

The Flagging of America

By flag waiver Don Meinshausen

“A flag is a baton with an emblem attached”

Flag- a symbol used to convey a bit of information, also a signal to stop. It can also mean to decline in strength or vigor.

Flagellant- one who whips either in whipping up passion or who scourges by way of religious discipline or public penance with cords or stripes

Bunt or bunting- a short way to get to first base with a stick, especially if your opposition is way out in left field.

Flags are much too important to ignore. They are not just symbols of war or nationhood they are also the symbols of leadership. Such symbols have been used since the times of ancient Egypt when the placenta of the pharaoh was waved on a stick as a religious and a political symbol. They have been used by every successful political, ethnic and religious power in the history of the world. Not using a flag can be seen as apathy or nihilism. It is also seen as a vacuum to be filled. I remember seeing communists carrying their flags during the peace marches of the Vietnam era dispersing through a crowd of demonstrators to give people the impression of the crowd being much redder than it really was. Not having a powerful symbol can be more defeating than having a bad symbol. We remember the swastika and the hammer and sickle with horror and who can remember their opposition? Whether in rallies or demonstrating in the streets, battles, revolutions, photos or backdrops you need to find your friends quickly before the band starts to play and the symbols clash. A flag is a lightning rod in that it transmits the anger of the heavens and grounds it to the earth. You need to send a signal to alert people of your presence. To conduct a band you need a baton. The flag is the costume or uniform of the message.

Banners are an established part of advertising, of letting the market know of your services and product and making it seem popular. It is a colorful way of raising interest and a way of finding those who are curious for new ideas. I have waved various flags at events and encourage alternative flag design for creativity and diversity does help us. But what can libertarians use to rally and remind people about America's revolutionary libertarian beginnings?

Flags have always been used in warfare and demonstrations to rally and identify friendly forces. Those people waving an unknown or unfriendly flag that could be identified as appealing to a hostile nationality or ideology. Burning or defacing a flag is seen as an insult and could invite actual combat. One mistake that people make is that they think that they have to wave the flag that everyone else is waving, or being contrary wave a flag that others dislike. Some cannot identify with or not participate at all in this important symbolic context.

Flag waving is an essential part of politics whether you like it or not, especially in the US of A. Mark Hanna, GOP leader in the late 19th century and the Karl Rove of his day, used the American flag a lot in advertising and rallies. Since the end of the Civil War the GOP

has waved the bloody shirt, as it was called then, and played up the identification of the GOP/Union forces and its victory. The Democrats were considered unpatriotic and identified with the defeated South. The pressure to wave or wear an American flag is always increased during wartime as a way to make people defend the government. This may be why we always seem to be in a war. American flags and bunting are always used in excess during that time as old depictions of those eras show. There is also at the same time a heightened distrust and even hatred of any flag or symbol that shows a new or foreign influence. So while jingoism must be confronted it must be done carefully and intelligently.

A black flag is a negation, rather than a positive value. It is a dark and angry emblem without the light of hope or even contrast. Worse it is confusing and antagonistic to many who we wish to reach since it is identified with the socialist or violent movements that peaked a hundred years ago. They were identified, rightly or wrongly, with chaos. Even worse they are identified with failure as in the Russian Revolution and the Spanish Civil War. Since then they have had little or no effect anywhere in the world.

Those who uphold these radical ideals of the American Revolution of liberty, peace and limited government have had a hard time finding their way in a stormy sea of red, white and blue. We need to show a flag of color and emblem that has our slogans as well. For a flag is the first bumper ticker or button. It can in a single display recall a time or cause of our past. We do not have to necessarily agree on one flag but we can agree on a genre. This genre will excite everyone to our cause while offending no one. These flags reflect a time of radicalism, success and pride. It is a flag that can be as easily displayed on a flagpole in front of a home in a rural, conservative small town as well as waved by a protester in an anti government protest anywhere in the world.

What can be more inspiring in our clash of symbols with those who have stolen America away from us than the patriotic symbols of our own American Revolution? We must constantly recall, to ourselves as well as to others, of the values that are our beginnings and the base of our rights and our prosperity. These roots are radical and must be shown as such when waved as our banner. We are connected to our sacred past which shows the way to the future. It is important that we use these symbols now before others do. These images should show our ideals rather than some conservative counterfeit. Our words and actions do match those of our founders therefore we are entitled to use their flags and slogans. We share a struggle against Empire; no matter if it is based on foreign shores or comes from Washington DC or multi national force. We uphold the values of liberty and justice as our birthright.

