

Nowadays on the rare occasion when a new flag is desired somewhere, advice on the art of flag design is often sought from 'vexillologists', or flag scholars. However, the study of fine art does not necessarily produce experts in fine art, nor the study of literature experts in literature, nor the study of music experts in music, let alone expert painters, novelists, and musicians, so why should students of the history and symbolism of flags be inevitably thought of as experts in flag design?

The best explanations for this misconception seem to be that vexillologists either allow the public to *think* that they possess such expertise, and out of vanity do not say otherwise, or that vexillologists *themselves* think that they possess such expertise, and out of vanity say that they do. In the absence of much information otherwise, a gullible public tends to believe what they are repeatedly told. What they are repeatedly told by vexillologists is that the best flag designs are always simple, so simple that children can draw them from memory: designs with a maximum of three colours, designs with only elementary shapes and patterns, designs that only include symbols that are extremely stylised and abstracted, designs without a different reverse side, and designs that never include inscriptions, seals, shields, coats of arms, geographical outlines, constellations, or any other content that without special treatment will appear incorrect in a reverse-side view.

[These are self-obvious lies](#). There are countless good flags, and even great flags, that are far too complex to be drawn from memory by *anyone*, flags with seven or more colours, flags with realistic depictions of plants, animals, or other symbols, and even flags with place names, inscriptions, seals, or other detailed, non-reversible content. Any flag that is well-regarded by the people that it represents is a good flag, and any flag that is *loved* by the people that it represents is a *great* flag. Thus the only true rule for a good flag design is that it must be capable of being well-regarded, and ideally loved, by those for whom it is intended. All else is subjective opinion. Any vexillologist who ignores this paramount rule of good flag design, and instead presents their mere opinions as being universal and inviolable rules, and especially one who arrogantly judges well-regarded flags 'bad', is a vexation, not a flag design expert worthy of admiration but a charlatan worthy of scorn.

At no time in recent history have more vexatious vexillologists been given credence than during the [New Zealand flag referendums of 2015-2016](#). The prominent Australian vexillologist Anthony 'Tony' Burton, for example, was [interviewed by Radio New Zealand](#) at the time. Introduced as an expert on all things flag-related, and positively oozing with erudition, he nevertheless said most of the conventional things that 'vexos' say when they are asked for flag design recommendations, although with the addition of a somewhat peculiar stance against symbols in the fly, Southern Cross or otherwise. Having seen a few Australian flags frayed away, and not repaired or replaced as would have been proper, he averred that all flags should avoid symbols in their entire fly areas, presumably to better accommodate as much as a fifty-percent fray. He criticised the legislative framework of the referendums, without explaining how national flag referendums could be run in the absence of such a framework, and he disparaged the flags of Turkmenistan, of Mozambique, and of the United States. The first two are perennial favourites for the disdain of vexillologists, although the people whom they represent are quite happy with them, thank you very much. Burton scorned the third with twaddle about it being "a crowded house", representing a "big dog" that deserves to be "trumped", although U.S. citizens love their flag with such devotion that they often fly it at their own homes, with a fervour that is puzzling to much of the rest of the world. Besides listing some obvious colour choices for a New Zealand flag, he shared his view that all of the fern designs in the referendum were insufficiently stylised (too many 'petals', by his count), seemingly oblivious to how woefully logo-like they were already. To his credit, Burton has actually designed a successful flag, that of the [South Sea Islanders](#). On the other hand, [his flag design book](#) has the subtitle "*Practical Guide to Flag Design*", yet its only 'practical' part is a brief listing, placed at the very end of the book, of what are basically the 'Do's and Don'ts' that are usually chundered up by vexillologists. Most revealing is Burton's pompous claim that "[vexillologists have higher standards](#)". Looking down his nose from below, so to speak, he sees flag scholars as vessels of innate wisdom and authority where flag design is concerned, notwithstanding that most of the world's greatest flags appeared long before organised flag scholarship even came into existence.

Radio New Zealand [also interviewed](#) one of its own nation's prominent vexillologists, [John Moody](#), of the New Zealand Flag Association, in a programme that focussed on the qualifications of the referendum's then newly-appointed twelve-member Flag Consideration Panel. Moody said that he had notified the Panel of his willingness to advise them, "if they needed it", but that he had not been taken up on his offer. He went on to question whether the Panel possessed the collective "expertise" required for picking flag candidates, the implication being that such expertise can only be possessed by vexillologists. Thus Moody did his part to establish a criticism that followed the Panel throughout the referendums, namely that they did not adequately seek or take vexillological advice. That accusation was belied by the Panel's own published "[Flag Design Guidelines](#)", which consolidated all of the simplistic flag design tenets that vexillologists typically advocate. The problem was never that the Panel did not take the advice of vexillologists, but that they embraced such advice far too readily, even going so far as to summarily reject flag candidates that did not have simple designs. In truth, the influence of vexillologists only helped to doom the referendums.

Meanwhile, wealthy New Zealander [Gareth Morgan](#), convinced that he too had been blessed with expert vexillological knowledge of good flag design (with simplicity of course being the paramount consideration), ran a separate flag design contest of his own. The contest attracted a thousand participants, each of whom hoped to garner the \$20,000 prize that Morgan offered. The winner he chose was [a grouping of coloured triangles](#). Later commenting on the criteria for his choice, Morgan said that "it had to satisfy the purists", a case of a vexation trying to please other vexations. The Morgan flag made it into the long-list of forty absurdly simple flag designs before ultimately being knocked out by yet [another grouping of coloured triangles](#) in the final set of five contenders, none of which ever stood any chance of inspiring the enthusiasm of a majority of New Zealanders.

There were plenty of others besides Morgan who decided that they as well, for the occasion, were not only vexillologists but flag design experts. Possibly spurred on by the whinging of those such as New Zealand First leader [Winston Peters](#) that there were no professional designers on the Flag Consideration Panel, the Designers Institute of New Zealand [got into the act](#), even going so far as to post a "[Principles of Flag Design](#)" video on YouTube, because 'design' is all the same, right? Surely professional designers should get it right, if anyone can. Yet all they had to offer was the identical insipid refrain of simplicity that was offered by Burton, Moody, Morgan, and the Panel itself. And as far as anyone knows, none of the above-mentioned pundits deigned to show mere mortals how it should be done, by themselves designing a manifestly great yet manifestly simple new flag for New Zealand, although no so-called flag design expert was forbidden from doing so, since the contest was actually open to everyone in the world, and not just to New Zealanders.

However, the pretentiousness of Burton, of Moody, of Morgan, and of all the rest of them cannot be compared to that of the American vexillologist Edward B. 'Ted' Kaye. When the Designers Institute and countless others have preached that there are 'five principles of good flag design', they have only been giving a shout-out to Kaye, whose influence regarding the *subject* of good flag design, more than that of any other individual, has been a pestilence in need of total eradication.

