverage appeared in *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, *U.S. News & World Report*, the BBC, and Canada's *Globe & Mail* (front page!) and *National Post*. Radio stations from Yellowknife, Northwest Territories to Gainesville, Florida reported on the survey, commented on the results, and invited listener participation. Several newspapers called for contests to design new flags, including the *Winnipeg Free Press* in Manitoba and the *Capital Times* in Madison, Wisconsin. The NAVA website, with usual traffic of 100,000 hits per month, was registering 100,000 hits per day.

The media coverage tended to take one of two approaches. The first, generally in states or provinces whose flags received high ratings, would say “our flag is great, we should be proud”. Reporting in New Mexico, Québec, Arizona, Nova Scotia, Texas, Maryland, and the District of Columbia emphasized this approach. The second, generally in states or provinces whose flags received low ratings, would say “our flag has been rated low, but we still like it”.

Where flags rated high, the articles emphasized the history of the flag and how it compared to those of neighboring states or provinces, and described NAVA in neutral or positive tones. Vexillology usually received a good explanation, and often the basic principles from *Good Flag, Bad Flag* were described. “We’re proud of Maryland’s distinctive state flag,” said Secretary of State John T. Willis. The secretary of the District of Columbia said she hoped the DC flag’s ranking would spur interest in the city’s history. The *Canadian Press* headlined an article “*Les connaisseurs considèrent que le drapeau du Québec est l’un des plus beaux*”. In New Mexico, the *Albuquerque Journal* editorialized “Flag Poll Should Have State Flipping”. The *Halifax Daily News* headlined: “Flag fans’ hearts flutter over Nova Scotia banner, Scottish-based emblem rates second in Canada, only trails 10 U.S. entries”. The *Columbus Dispatch* said “Ohioans may not realize it, but a triumph of design has fluttered atop flagpoles across the state for almost a century.”

However, where flags were rated low, the commentary often turned bitter, asking “Who is NAVA to criticize our flag?” It seems that the NAVA-sponsored survey of public opinion of flag designs became interpreted as criticism of the low-rated flags and, indirectly, of the states or provinces themselves. Many in those states or provinces responded as did the Kansas secretary of state, Ron Thornburgh, who said “I think our flag does a nice job of talking about the traditions and history of Kansas.” The *Boston Globe* demanded, “We want a recount!”

A reporter asked me to guess why the Arkansas flag rated 45th out of 72. I ventured that the problem was the word “Arkansas”, saying “the underlying issue is that a flag is a graphic symbol; by putting words on a flag you’re showing insecurity in your symbolism”. Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee responded: “They had a problem with the word

‘Arkansas’? It’s the name of our state!” He thought the criticism was what he might expect from “idiots who have nothing better to do than rank state flags. What a stupid way to spend their time.”

Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura said in an e-mail to the *Grand Forks Herald*: “I think it’s kind of funny that someone can call themselves ‘experts’ on something as subjective as judging aesthetics. If I’m an expert on dogs, does that mean I know better than anyone which breed is the prettiest?”

Another Minnesotan who signed himself “Flag Lover”, wrote me to say, “The flag of the Great State of Minnesota may not meet with your ideas of a good flag, but has served us very well for a very long time...Minnesota’s blue background is quite distinctive; South Dakota is the only one that really comes close. No, your standards are only good for flag makers and designers. As for those of us who live beneath the flags; I think we’ll keep them.” Another wrote “I think [Wisconsin’s] is a great flag, regardless of what everybody else thinks. As a member of the Air Force I respect all Flags.”

In an interesting explanation of the blue “seal-on-a-bedsheet” design common to nearly half of all U.S. state flags, the Las Vegas, Nevada *Review-Journal* quoted former NAVA VP Jim Ferrigan: “Most states use the blue field, and for good reason: they won the Civil War.” He asserted that the flag’s color, and not its details, were intended to be distinguished from far away. His comments formed an intriguing counterpoint to the debate over the use of the Confederate Battle Flag in the flags of some states in the South.