The flag from the American Revolution that best represents this is the Culpeper flag. It was first used by Minutemen in Culpeper, Virginia and was one of the first flags used by our revolutionaries. In black letters on a white background of hope and purity are not one but two radical libertarian slogans; "Liberty or Death" and "Don't Tread on Me" The words Culpeper Minutemen are also on the flag and that label could be omitted or changed to reflect local organizations and sentiment.

This flag has a picture of a coiled rattlesnake on it; ready to strike. This snake is part of nature and our national heritage. It is bad assed to boot. The rattlesnake's eye is brighter than any others and has no eyelids, so it is the creature of constant vigilance. The snake never initiates an attack and hisses and rattles a warning. Once aroused it never surrenders. The serpent has had the clashing symbolic meanings of magic, healing, evil and knowledge

within the Old Testament. The embrace and deadly bite of the rattlesnake is actually sought by some Pagans and even Christians (primitive Baptists) today as a way to tempt fate and achieve a higher consciousness. This serpent was also portrayed as having 13 rattles representing the 13 colonies of the time. There is also a version of the rattlesnake flag which has the serpent upon 13 stripes. The thirteen stripes were a symbol of the wounds suffered under British imperialism

In 2002 I had 1,000 of these flags made as lapel pins. Lapel pins are like political buttons which I have worn since the 60's. I have a large collection of them of all different types and origins and wear them on occasion. Lapel pins and political buttons are both conversation starters. Lapel pins are more discreet and less controversial therefore appropriate for family and business situations. It is important to have lapel pins made since there are so many conservatives and politicians who wear the American flag of today. This flag connotes the modern times with its 50 stars and represents the disastrous turn to empire rather than our original ideals. I brought the Culpeper pins to the Libertarian National Convention in Indianapolis and presented my pins and ideas to the LP staff. The lapel pins are meant as a way to readily identify ourselves within a historic, patriotic American context so that we can show the way to our roots and our salvation. Through this we identify ourselves through our love of America's heritage. This can appeal to conservatives, radicals and everyone else. The LP bought every single pin and distributed them at the banquet where you might have seen them.

I also sold several hundred lapel pins of the Gadsden flag which has a yellow or gold background and similar image and history. For those who work within the environmentalist camp one could have the Pine Tree flag also from the times from the American Revolution. Browsing through the internet or encyclopedia one can find other flags to use as well. Do other countries and times have flags or symbols that we could use? Let me know what you have found. Solidarnosc, anyone?

During the fight against imposing an income tax in the state of New Jersey in the 70's we adopted the tri-cornered hat as our symbol. Rebellious colonists also wore the Liberty Cap. This cap has a long history coming from ancient Rome where it was worn by freed slaves. That cap could also be revived for current use especially among those who want to legalize psychedelic mushrooms since there is also a Liberty Cap mushroom.

Upon my release from prison for distributing psychedelics and hemp I hope to see some organization or entrepreneur distributing these wonderful logos as lapel pins, flags, desk sets, hats, coffee mugs, key chains, t-shirts, screen savers etc to get out our image as well as our message. This is fund raising and publicizing at the same time. These wonderful images can also grace our ads, writings, websites, and bumper stickers and be easily downloadable as clip art. We need more imagery in our copy, as ideas flow through TV, film, the internet and other advertising. We need imagery that is positive and has a wonderful history of being used in making a libertarian revolution. (Please include clip art of the flags noted here)

We can and should have creative and modern flags and logos as well so as not to be confined to the past. History is a springboard rather than a chain. I remember in the early days of our movement I asked Murray Rothbard, economist and a founder of our movement: "What should our flag look like?" He said that anyone could have any flag that they want and that also he was friendly to the anarchist tradition. His idea was for a black

flag with two or more gold lines coming together symbolizing free trade. I like this idea also and would love to see versions of this and other symbols free trade.

The rainbow flag could also be modified to include a band of our color, gold, included along with other colors. When I think of the colors of liberty; gold and sky blue come to mind; as you need libertarian values and freedom of the open skies to achieve goals. Perhaps there could be a contest on a website where people could publicize their design of flags for liberty. This could also be an art show at a libertarian conference as well. We need to encourage creative types since liberty and creativity are so connected and good for each other.

The idea of our own flag is that when we see a film clip or photo of some anti government rally we and the world will know that the defenders of liberty are present. At that moment we will be less alone; knowing that there are others who share our ideals. We have been here for a very long time, just look for our flag and you'll find friends. Please respond with your ideas and support to put the ideas here into effect. This could be a banner year for us.

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