A successful businessman, community servant, and life-long flag enthusiast, Kaye has been a well-known and well-respected member of the vexillological community, and in particular within the [North American Vexillological Association](#), since the mid-1980s, but his renown before the early 2000s was not that of a highly-regarded flag scholar, and certainly not that of a flag design expert, but rather, at various times, that of an editor, treasurer, secretary, record-keeper, and organiser. Kaye performed and still performs many of these indispensable yet less than glamorous tasks, for NAVA as well as for the [Portland Flag Association](#), which is in his long-time home city and [state](#).

After the dawn of the new millennium, however, Kaye's stock and influence increased dramatically, not only in the vexillological world but well beyond, to the point where nowadays his is perhaps the most famous name in vexillology, and one that you will probably hear whenever a new flag is being contemplated anywhere in the world. His rise, entirely self-contrived, has been Machiavellian.

Charting the course to prominence that Kaye engineered for himself requires a bit of background, starting with the character of the vexillological world as it was in the mid-to-late twentieth century. In those years, flag scholars and enthusiasts were a very sociable but still rather small community, pursuing their avocation within vexillological organisations, occasionally attending vexillological conventions, publishing flag-related books and papers, and generally adhering to the philosophy of the late American flag scholar [Whitney Smith](#), who invented the term 'vexillology' in 1957 and who founded NAVA in the 1960s. Smith insisted that the study of flags should be dispassionate and non-judgemental, with vexillologists never dictating any norms for new flags nor exhorting any changes to existing ones. Although there were always vexillologists who had opinions about flag design, including Smith himself, they mostly only shared their ideas amongst themselves, generally without preaching them to the wider public, not least because of a still-nascent Internet, which was not yet fully a planet-wide distribution network of information (and of misinformation).

In the 1970s, for example, the late British vexillologist [William Crampton](#), who founded the U.K. [Flag Institute](#), could only circulate photocopies, or at first probably only [mimeographs](#), of his 20-page pamphlet entitled "[Flag Design, A Flag Institute Guide](#)". Crampton's flag design guidelines were actually summarised in a ten-item list at the end of his pamphlet, but at least he emphasised meaningfulness and distinctiveness over simplicity. Although a handful of other vexillologists made their own formal lists of guidelines over the years, Crampton's somewhat antiquated booklet probably remained the most prominent until perhaps 1995, when the late Romanian-American vexillologist [Peter J. Orenski](#) published "[A Flag for New Milford, the Practical Guide for Creating a Successful Civic Flag](#)", a book that embedded [Orenski's fettering personal flag design philosophy](#) within an account of the flag-change effort that he orchestrated for [his adopted home city](#), in the U.S. state of Connecticut. Leaving no doubt that he thought himself a flag design expert, Orenski vexatiously asserted that simplicity is "the most important attribute of a good flag, bar none".

As the century came to a close, and as Whitney Smith and other pioneers of vexillology reached old age, upstart vexillologists such as Orenski began to be chafed by the conventional restrictions. Developing the 'new school of thought' that their studies of flags had made them the natural repositories of '[vexillographic](#)' expertise, they began to assert that they had the resultant right, and possibly even the duty, to start telling the world how to design new flags, as well as how to revamp old ones. Closely monitoring all of their discussions and writings was Ted Kaye. As he tells it, he was inspired to begin codifying and condensing what this group had said and written, and he began to see himself as one of them, as a flag design 'activist' if you will, or more flamboyantly as a 'vexillonnaire'. So Kaye began to compose a brand new flag design guide, one that would supposedly 'distil the collective wisdom' that all of the other vexillonnaires had been postulating.

In early 2001, the NAVA website was only a few years old. The Internet's initial novelty had begun to wear off, even as its powerful uses were becoming more obvious, and Kaye had a brainstorm. Phase one of his plan was to persuade then NAVA president David B. Martucci to allow him to run a survey on the website, one that would be open to anyone in the world who wished to participate. The survey would ask respondents to 'use their personal opinions' to rate the designs of the flags of U.S. states, Canadian provinces, and a few territories, 72 flags in all, each on a scale from 0-to-10.

Whether there was any discussion of the *ethics* of running such a survey is unclear. The flags of states, provinces, and territories are not only *their* symbols, but those of their respective peoples. It follows that rating the flag of a state, province, or territory not only equates to rating that particular state, province, or territory, but also the people within that state, province, or territory. Given human nature, high ratings will always be pleasing to recipients whilst being resented by lower-rated neighbours, whereas low ratings will always be offensive to recipients whilst giving higher-rated neighbours a pretext to feel superior. The only groups of people who have the vested right to rate the flags of states, provinces, and territories, or for that matter to rate the flags of organisations, tribes, cities, regions, or nations, are the groups of people over whom those flags fly. Ratings of those flags by people to whom they do not belong can only be irrelevant and insulting.

Adding to the questionable ethics of the NAVA survey was the requirement that respondents divorce their ratings from real-world history, obviously a provision to prevent downgrades of U.S. southern state flag designs that incorporated elements of the Confederate Flag, which has become a symbol of racial oppression. This was a curious requirement, to say the least. If the survey had asked respondents to give their personal opinions of the Nazi flag, should they have discounted the atrocities that it came to represent, and focussed only on the aesthetic qualities of Hitler's design?

An association of supposed flag scholars such as NAVA could no more have justified Kaye's survey than a human rights organisation could have justified a survey ranking the worthiness of the races, yet it went ahead, apparently with Martucci's blessing, possibly because he himself had been one of the vexillonnaires, or perhaps because [his own precepts of good flag design](#), in which simplicity naturally tops the list, may have motivated him to seek the validation that such a survey could potentially provide. It might also be observed that Martucci refers to himself [on his website](#) as 'vexman', no doubt meant to be a reference to his prowess in both vexillology and vexillography, but for purposes of this document it is appropriate to note the actual definition of the word 'vex'.

Running from mid-February through May of 2001, the survey was completed by a few hundred willing respondents from some twenty countries, all of whom were apparently just as unethical and/or inconsiderate as Kaye and Martucci, since they did not pause to reflect on how they themselves might feel if a random group of North Americans decided to critically rate *their* flags. Faced with the attractive prospect of trolling others, what use did they have for the Golden Rule?

When the survey results had been tabulated, Kaye enacted phase two of his plan, which had three parts, the sum effects of which would guarantee the trajectory that he had calculated for himself. First he posted a prominent link to the survey results on the NAVA website homepage. Because he knew that all of the survey respondents would return to the website to learn the survey results, he also posted [a second prominent link](#) directly below, one which led to [a new NAVA web page](#) where his now-completed flag design guide, which he entitled "[Good Flag, Bad Flag](#)", could either be read online or downloaded as a Microsoft Word file. This virtually guaranteed that most of the returning survey respondents would take GFBF away with them, seeding it to their twenty respective countries. Lastly he compiled press releases of the survey results, which he strategically distributed to various print and broadcast media just a few days prior to the annual U.S. 'Flag Day' celebration, no doubt looking forward to the controversy that the press releases would precipitate.