“I’ll match our flag up against any of the other provinces,” said Manitoba’s Transportation Minister Steve Ashton. “I think most

Manitobans like the flag the way it is.” And a columnist in the *Winnipeg Sun* said “You’re probably asking yourself what a vexillologist is. I know I did. Apparently it’s a bunch of morons that fancy themselves as flag experts.”

Most ominously, one Nebraska legislator pointed out that it is illegal for someone to cast contempt or ridicule upon the state’s flag, saying: “...some vexillologists are going to be reaping the vengeance of Nebraska state law.”!

Such responses must be expected from public officials, who have little to gain from joining any perceived criticism of their state symbols, or from newspaper writers, for whom the safer course is picking on NAVA rather than on their state’s flag. However, some columnists and many members of the public chimed in with comments such as “Our state flag is a joke”, indicating that partisanship, not sound design, spurs the reflexive defense of state and provincial flags.

Several people e-mailed me to bemoan the low quality of their state flag’s design, sometimes with a plea that we “do something about it”. Certainly the line between vexillology and vexillography would be tested there—calling all *vexillonaires!* Some newspaper stories quoted citizens’ negative comments, for example, from a flag store manager in Omaha: “There’s a lot of pride in the Cornhusker football team; there’s not a lot of pride in the Nebraska flag.” A few columnists wrote patently tongue-in-cheek defenses of their state flags, telegraphing their actual agreement with the low scores.

The Wisconsin *State Journal* said that no topic it had asked its readers about in years had drawn as much mail as the state flag. While most respondents defended it, one wrote, “I strongly agree with the

Vexillological Association in regards to Wisconsin's state flag. It is awful."

A designer in the advertising field wrote: "I have always thought that the Wisconsin flag was unattractive. Does that make me less loyal to my home state? No way! I love everything about Wisconsin. As a defender of good design, I feel all design needs to be scrutinized whether it is a logo, a package, an advertisement, or even a flag. For those who have gotten their noses bent out of shape, I say don't take it so personally. It is not an attack on our state or its history. It is simply an art review."

Georgia's New Flag

Nothing compared to the rating of the new state flag of Georgia and the public's reaction to the survey there.

That flag drew far more attention in the survey than did all others. NAVA members *and* the public gave the new Georgia flag the lowest score—2.4 points—by the largest margin of any flag. Some even asked to give it negative points. They disparaged Georgia's flag as "desolating", "simply awful", "hideous", and "by far the ugliest". One person derided it as "Five Flags Under Georgia". Another said, "... the new Georgia state flag certainly is a shame to any flag designer. What a mess!" My favorite comment came from Portugal: "Seals on blue stink. The new Georgia flag even stinks harder!"



The rating and the responses came as no surprise. Georgia’s complex design violates all the principles of good flag design, incorporating a seal, lettering, and a series of miniature historic flags (in incorrect order). While the story of the new Georgia flag merits a full article of its own, a few points are relevant here, with supplemental information in Appendix 1.

Cecil Alexander, the architect who designed the flag, wrote me to say, in part, “...Its prime function was to create a symbol that would be adopted by the Georgia Legislature and would in time be saluted by the majority of our citizens. If form does follow function, then the 2001 flag fulfills its function as it flies over our Capital. Therefore, I submit, its form must be acceptable.”

Georgia senate minority leader Eric Johnson, who had opposed the new flag, said that the survey results echoed his previous assessment: “It is an ugly, boring design that was solely adapted to satisfy the governor’s ego and give reluctant legislators an excuse to vote for it.” Allen Trapp,

commander of Georgia's Sons of the Confederate Veterans, had been calling the new flag a "Denny's placemat" but said he was backing off out of fear the restaurant chain would sue for slander!

While Governor Barnes had no comment, state representative Tyrone Brooks, one of the new flag's staunchest supporters during the legislative debate, reacted to the survey respondents, saying "They don't have good taste, I'm sorry".