Kaye has always been skilled at self-promotion, and many of the flag-related articles and formal papers that he has written have simply been chronicles of his personal adventures. In mid-2001, mere weeks after GFBF had been successfully launched in the wake of his survey, he was already waxing nostalgic about both of his early brainchildren in a formal NAVA essay that he grandiosely entitled "[Good Flag, Bad Flag, and the Great NAVA Flag Survey of 2001](#)". Essentially this was Kaye's manifesto. It was in this article that he first began to characterise his mere 'opinions' about flag design as a set of universal 'principles', and in which he formally styled himself a vexillonnaire. Like any good self-promoter, he also used the article to take credit for the efforts of others:

"In my work on..."*Flags of the Native Peoples of the United States*", I noted the poor design of most of the over 100+ tribal flags documented...Most showed a lack of understanding of sound flag design principles...However, this vexillonnaire, before attempting to help a tribe with a new flag or a redesign 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*..."

Contrary to his implication, the 'work' that he performed on [that seminal document](#), the precursor to [a seminal book](#), was as its editor, and not as its author nor as its illustrator, who respectively were the flag scholars Donald T. Healy and Peter J. Orenski, neither of whom Kaye mentions.

That 'oversight' is bad enough, but as with all editing, Kaye's was largely proofreading, so the idea that he had accordingly been endowed with the authority to 'educate, influence, and guide' U.S. indigenous tribes, whether about their flag designs or about anything else, is patently delusional.

Kaye went on in his manifesto to offer a couple of tips about being a vexillonnaire, one who sets themselves the mission of actively seeking to improve flags, meaning all flags everywhere, whether they are those that represent the vexillonnaire or not, and with the 'improve' part requiring by extension that the vexillonnaire must also become a self-appointed *judge* of flags, if not also jury and executioner. His first tip is a "stock response" that vexillonnaires can use to deflect criticism:

"A great _____ deserves a great flag" (insert 'state', 'province', 'nation', 'tribe', 'region', 'city', 'organisation', 'leader', 'cause', etc.). "Who could argue with that?", he glibly asks.

Kaye's second tip is a list of actions to take when someone's flag does not meet the vexillonnaire's personal aesthetic standards of flag design, the first of which is to:

"Stir up public discontent with the [current] flag...".

Talk about a vexation. Substitute 'regime' for 'flag', and you have something right out of the pages of a CIA playbook. Such noble individuals, these vexillonnaires.

Kaye's manifesto is antithetical to items 10 and 17 of Whitney Smith's "[Principles of Vexillology](#)", and it even attempts to twist a scholarly essay that Smith wrote about heraldry into a tacit endorsement of 'vexillonnairism'. Referring to page 52 of Smith's essay, which was entitled "[American Perspectives on Heraldry and Vexillology](#)", Kaye claims: "As Whitney Smith has noted, the allied field of heraldry does not differentiate between the descriptive and the prescriptive, it combines them...". That statement is a false account of anything that Smith says on page 52 of his essay or on any of its other pages. Smith's essay is merely a comparison of the similarities and the differences between formal European heraldry, which is usually governed by strict rules, and what amounts to an American version of heraldry, which often *violates* such rules, and it is a call for heraldic scholars to study each version equally and without Eurocentric prejudice. Although Smith criticises the symbolism in many of his examples of American heraldry, he does so according to European standards, and in any event his essay essentially defends the American version of heraldry, as well as the freer forms typified by American heraldry as they are sometimes applied to the symbolism of flag designs. Even if European heraldry might 'describe' coats of arms in accordance with heraldic rules, whilst also 'prescribing' what those rules should be, that situation would not imply that flag *study* should be combined with flag *design* in such a way that the amalgam will be justified in both 'describing' flags and 'prescribing' rules for their design. European heraldry is only in the loosest sense an "allied field" of flag scholarship, and it in no way justifies the existence of, nor provides a viable model for, Kaye's prescriptive rules of flag design, notwithstanding that European heraldry comprises several strictures that have been parroted by GFBF. Smith may have tolerated the idiocy of *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, as well as that of Kaye's flag survey, but he never endorsed either of them. In fact his statements on page 53 of his essay can be seen as a pointed rebuttal of both GFBF and of Kaye's transparent attempt to subsume flag design into a sanctioned area of flag scholarship: "Good and bad flag design is recognized as properly being in the realm of vexillography, where questions of taste and preference rather than objectivity and rigorous analysis prevail", and "...the vexillologist is not beholden to any flags nor to immutable laws about what constitutes their proper...design." It must have hurt Smith deeply to see the uses of NAVA, an organisation that he founded, be so thoroughly subverted by Ted Kaye.

Good Flag, Bad Flag [has been fully excoriated elsewhere](#), so only a general lambasting will be included here. Its chief premise is that there are five principles of good flag design, simplicity being foremost amongst them. That artifice makes GFBF especially attractive to those with little discernment, since it naturally evokes the fingers of a hand, on which GFBF's 'principles' can be easily remembered and ticked off, but it is a strained fiction to begin with, since GFBF stretches simplicity into three extra categories, meaning simplicity of symbolism, simplicity of colour, and simplicity of graphical elements. So GFBF actually only says two things, which are, in the perversely *reverse* order of their importance to flag design, 'keep it simple' and 'keep it distinctive'.

As with most alleged guidelines for good flag design, those of GFBF do not even fill a single page, so GFBF purports to somehow validate its arbitrary precepts by padding out its sixteen pages with illustrations of several current and historical flags from around the world that either do or do not

adhere to its precepts, a fatuous didactic exercise that proves nothing, but one that insults the people of Turkmenistan, Dominica, and Indonesia, those of the U.S. states of West Virginia, Virginia, South Dakota, and Vermont, and those of Canada's province of Manitoba and its hamlet of Fort Providence, as well as the Organisation of American States and the entire American indigenous tribe of the Navaho Nation, amongst others. All of their flags, which Kaye labels 'no' in the 2020 revision of GFBB and 'bad' in all other revisions of GFBB back to 2001, can be judged respectively 'yes' or 'good' using other criteria that are far more valid than any advocated by Kaye.