The Atlanta *Journal-Constitution* wrote a balanced story, headlined "Experts vote Georgia's redesigned flag 'the ugliest'—by far". The story ended by saying "Vexillologist Kaye suggested Georgians should move beyond the flag flap and, in the process, 'join the community of good flags'". The paper held an on-line poll in which Georgians voted against the new flag by a 70%-30% margin. And one of its columnists wrote: "Hallelujah! Somebody has come out and said what I've been afraid to say out of fear of being branded as a politically incorrect racist: The new Georgia flag is ugly. Not just common ordinary ugly, but hard-down ugly."

Even other states chimed in. The *Patriot-News* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) opined: "Jeers to Georgia state legislators whose unwillingness to take a stand resulted in what the North American Vexillological Association, a group dedicated to the study of flag design, termed the worst state flag flying over the continent. Only five months old, the Peach State's new flag represents a determination to appease die-hard rebs who fought like Stonewall to preserve elements of the Confederate battle flag. The result is a generic blue flag with state seal and a strip of smaller flags—including the rebel one—across the bottom. But don't expect Georgia to revisit the issue any time soon; just working out the unsightly compromise was difficult enough."

Apparently our survey picked the scab off a recent wound in Georgia. Ironically, the state had gone from a flag with a relatively good design but a difficult history, to a flag that is so bland it's supposed to please everybody but has a very disappointing design. In an unintended consequence, our survey may have strengthened the case of those who would restore the old flag.

The Possibility of New Flags

I had a stock response to any reporter asking about a poorly designed state flag: "A great state deserves a great flag". Who could argue with that?

The *Utne Reader*, a Minnesota-based alternative magazine, announced a contest soon after the NAVA survey appeared, commissioning professional designers to create five new state and provincial flags. It wrote: "In an era when visual icons, from the Nike swoosh to anarchists' black banners, have such cultural power, it seems baffling that so many states pass up the chance for a symbol that could win people's attention and stir their souls." However, the professionals' results showed disappointing complexity and a fundamental failure to understand the principles of good flag design. But when the magazine followed up with a public competition, some stunning new flags appeared!

I believe the steps to actually getting a state flag changed to a successful design go something like this:

1. Stir up public discontent with the flag (this requires an external event).
2. Get state government agreement that a change is necessary.
3. Create a process to receive designs.

4. Name the appropriate committee to judge them.
5. Have the legislature vote yes/no.

It is unlikely that a low score on the NAVA survey is adequate to reach step 1. However, it might pave the way for public awareness when a more significant event occurs (for example, a threat of a boycott or the potential for a major occasion such as the Olympics). The least likely way to change a state flag is to propose an alternative design in the absence of step 1—the new design simply becomes a target.

Three recent cases demonstrate these steps. Mississippi, in seeking to replace its Confederate-dominated flag in February 2001, failed on step 5 when its legislature referred the new design to the public in a referendum. Jim Ferrigan got Nevada's April 1991 re-specification through the state's legislature successfully, even skipping step 1, perhaps because the change would not be noticeable to the casual observer. Georgia, in January 2001, actually progressed through all five steps due to the forceful action of its governor, but a stumble on step 4 led to a poor design.

Conclusions

What have the creation of *GFBF*, the survey, and the resulting press coverage accomplished?

As good *vexillonnaires*, we've created a tool for the public to use in flag creation and re-design. It is consistently the most-downloaded feature on the NAVA website. While we cannot expect much feedback, we do hear that it is being put to use. It has already been translated into Spanish, French, and Latvian!

The survey validated the basic design principles of *GFBB*. Those principles are not just expert opinions, but very likely underlie the flag-design opinions of the general public as well.

We raised awareness. Tens of millions of people were exposed to the word “vexillology”—perhaps multiple times—and a large fraction had the opportunity to encounter NAVA.

The survey by itself may not have much immediate impact on state or provincial flag designs, despite the huge publicity, but it has sparked debate in many states and provinces, and may well have sown the seeds of change. Peter Orenski calls it “the most ambitious attempt to bring before the national consciousness the generally poor design of U.S. state flags”.

And while NAVA invited each survey respondent to become a member, it will take more than a single exposure to recruit most people, so any membership increase will likely be gradual.

One NAVA member wrote: “The media reaction to your survey is the greatest thing to ever happen to NAVA, because it has established vexillological legitimacy before the general public. All kinds of good things will derive from this down the road—I’m sure of it.”