In his choice of flags for GFBB to criticise, Kaye plays it safe as far as any negative consequences to *himself* might ever go. He does not dare to insult any flags of the U.K., Mexico, or South America, where he has many current and former social contacts, nor does he bravely take on any flags that are close-to-home, such as those of the U.S. or of his home state of Oregon, the designs of which he actually has the *right* to criticise. He could nuzzle, for example, about the complex grid of fifty small white stars in the canton of the U.S. flag, and in fact he has done so elsewhere, advocating a return to thirteen, as in [an antiquated design](#) that was possibly the original, so why is the U.S. flag not pilloried within the pages of *Good Flag, Bad Flag*? Incidentally, the U.S. flag is oddly included on GFBB's front cover, in the incongruous company of eight other flags that all have simple designs. Is that due to Kaye's sentimental allegiance, or is it just his way of acknowledging the indisputable effectiveness, recognisability, and symbolism of the U.S. flag's complex design?

GFBB says “no lettering or seals” and “don't put a different design on the back”. [The Oregon flag](#) has all three of these supposed shortcomings, so why did Kaye instead choose the flags of West Virginia, Virginia, South Dakota, Vermont, Manitoba, and Fort Providence to 'illuminate' those 'principles'? Many organisations, tribes, cities, provinces, states, and nations display coats of arms, shields, or seals on their flags, and there is nothing wrong with that, no matter the views of Ted Kaye, who elsewhere thinks himself clever for calling them 'seal on bed-sheet', or 'S.O.B.' flags. Wouldn't a man of his convictions publicly bestow that same epithet on the flag of his home state?

Whether as an exercise in false modesty or simply as a way of warding off questions of his motives, Kaye refers to himself as the 'compiler' of GFBB rather than its author. The pretext is that he is conveying “the expert wisdom of over 20 vexillologists/vexillographers”, rather than codswallop that he came up with himself. GFBB's sole supportive quotation, however, is not from one of the 17 (*not* “over 20”) 'experts' on its back cover but from [the designer of the Confederate Battle Flag](#). Even glossing over its anachronistic reference to woollen '[bunting](#)', it is a troubling and needless choice, leading one to wonder why NAVA has continued to allow its inclusion in GFBB since 2001.

For that matter one wonders why it is that for a full year, between August 2020 and August 2021, the [NAVA website homepage](#) included a link to a PDF entitled “[Confederate Flag Facts](#)”. The link was proudly prefaced with “NAVA does not judge flags”, yet the same web page also included two links to *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, which is explicitly judgemental in both its title and its content. Everyone already knows the main facts about the flag, which are that it was flown during a failed nineteenth century insurrection against the United States, one intended to preserve legal slavery, and that although it may once have been a nostalgic reminder of a bygone era, it is now a symbol of racial bigotry and of continued insurrection, as it was used, for example, in the January 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol. These are facts, not 'judgements', but they are not mentioned in the PDF, which comes off as more of a celebration of the Confederate Flag and of its variants than as a harmless 'study' meant to educate. Most insidiously the PDF includes a photo of the infamous U.S. segregationist [George Wallace](#), smiling broadly whilst he flashes the 'white power' hand gesture, a popular symbol amongst white supremacists that was also seen in the 2021 U.S. Capitol attack. Readers of this document who are white, but who are capable of some empathy, are asked to imagine visiting the NAVA website between 2020-21 as black North Americans or as other persons of colour from anywhere in the world, and seeing that of all the flags that exist, the one that NAVA chose to figuratively wave on its homepage was the Confederate Flag. Could you have blithely accepted that the intent of the PDF was to innocently contribute something to flag scholarship?

The *Confederate Flag Facts* PDF does not disclose its author within its pages, an omission that may leave the impression that it was the collaborative effort of several NAVA flag scholars, rather than the work of a single individual. Fortunately a PDF often encodes its author's name within its file properties, whether the author is aware of it or not, and that data can be examined to reveal that the author was Ted Kaye. Few flag-related documents that Kaye has ever authored, edited, or had anything else to do with have failed to credit his name. The omission does not seem to be accidental, given that the file properties of the PDF also reveal that it went through five revisions. If Kaye is proud of the PDF and of its ostensible purpose, he does not show it. At best its existence suggests racial insensitivity, all the more puzzling in a person who seems to have a Jewish heritage. This is not to say that Kaye has not publicly commented on the Confederate Battle Flag and others of its kind in dozens of interviews and written articles in the past two decades, but in all of those cases he has only pointed out the flag's two meanings, one as a relatively benign symbol of U.S. southern heritage and the other as a blatant symbol of racism, a dichotomy that no one needs to have explained to them by a vexillologist. What Kaye has never done publicly is to explicitly *condemn* the Confederate Battle Flag, which the [Anti-Defamation League](#) and other organisations have designated to be an irredeemable [hate symbol](#). Kaye has no problem faulting flags that have complex designs, but as regards the Confederate Battle Flag the word 'bad' never passes his lips.

As of September 2021, both the link to the PDF and the PDF itself have been purged from the NAVA website, possibly due to being pointed out by prior revisions of this document, but neither NAVA nor Ted Kaye has issued an apology for having presented the odious PDF in the first place. This document's digression on the topic will be concluded here by noting that the swastika is an ancient symbol that had only good connotations until it was co-opted by Hitler's Nazi Germany. Because forever after it became tainted, as a symbol of anti-Semitism and of genocide, it was banned, at least in the Western world. Likewise, the Confederate Battle Flag was a relatively benign symbol until it was co-opted by white supremacist ideology. Because forever after it has become tainted, as a symbol of racial bigotry and of violent insurrection, it should be banned. What is crooked cannot be made straight. Flags and other symbols of historical hatred belong in museums, not in public places. All of us who possess a modicum of human decency should vehemently condemn the Confederate Flag. Ted Kaye and NAVA are not exempt from that ethical obligation, and all the less so because of their public involvement with flags. There is nothing virtuous or scholarly about failing to denounce evil, whether it is tangible or merely symbolic.

Returning to the main thread of this diatribe, the ascent of the world's most vexatious vexillologist: With Kaye's plan set fully in motion by the 2001 survey results, by the press releases, and by the publication of GFBBF, the stage was set for the consequences that he had so callously orchestrated. The subjects of the survey were soon either predictably chuffed or outraged, depending on how their flags had been rated, giving rise to both print and broadcast media coverage. A flood of letters and e-mails poured into NAVA. As both the instigator of the survey and the author of GFBBF, Kaye was soon granting interviews, helping to establish both his and NAVA's wider fame. The general public suddenly became aware of the word 'vexillology', as did various dictionaries. NAVA enjoyed a sharp rise in its membership, as well as an attendant strengthening of its treasury, such that in retrospect it seems rather likely that Martucci's anticipation of such results could even have been one of his primary motivations for allowing Kaye to run his survey in the first place.