As a *vexillonnaire*, I hope so too. Thank you.

This paper was delivered at the 35th NAVA meeting in Norfolk, Virginia, in October 2001.

Appendix 1: Opinions on the New Georgia State Flag

Cecil A. Alexander, the Designer

To: Mr. Ted Kaye, NAVA

From: Cecil A. Alexander
Fellow American Institute of Architects
Lt. Col. U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)

Re: The new state flag of Georgia

I am the designer of the 2001 Georgia flag. I am not ashamed of it.

Rating the flags solely on “design qualities” and ignoring “political, historical or geographic consideration” is simplistic and does not address the political and historical considerations required for the new Georgia flag. I doubt that many flags ever demanded such political acceptance.

In 1956, Georgia adopted a new flag featuring the Confederate Battle Flag. It was adopted in defiance of the civil rights decisions of the Supreme Court and new Federal laws against discrimination. It is still flown by racists, state’s rightists, and hate groups as a vibrant symbol of white supremacy. (Some do, indeed, fly it only to honor the Confederate dead.) The 1956 flag has been a constant source of divisiveness, threats to our economy, and damaging to the State’s role as a leader of the “New South.”

I drew the original concept in 1993. It is basically unchanged in concept, i.e. presenting Georgia’s past with historical flags rather than using them in defiance. There was and still is the NAVA rejected blue field and the Great Seal of Georgia surrounded by thirteen stars representing the original states which include Georgia. The gold ribbon at the bottom contained the flags that have flown over Georgia since pre-colonial days up to the present. They were: the Spanish, French, English, American Revolution, Confederate “Stars and Bars”, and the present U.S. flag.

During the first weeks of January this year, I modified the flag to accommodate the political realities required for the flag to be accepted. In all, there were seven different versions. Finally the design incorporated three past Georgia flags—the 1897 flag, the 1920-1956 flag, and the 1956-2001 flag—flanked on the left by the first U.S. flag and on the right by the present flag. These flags honor all who served our country from the American Revolution to Desert Storm. “Georgia’s History” was added to emphasize that the small flags are in an historical context. “In God We Trust” was added via an amendment in the House.

Through Governor Barnes’ outstanding leadership and superb speech to the House, the 2001 flag was adopted in one week, after forty-five years of acrimony.

The flag does have a lot going on, it is true. As an architect who received his Masters in Architecture under Walter Gropius at Harvard after World War II, I was heavily influenced by the Bauhaus philosophy that “Less is More.” I accept the beauty of simplicity. I also believe that “form follows function.” In my fifty years as an architect, I designed my buildings to reflect both these concepts.

But the function of the new Georgia flag was not to satisfy NAVA or even Gropius. Its prime function was to create a symbol that would be adopted by the Georgia Legislature and would in time be saluted by the majority of our citizens. If form does follow function, then the 2001 flag fulfills its function as it flies over our Capital. Therefore, I submit, its form must be acceptable.

I have been asked to address numerous groups about my flag. Without fail, I have been given standing ovations from audiences from grade school students to Rotary members.

Strangers, black and white, who recognize me from published photographs and television clips, have approached me on the streets and in malls to thank me for solving the State’s agonizing dilemma.

One of the original flags with my signature on it was auctioned off at a school benefit for \$3,200 and later two more at another school brought in \$5,200 each. Except for “experts” and those who resisted any change, I have been told many times that the flag is beautiful.

Yes, I have had some acid criticism even prior to your survey and comments, both on the design and its symbolism. Dr. Whitney Smith, who I understand is the dean of vexillologists, was quoted in an AP release as saying, “It is a great example of how not to design a flag.” We have since exchanged friendly calls. As an expert on “how not to design a flag,” I offered to conduct a class for him.

One local graphic designer called it a “dog’s breakfast.” Since it now is the official State flag, I think it is, rather, the “cat’s meow!”