Although the survey and the release of GFBBF had directly centred Kaye in the spotlight he wanted, it was soon dimmed by the glare of the 9/11 terrorism attacks. Nevertheless, once 2001 had ended, and the national and international grief had faded somewhat, there was enough glow left on Kaye to make him sought after as a flag design and/or flag contest consultant. The first major instance was perhaps in early 2002, when [Sheriff Leroy 'Lee' Baca](#), of the often-controversial Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, hired Kaye to advise an appointed panel regarding the merits of 726 flag designs that had already been gathered as candidates to become the new flag of the Department. Baca selected the winner and changed its design to make it more to his liking, probably whilst wondering what he had ever needed Kaye for, since Kaye's whole shtick is written in his pamphlet.

Also in 2002, a flag design contest was launched in the U.S. state of Utah, using the flag design guidelines of GFBF, and with Kaye serving as a judge on the flag candidate selection committee. In an example of how NAVA has progressively become Kaye's 'vexillonnairist' plaything, it became wholeheartedly involved in the contest by way of a '[report](#)' that Kaye authored, one which not only recommended news coverage of the finalist flag candidates but supported legislative action to have the current flag changed, ignoring the fact that NAVA's stated principles do not allow it to "...participate in the...promotion of any particular flag". The flag-change effort had been initiated by a Utah newspaper, and not by the Utah citizenry, who offered it no support, so it went nowhere. In later years the flag has received a small correction and a general refresh of its appearance, but it remains essentially the same today as it was in its original 1903 design and in its 1911-13 adoption.

Using the Utah contest as his template, Kaye has in subsequent years continued to stick NAVA's nose into various flag-change efforts, as reflected in his similar reports for those of the U.S. cities of [Kansas City](#) (state of Missouri, 2005), [Mesa](#) (state of Arizona, 2005), and [Burlington](#) (state of Vermont, 2017), as well as for the U.S. state of Oregon (2009). Kansas City ignored Kaye and left the extensive writing on [its beautiful flag](#). More compliant because of not already having an official flag, Mesa allowed Kaye himself to select a panel of flag contest judges, on which Kaye and at least four other prominent NAVA members served, although "NAVA does not judge flags", as the reader may recall from this document's earlier digression. The panel selected two-dozen final designs to present, but not before Kaye modified their favourite, and probably without its designer's consent.

The voters in the Mesa flag contest were simply those Mesa citizens who happened to be readers of the local newspaper that held the flag contest. Whether they followed the selection panel's ranking of the finalist candidates or independently used their own judgements, their ranking agreed with that of the panel, and Mesa had [its new flag](#). Like Mesa, Burlington did not already have an official flag, although [its 1990 unofficial flag](#) was brilliantly symbolic of the city. Unlike Mesa, it selected its own panel of judges instead of allowing Kaye to be so aggressive as to choose them himself. However, Burlington did make GFBF its verbatim official flag design guidelines, and it actually *required* its panel of judges to read GFBF before whittling the finalist candidates down to seven. It also let Kaye present his GFBF dog and pony show before any of the actual whittling commenced. At least the full Burlington public was allowed to choose the winner, but they were not allowed the option of choosing their previously unofficial flag, because it was obviously not a GFBF cup of tea. If you have visited the link for that flag, located in one of the recent sentences preceding this one, you have already seen the winning flag design as well, a zigzagging GFBF exemplar in every way.

According to Kaye, the 2008 initiative to change [the flag of his U.S. home state of Oregon](#) did not come from him but from two newspaper reporters, although as previously noted he would have been within his rights to lobby for such a change. Whatever the true tale, after the first shot was fired Kaye used every vexillonnairish weapon in his arsenal to "stir up discontent with the flag", but just as with his Utah fiasco, [nothing came of it](#). The Oregon flag is an intensely symbolic and beautiful creation in blue and gold, and there is no indication that a majority of Oregon citizens have ever had anything but the deepest and most sincere respect for it since its 1925 creation. [Kaye's report on the initiative](#), yet another chapter in the ongoing saga of *Ted Kaye, Vexillonnaire*, joins his other reports as little more than a self-serving plug for himself, for NAVA, and for GFBF.

Using his *other* plaything, the Portland Flag Association, Kaye has relentlessly pushed to bring the designs of city flags around the world into accord with the asinine tenets of *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, beginning with [that of his home city of Portland](#), which with his 'help' in 2002 saw both a slight adjustment to its basic design and a toss of its previous city seal, making it more unidentifiable for any non-Portlander, and probably for most Portlanders as well. Giving Kaye's city flag-change efforts extra traction was his [2004 American City Flags Survey](#), another unethical Kaye-Martucci collaboration that followed the template of NAVA's 2001 survey, and one that predictably provided another boost to NAVA income and to Kaye's renown. In this case about 500 survey respondents gave their personal opinions of about 150 U.S. city flags. It was ostensibly a 'limited-participation'

survey rather than a fully public one, open to NAVA members, to other persons on NAVA's e-mail list, to all of the 2001 survey respondents, and finally to any visitors of the NAVA website. It was also publicised in other flag-related forums. In other words it was essentially open to anyone who had at least a passing interest in flags, and thus a familiarity with conventional flag design precepts. This of course was the same primary source of bias that was present for the participants in the 2001 survey, and it meant that simplicity was once again the watchword for their ratings. Actually this bias was far more pronounced for the 2004 survey than it had been for that of 2001, because by that point in time, *Good Flag, Bad Flag* had been prevalent for more than three years.

In his [2004 survey report](#), Kaye gives himself his usual pat on the back, and he gives us his always-included advert for *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, but this time he documents a flag rating 'methodology' that he credits to his son Mason, who had either just completed his secondary/high school education or was soon to do so. Mason supposedly devised a way of translating the five dubious tenets of GFBB into a 0-to-10 'flag design rating scale', which Kaye then christened the 'K Scale'. The scale was pseudo-scientific to say the least, but nevertheless Kaye used it to draw a tortured, 89% correlation between K Scale predictions and the ratings that were submitted by the survey respondents, many or even most of whom, as mentioned earlier, were biased towards GFBB premises to begin with. However, the biggest source of bias may not be immediately apparent, because using the 0-to-10 K Scale required someone to subjectively assign 0-to-2 points for a flag's simplicity, for its symbolism, for its number of colours, for its lack of letters or seals, and for its distinctiveness. That person was of course Ted Kaye, who could thus make the K Scale do anything that he wanted it to do, and then simply pretend that it was 'a scientific validation' of GFBB tenets. Essentially the survey respondents used GFBB to rate each flag design, and then Kaye used GFBB to rate each flag design by K Scale proxy. How could the two sets of ratings *not* seem to correlate?

There is no scientifically legitimate system for rating the quality of a flag design. The K Scale is an obvious flimflam that can only add credence to GFBB and to the results of the 2004 survey for those who are scientifically ignorant, and most tellingly it is but a thinly-disguised 'dress-up' of an identical ruse that Kaye used in his report for the 2001 survey, three years earlier:

"I tested GFBB 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!"