I hope that your negative appraisal does not encourage groups such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans to redouble their efforts to lobby our law makers to return to the divisive flag we just replaced or, God forbid, one emblazoned with a peach—no longer a major Georgia product. If you think the peach should represent today’s Georgia of eight million striving to make our state a center for scientific research, higher education, international commerce, and cultural pursuits, you are certainly ignorant of what Georgia has become. Why not the cotton gin or Old Mammy harvesting cotton?

One letter I received from a second grader stands against all criticism: “Dear Mr. Alexander, I am sure after you are dead you will be honored. Your friend, Mary.”

Cecil A. Alexander

P.S. I do not agree that the three historic flags on the ribbon of Dahlonega Gold are out of order—please explain.

Ted Kaye, author of *Good Flag, Bad Flag* and originator of the Survey

Dear Mr. Alexander,

You make a solid, impassioned, and persuasive case for your recently adopted flag for the state of Georgia. It is clear to me and any thinking observer that the new design responded admirably (and, it is to be hoped) successfully to the political-historical challenges posed by the placement of the Confederate Battle Flag on Georgia's flag in 1956.

In your letter to me, you make clear the difference between your approach and that of the organizers of our flag design survey: "Rating the flags solely on 'design qualities' and ignoring 'political, historical or geographic consideration' is simplistic and does not address the political and historical considerations required for the new Georgia flag." And that, indeed, accounts for the difference between our views.

Respondents to the survey, rating flags only on their design qualities, gave the new Georgia flag the lowest score. I surmise that its ranking resulted from an implicit application of the basic principles of flag design, none of which (with the possible exception of "meaningful symbolism") the new flag followed.

On the other hand, you and many other Georgians assert that the beauty of a flag can lie in a realm beyond its design qualities, such as in its political/historical role. And Georgia's flag indeed is beautiful in that sense, as a replacement for a flag that brought divisiveness and contempt to a great state.

You say "... the function of the new Georgia flag was ... to create a symbol that would be adopted by the Georgia Legislature and would in time be saluted by the majority of our citizens." If form follows function, you are likely right. The new flag was in fact adopted by the Legislature, with admirable leadership from the governor. And since citizens of a majority of U.S. states salute flags that experts deem poorly designed, Georgians may well come to salute their new flag, too.

But the fundamental difference between our two positions cannot be resolved, because we are answering different questions. On the one

hand, asking “is the new Georgia flag a good flag design?”, the survey of 100 “experts” and over three times as many public respondents said “No”, confirming that it violates the basic principles of flag design. On the other hand, asking “is the new Georgia flag a political success?”, its acceptance by the Legislature and the governor proves the answer to be “Yes”. If the new design were the only one that could have succeeded politically, it is a successful flag. We must agree to disagree.

It is indeed unfortunate, however, that any assertion of poor design qualities in the new flag might provide ammunition for those who seek to restore the old flag. I sincerely regret that consequence of our survey.

As for using the peach to represent Georgia, I merely mentioned it when a reporter asked if I could think of a unique symbol for the state. I too doubt it would make a recognizable flag symbol (although the color “peach” might be used somehow). But the peach does represent Georgia on the new state quarter and on the state’s license plate, and Georgia is indeed the “Peach State”, so although possibly outdated it remains a state symbol.

You asked about my comment that the flags on the new Georgia flag are not in correct order. The U.S. flag should be displayed on its own right (that is, the far left as seen by the viewer), so I believe the 50-star current version is at the wrong end of the scroll.

I want to thank you for writing. Few people engaged in flag design have had to contend with such contentious underlying issues as you have, and I salute you for it. Flags generate deep emotions; that’s one reason they draw people to their study and design, and that’s why this issue has drawn such attention from all over the world.

As an architect trained in the Bauhaus style, your comments on the draft booklet “*Good Flag, Bad Flag*” would be useful to me, and I would appreciate your visiting our website to see it (www.nava.org).

Regards,

Ted Kaye

Managing Editor,
Raven, A Journal of Vexillology

Judith Augustine, the Designer's Daughter

Dear Peter [Orenski],

Thanks for your kind letter regarding my comments on the Georgia flag...