One wonders if Kaye has told so many lies that remembering this prior ruse was difficult for him, but perhaps he just wanted Mason to be there to take the blame if anyone recognised it for a scam. The quote above also illustrates Kaye's habit of liberally sprinkling exclamation points throughout his writings, as a sophomoric attempt to emphasise either how 'right' he is about something or how 'wrong' someone else is. There are nine such exclamation points in *Good Flag, Bad Flag* alone.

Since we have returned above to Kaye's 2001 survey report, which as noted before is his manifesto, consider the fallacious quote below, which would be equally at home in his 2004 survey report:

"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."

What Kaye wants us to believe is that the biased opinions of a few hundred flag enthusiasts can be accurately extrapolated to those of entire populations, be they the thousands in cities, the millions in states and provinces, or the billions on Earth. There are no limits to Kaye's pretentiousness. However, he did manage to say one true thing, and possibly one only, in his 2001 survey report: "One doesn't need to be a flag expert to recognize a good flag design." This writer totally agrees, noting only that one also doesn't need to be a flag expert in order to *produce* a good flag design.

Much to Kaye's utter delight, the pernicious weed that is *Good Flag, Bad Flag* has steadily spread. 2004 saw the first offering of a downloadable PDF version. In 2006 a downloadable Spanish PDF version emerged, and that year also saw the first printing of GFBB as a paper pamphlet, which NAVA offered for wholesale purchase. A French PDF was offered in 2007, and a German PDF in 2011. By 2021 there were Portuguese, Italian, Slovenian, and Russian PDFs. Thus Kaye's idiotic

brainchild has become the entire world's most prominent guide to flag design. Nowadays *GFBF* is the centrepiece of [an entire section of the NAVA website](#), one that proudly proclaims the flag design expertise that Kaye and NAVA have pretended to possess since *GFBF* was first introduced. A recent addition to the section is a link to "[Modern Flag Design](#)", which of all the *GFBF*-toadying documents on the Internet is probably the most sycophantic. With "the advice of Ted Kaye", it simply uses *GFBF* 'principles' to denigrate roughly another score of perfectly good flags, pretentiously concluding with "...you now know everything you should know about flag design...". This 'expansion' of *Good Flag, Bad Flag* is the metaphorical equivalent of the biblical Pharisees, who looked far-and-wide for converts, only to make them twice the children of hell as themselves. In addition to doubling down on the injuries caused by *GFBF*, it adds new insults to the people of: the French collectivity of Saint-Pierre-and-Miquelon, the Kenyan county of Nyandarua, the Belgian province of Liège, the Bolivian municipality and department of Cochabamba, the Bolivian municipality of Lagoa Formosa, the Spanish island of Tenerife, the Chilean city of Coquimbo, the Papua New Guinea province of Hela, the British Indian Ocean Territory, the U.S. state of Wisconsin, the Central Province of Sri Lanka, the Mozambican militant organisation RENAMO, the U.S. Wisconsin state's city of Milwaukee, the U.S. state of New Hampshire, the British possession Saint Helena, the French region of Lower Normandy, the U.S. Michigan state's city of Detroit, and even those of Tibet, or at least those who love the same flag as the Dalai Lama. All of these people have extraordinarily symbolic, distinctive, and beautiful flags that they fully embrace.

GFBF is currently respected and promoted by vexillological organisations throughout the world. Its 'principles' are generally taken for gospel, not only by flag designers and by flag contest organisers, but by those who decide which flag designs can be seen by the public, such as [Australia's Ausflag organisation](#), which for almost forty years has received thousands of design submissions whilst only showcasing [the handful that meet their simplistic vexillological standards](#). Such *censoring* of designs is yet another vexation, never better exemplified than by New Zealand's 2015-2016 flag referendums. Told that only simple flag designs would be acceptable, ten thousand would-be New Zealand national flag designers were not given creative free reign, but were instead forced to constrain their flag designs to those that would conform to the sanctioned strictures. Thus all of the design submissions were censored from the start, *self-censored* by their designers, and accordingly the first democratic national flag referendums that the world had ever seen were doomed, as will be almost any flag-change effort that relies on advice from vexillolo'gits' like Kaye.

No doubt Kaye longed for an invitation from New Zealand to share his 'flag design expertise' in person, but alas, he had to be content with [pontificating on the affair](#) from afar. In early 2015, during the preliminary stages of the referendums, one of Kaye's interviews about them came to the attention of the prime minister of Fiji, strongman [Josaia Voreqe 'Frank' Bainimarama](#). Taking his cue from the efforts in New Zealand, Bainimarama had decreed that Fiji's flag, too, would be changed, although in a more insular exercise that, unlike New Zealand's open-to-the-world contest, would only accept flag designs from Fijians. Bainimarama had already appointed a panel of twelve prominent Fijians to select the flag designs that would be put to a public vote, but when he invited Kaye to play an advisory role, our favourite vexillonnaire did not hesitate to pack up some *GFBF* pamphlets and his collection of flag-themed ties, and off he jetted to Suva for a week, to be the know-it-all American who made it thirteen-at-table. In printed and televised interviews whilst in Fiji, Kaye often noted that he was "offering his services for free", which was little largesse, given that the tab for his transportation and accommodation [was picked up by Fijian taxpayers](#). According to Kaye he had "a three-day marathon session" with the twelve Fijian panellists, which must have given him a few days to simply enjoy the prime holiday spot that Fiji was in 2015, not a bad consolation prize for missing out on NZ. One wonders if his wife was on the tab to enjoy it too.

In [a patronising interview on video](#) that was apparently given from the poolside veranda at his Fiji accommodation, Kaye asserted that he had formerly been "involved" with the flags of the U.S. states of Utah, Oregon, and Georgia, implying he had something to do with their designs, rather a good trick for those of Utah and Oregon, which as noted earlier were completed in 1903 and 1925.

Whereas the flag of the U.S. state of Georgia was poorly rated in Kaye's 2001 survey, the effort by that state's populace to remove its flag's Confederate symbolism was already fervent in the years prior to the survey, and it remained so right up to 2003, the year the flag was changed, records of which reveal no involvement by Ted Kaye, or at least none beyond the existence of his pamphlet, the rules of which are ignored by [the new Georgia flag design](#). Kaye toots another horn that is not his to toot by dredging up the flag of the L.A. Sheriff's Department. When viewing the video it is fun to try to spot the moment when Kaye's brain twigs to the fact that his mouth has imprudently run off into the potentially fraught minefield of multi-ethnicity, as his eyes dart about and he struggles to find the words to haltingly avert what he was so very close to revealing about himself.

The GFBF patent medicine that Kaye hawks is usually not recognised for the snake oil that it is, but it did not fool Dr. Wadan Lal Narsey, the notable Fijian academic, politician, and commentator. In his *Fiji Times* article of 25 June 2015, entitled "[Fiji's flag fiasco: a process hijacked?](#)", Narsey not only revealed the daftness of the flag-change effort but of Kaye's less-than-welcomed part in it. His article is good reading, but especially the section titled **Enter foreigner Ted Kaye**. An excerpt:

"...American Ted Kaye...(flag expert)...volunteered to help Fiji choose a distinct new Fiji flag... Kaye was soon giving seminars to the simpletons on the Fiji Flag Committee about the 'universal flag principles' of simplicity, the need to have a few colours only, and not to have too many details, so that any child could draw the flag, all supposedly 'good principles' allegedly not followed by our current flag. But, apparently no one told the people of Fiji for the last forty five years, that our Fiji flag that they have been passionately waving around...does not have the 'good qualities of a national flag' according to this American...Oh dear, to think we have suffered for forty five years under a flag like this, with so many imperfections...Kaye claimed "*the [only] distinctive aspect of Fiji's flag is its colour.*" Gobbledygook...Gibberish, Claptrap, Nonsense, Rubbish, Balderdash, Blather, Garbage, Drivel, Tripe, Hogwash, Baloney, Bilge, Bull, Bunk, Eyewash, Piffle, Twaddle, Poppycock, Phooey, Hooey."

Now there is a man who is after this writer's own true heart.

Upon returning to the U.S.A., and seemingly indifferent to how his Yankee intrusion into Fijian affairs was probably received by most Fijians, Kaye gave himself a ticker-tape parade in the form of [a newsletter](#) about his adventure. Its readers were encouraged to go to the [Fiji Sun website](#) and to search for "Kaye" articles. In one article he was quoted as saying, "A great country deserves a great flag." Sadly for Kaye, his only 'involvement' with a national flag-change effort would not become a feather in his cap, because Bainimarama soon shelved the initiative. The lack of any widespread public support played its part, as well as allegations of various unfair practices and perhaps even a bit of corruption, but the consensus view is that the devastation that was wreaked on Fiji by Cyclone Winston in early 2016 made the effort inappropriate, and the pride that was shown in the current flag later that year, when Fiji's Rugby Sevens team won Olympic gold, made it untenable. The simpler explanation is that Bainimarama loathed all of the flag design alternatives that the Kaye-led flag committee had come up with, and was not inclined to chance a public vote on them.

One of the staunchest and thus most vexatious supporters of Kaye's crusade to dumb-down all of the flags of the world has been the popular American radio and pod-cast personality Roman Mars. Mars is essentially a self-taught critic of design, his observations having first been confined mostly to architecture but having now broadened to the designs of pretty much anything and everything, [including flags](#). The results of an Internet search for his name will not need much scrolling before one or two of his flag-related writings, audio recordings, or videos will appear. His most-watched video is probably [his assessment of city flag designs](#), in which he leads a TED-Talk audience into gleeful mockery of some typical targets such as those identified in Kaye's 2004 city flags survey. Like Kaye, Mars is a flag critic, and their views could not be more perfectly aligned. Mars never mentions the word 'flag' without fawningly mentioning Kaye as well, and as a far more polished showman than Kaye, Mars has spread Kaye's fame more than any person other than Kaye himself. Mars too has benefited from their mutual-admiration society, as recently as in 2020, when NAVA blew a decade of dust off of the '[Vexillonnaire Award](#)' and gave him one, probably at Kaye's behest.

You will be hard-pressed to find a photograph of Ted Kaye in which he is not flashing his best toothy smile. Even during his video interviews, such as those that have been previously linked to from this document, he generally keeps a grin on his face, not only as he gives his answers but in the pauses between questions, no matter how lengthy. Whether it is instinctive or something that he was taught, perhaps in business school as a way of projecting confidence, its effect in this writer's opinion is instead condescending, sardonic, or even unctuous, like the smile of a con artist. Serving as a final example we have [this recent video](#), a 'Zoom' interview that Kaye granted during the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2020. Like a parent reading to their wee one, he narrates from GFBBF word-for-word whilst displaying PowerPoint slides made from its pages. What an educator.

This diatribe on vexatious vexillologists is nearing its end. It began with Aussie Tony Burton, who has said that in flag design, "less is more, and more is less". For some his words may pass for profundity, but how can less meaning, symbolism, and distinctiveness in a flag design, as well as less acceptance of one, be in any way 'more'? In this writer's maths, less is less, and more is more. From Burton we moved on to many other vexations, the last being Roman Mars, a newly-minted vexillonnaire who offers other profound ideas, such as [designing flags on tiny pieces of paper](#), a folly that was probably first foisted upon us in one of the writings of Ted Kaye, who has been the main focus of this tirade, as well he should have been, since he is far and away the worst of the lot. Some readers may dismiss this document as an undeserved character assassination of Kaye, yet through his pamphlet, his flag surveys, his consultations, and his other flag-related activities, he has arrogantly and needlessly insulted millions of people around the world, whilst his sycophants have insulted millions more, and during all of it he has been proudly 'unapologetic', to use his own word, meaning without regret, remorse, or contrition. So he should reap a bit of what he has sown.

Not that Kaye himself is likely to read this document with anything but a self-assured smirk, in the same way that he has appended the missives of the deeply hurt and angered to his 2001 and 2004 survey reports, with a conceited wink, and not as an admission of even the slightest possibility that *his* views could be those that are consummately wrong, rather than theirs. Whenever people prefer to keep their current flags instead of changing them to GFBBF-sanctioned alternatives, his explanation is always that they have been blinded by an unfortunate [psychological shortcoming](#), and never that they have carefully considered the GFBBF-sanctioned alternatives but simply found them to be hackneyed and uninspiring. In all of his autopsy reports of failed flag-change efforts, Kaye has proudly included full-colour images of the rejected flag designs, as you will find if you return to any of the previously-listed links for Kaye's reports on those failed initiatives, such as that [for the Oregon flag](#). If you view the images of the rejected Oregon flag designs, and if you are an objective observer rather than a servile adherent to the dogma of GFBBF, the chances are good that you will easily intuit why those designs were rejected. The chances are also good that you will scoff at Kaye's conclusion, on page 16 of his report, that the failed designs were victims of what he calls "[the ugly baby phenomenon](#)", which he has in later years used to explain the failed flag-change efforts in New Zealand, Fiji, and elsewhere. What Kaye will never grasp is that the collections of failed flag design images in his reports amount to his personal photo albums of 'GFBBF babies', which he is prevented by his *own* mental biases from seeing as the ugly babies that *they* often are. Lying to himself as well as to others, like Trump, he will be spouting his lies until the day he dies.