In the interest of full disclosure, I want you and Mr. Kaye to know that in addition to my being a proud Georgian, passionate about this particular issue, I am also the daughter of Cecil Alexander, the flag's designer. Yes, that makes me biased to some degree, but in my 50 years on the planet, I have certainly developed my own mind and have disagreed with my father plenty! But my values, I'm proud to say, were derived, in great part, from him and my late mother, both civil rights activists.

In all candor, I was, for a long time, in favor of returning to the pre-1956 flag, a much simpler flag—a flag that did contain the dreaded Seal of the State of Georgia nonetheless. Efforts to get that flag reestablished, however, went nowhere. When I heard that Dad's design was being proposed by the Governor earlier this year, I was, to say the least, shocked. And thrilled. I had feared that, in my lifetime, I'd never see the former flag, which is abhorrent to me, removed. Thankfully, I was wrong.

My father has written a letter to you, Mr. Kaye, in reaction to the NAVA survey. I think you will find that he is the expert, not myself. I'm just a passionate believer in the beauty of a flag that could make such a profound change—regardless of who designed it. And I also feel strongly that any flag that had to face the struggle this one did must be judged not only on its aesthetics but also on the politics involved.

Sincerely,

Judith Augustine

Roy Barnes, Governor of Georgia

Text of his speech on the proposed new flag (to the Georgia state senate)

Last weekend I went with my family to the North Georgia mountains, and I brought some reading with me. I reread President Lincoln's inaugural address, where he prayed that the better angels of our nature would allow unity and peace to prevail over division and conflict. And Churchill's warning during Britain's darkest hour "that if we open a quarrel between the past and the present, we shall find that we have lost the future."

I read a letter from a former member of this body, Sen. Clint Day, that contained these wise words: "People of faith must be guided by a moral compass that goes beyond political expedience."

The Christian faith may ask 'What would Jesus do?' about the state flag. I believe Jesus would change the flag to unite people." The president of the Southern Baptist Convention, Dr. James Merritt, wrote me to say, "I support the proposal for a new state flag" and "I pray that the outcome of all of this will be increased racial harmony and peace that we may focus on the deep spiritual and moral issues that face our great state."

And I read letters from people all over Georgia. A woman from Maysville wrote: "I am not a Democrat. ... I have been opposed to changing the flag until today, but feel that you have proposed a reasonable compromise that should be applauded by everyone." This came from a man in Toccoa: "I am a white male, 42 years old and would be willing to die for the Confederacy today. The changing of the state flag is of the utmost importance and the sooner the better. I can only hope that our legislators do the right thing."

Another woman wrote: "I hate to see the current flag go, but I understand. To me it is a beautiful flag, but to others it is a source of pain. ... I think it is the Christian thing to do, to try to ease the hurt that the flag causes. I want all of the children of Georgia to be proud of their flag. When I go places (recently a park in Rome, Ga.) and the Georgia flag is not flown, I am hurt. ... I want a flag that Georgians can fly with

pride and that no organization will refuse to fly. Most of all, I am proud to be a Georgian, and I don't want to be anywhere where my flag is left out."

"I have been committed to keeping the flag unaltered," said another. "I am from a family who like yourself had a grandfather killed at Vicksburg. He is buried in an unmarked grave which I've had no success in finding. His young widow raised the small children of their marriage (my great grandmother and her brother) in rural Paulding County. The Union Army then came over the farm land leaving near total devastation in its wake. ... Thank you for your sensitivity."

And this was from a grandmother in Tifton: "I must admit at the beginning that I have never voted for you before. ... I am proud to be the great granddaughter of a Confederate soldier. But I am also a grandmother who wants her granddaughter to grow up in a state where people care about each other. Where race is not the first thing that matters. I pray the new flag passes the Senate. Thanks again for caring about the past, but caring more about the future."

I have read these letters to you because I know you have received others from those who claim we can never satisfy the "other side" or say any change to our flag will dishonor our heritage.

Well, there is no "other side" in Georgia. We are all one—or at least we should be—and it is our job, our duty, and our great challenge to fight the voices of division and seek the salve of reconciliation.

And to those who say this would dishonor our heritage, I say that nothing could be further from the truth. This new flag does not, however, value one Georgian's heritage over another. We will never forget those like my great grandfather who fought at Vicksburg. But neither will we forget those who served at Yorktown or those who died on the beaches of Normandy or in the jungles of Vietnam.

The flag you will vote on today honors all Georgians.

I have spoken with many of you in the last few days and told each of you to do what you think is right and in the best interest of Georgia.

There are some among you who do not like the process that brings us here today. I think I can defend that process, but it really does not matter. If you dislike the process, take it out on me. I am fair game. But don't put our people to anguish because of something that is not their fault.

Others have expressed concerns about demagoguery—on this and other issues. Neither political party is clean when it comes to tactics that divide our people. And as we put this issue behind us, we should also put an end to such tactics. Today, I ask you once more to rise above party and to heal our people.

Before I go, I want to read to you from two speeches made by a member of this body—the first on the opening day of this session of the General Assembly and the second a week later. Here's what he had to say: "It is important that Georgia avoids what we saw across the river in South Carolina. ... If any state can resolve this kind of issue peacefully, it's Georgia; and if anybody can take the lead in this issue, it is this Senate. We can starve hate and feed love. We can take away despair and provide hope. We can heal instead of hurt. But we cannot accomplish this if we remain divided by race or party." Senator Johnson was right when he said those things.

Today, you have that opportunity. And, when this day is done, may these words from Alan Dunn of Austell, Georgia, apply to each of us: "Your action today ... may very well propel Georgia into the role of leadership in a nation struggling to find the middle ground where quiet lives and sane men walk. Today you took steps to make Georgia better for your girls, my son, and our grandchildren. And you have honored your great grandfather and his memory far beyond what any flag or memorial could ever achieve. He did not fight for that flag, but for his home, his state, his Georgia. Today you fought for Georgia."

Thank you.

Appendix 2: Survey Scores (NAVA Members)

[10 = highest; 0 = lowest; n = 100]

1 New Mexico	8.61
2 Texas	8.13
3 Québec	8.04
4 Maryland	7.97
5 Alaska	7.96
6 Arizona	7.92
7 Puerto Rico	7.66
8 District of Columbia	7.48
9 Marshall Islands	7.19
10 South Carolina	7.16
11 Hawaii	7.15
12 Nova Scotia	7.06
13 California	7.00
14 Tennessee	6.98
15 Ohio	6.87
16 Colorado	6.83
17 Nunavut	6.72
18 New Brunswick	6.68
19 Micronesia	6.45
20 Labrador	6.45
21 Prince Edward Island	6.30
22 Mississippi	6.30
23 Wyoming	6.28
24 British Columbia	6.28
25 Newfoundland	6.24
26 Saskatchewan	6.22
27 American Samoa	6.16
28 Rhode Island	6.12
29 Alabama	6.06
30 Northwest Territories	5.89
31 Yukon	5.86
32 Indiana	5.77
33 North Carolina	5.34
34 Florida	5.17
35 Alberta	5.00
36 Louisiana	4.98

37 Virgin Islands	4.94
38 Massachusetts	4.78
39 Oklahoma	4.78
40 Guam	4.77
41 N. Mariana Islands	4.73
42 Iowa	4.72
43 Ontario	4.64
44 Manitoba	4.60
45 Arkansas	4.59
46 New Jersey	4.57
47 Washington	4.53
48 Missouri	4.50
49 Illinois	4.38
50 Connecticut	4.32
51 West Virginia	4.16
52 Delaware	4.08
53 New York	3.93
54 Virginia	3.93
55 Nevada	3.88
56 North Dakota	3.69
57 Pennsylvania	3.69
58 Utah	3.47
59 Michigan	3.46
60 Maine	3.39
61 Vermont	3.37
62 Oregon	3.30
63 New Hampshire	3.18
64 Idaho	3.17
65 Wisconsin	3.16
66 Kentucky	3.16
67 Minnesota	3.13
68 South Dakota	3.12
69 Kansas	3.01
70 Montana	3.00
71 Nebraska	2.98
72 Georgia (new)	2.36