Incidentally, in his introduction to his report on the failed Oregon flag-change effort, Kaye outdoes himself with his implication of a dark association between the Oregon flag and the Ku Klux Klan. All the more perplexing, then, that his *Confederate Flag Facts* PDF fails to mention the decidedly more obvious and well-established ties between that organisation and the Confederate Battle Flag. One wonders which of the two flags Kaye would rate higher, perhaps in keeping with a KKK Scale.

Just as befell the pioneers of flag scholarship, Kaye has now reached advanced age, so he too has become one of the old guard of vexillology. A new breed of flag scholars may discard Kaye's views, just as he rubbished those of Whitney Smith. Perhaps this new guard will return flag scholarship to the considerate and non-judgemental discipline that it was originally, when Smith founded it.

In 2016, about ten days after Smith passed away, Kaye published "[A Personal Reminiscence](#)" of what he probably thought were amusing anecdotes about his and his son's interactions with Smith. The always clean-shaven Kaye began his off-key eulogy for the founder and doyen of vexillology with the revelation that Smith was originally "moustachioed". He acknowledged that Smith was always kind to Mason and to everyone else, but otherwise Kaye's 'reminiscence' was far less about Smith than about himself. I visited here, I journeyed there, I organised this, I negotiated that. "How did I become advisory editor of the *Flag Bulletin*?", he asks, followed by his equally irrelevant answer, a tedious explanation of how he manoeuvred Smith into sending him pre-publication articles from Smith's "[Flag Bulletin](#)", just to correct all of the "typos", but how he was unable to resist "wielding the red pen" to make "improvements" to Smith's copy (overly-articulate fellow had to "repeat himself to reporters constantly"), and how he was soon to be "on the masthead" as Smith's "advisory editor" for "over 200 articles, some more than once!" He saluted Smith for his "sound scholarship" ("even at the expense of timely publication"), ha-ha, noting that Smith's endeavours sometimes took ("significant time away from his paying business"), tut-tut. And how about that time Mason proved just how wrong Smith was about how many "mappy flags" there are? Funny how the great editor flubbed the title of Smith's most famous book. Funnier still how his amusing tales all preceded the birth of GFBBF. No amusing interactions after that, perhaps.

One of Smith's many eulogists saw fit to note that those who knew him personally did not often "remark his humility", yet for all his considerable ego he seems a saint in comparison to Ted Kaye. In [a 2015 radio programme](#) about the Confederate Flag and other toxic symbols, Kaye was asked, "Being a vexillologist makes you a flag expert, right?" Kaye's immediate reply was "That's correct." Smith got his PHD, founded a new field of scholarship, coined its name, and authored [the best flag book ever written](#). Kaye got his MBA, made a mint as a money manager, and authored a pamphlet. Smith had an astonishing passion for flags that for his entire life he applied assiduously in the service of objective political science, and his pride never outstripped his actual accomplishments. Kaye has a passion for Smith-level recognition that he applies tirelessly in the service of himself, and his pride is based on pedestrian achievements and lies. Good vexillologist, bad vexillologist.

Taking the above 'compare-and-contrast' exercise a little further, one might consider the Scottish flag scholar [Graham Bartram](#), who would easily take all of the top marks in the 'good' category. Practically the living antithesis of Ted Kaye, Bartram has authored actual works of flag scholarship, has designed more than half-a-dozen actual flags, has personally built and personally funded a "[World Flag Database](#)" of the flags of nations, sub-national regions and territories, heads-of-state, organizations, and many ensigns and military flags, has initiated and guided the publication of "[The Commission's Report on the Guiding Principles Of Flag Design](#)", a 2014 flag design guide that is superior in every way to *Good Flag, Bad Flag* (such that since 2016 the Wikipedia article 'Vexillography' has only offered guidelines from the *Principles*, and not a word from GFBBF), has served as Chief Vexillologist of the U.K. Flag Institute and as Secretary-General for Congresses of the International Federation of Vexillological Associations (as opposed to being a glorified editor and/or secretary at NAVA), and who has been such a light in the world's vexillological community that someone dedicated a Wikipedia page to him in 2006, keeping it updated through 2019 in the English Wikipedia, and through today in many other language versions. The probable reason that Bartram's page no longer appears in the English version is that he redirected it to the Wikipedia page for the U.K. Flag Institute out of humility, thinking himself unworthy of being considered in the company of the original giants of flag scholarship who appear on dedicated Wikipedia pages: Whitney Smith, William Crampton, and Alfred Znamierowski, all of whom are deceased. Kaye, on the other hand, would probably commit murder to see himself on a dedicated Wikipedia page. How it must irritate him to know that even Roman Mars has one, but that nobody has yet thought his pamphlet to have made *him* deserving of one. Authoring such an article himself, of course, would too plainly reveal the narcissism that is at his core. He has made certain that the NAVA website places *Good Flag, Bad Flag* at the very top of its collection of good flag design 'resources', with *The Guiding Principles* at the bottom, beneath perhaps half-a-dozen far less valuable listings, notwithstanding that NAVA used to refer to the *Principles* as [their 'official' flag design guidelines](#).

The web page where NAVA used to do so was always well-buried, and it has now been completely deleted, probably by Kaye, who has also ensured that the NAVA website provides at least four separate download links for GFBF, as well as roughly a dozen separate mentions of it. In Australia, the only download link that [Ausflag](#) offers for a flag design guide is one for GFBF, and likewise the only link to a guide on the [Flag Society of Australia website](#) is one for GFBF, along with purchase info for Burton's book, which he himself admits is just an '*amplification*' of GFBF. It is only on the website of the U.K. Flag Institute, as shepherded by Graham Bartram, and representing the world's second-largest vexillological organisation (actually the *largest* that continues to conscientiously honour the principles of William Crampton and of Whitney Smith), that one does *not* find a single link from which *Good Flag, Bad Flag* can be downloaded, nor does one find any mention of GFBF at all. Download links have only been provided for *The Guiding Principles*, indicating that Bartram, one of the few vexillologists who is *not* a vexation, recognises rubbish when he sees it, and that for he and for the UKFI, the mindless *promotion* of such rubbish is just not on the cards.

Bartram's name is conspicuously absent from the list of seventeen prominent vexillologists on the back cover of *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, all of whom may have had *opinions* about flag design, but only a few of whom actually *designed* one or more flags that have seen usage, somewhere in the world. One of the several that Bartram has designed is a flag for Antarctica, which comprises a white rendering of the continent against a light blue field. Although no flag of Antarctica is official, Bartram's is basically the de facto, having been used far more than any other, even to the point of becoming the '[emoji-of-choice](#)' that appears beside 'Antarctica' for such lists as country code top-level [Internet domain suffixes](#). In late 2002, when GFBF had only recently seen its first birthday, Kaye travelled with his wife and sons to the southern tip of South America, and on to Antarctica, bringing several specially-manufactured Antarctica flags in Bartram's design, to fly from ships and to 'raise' at a few icy stations on the continent, for a plethora of photo-ops. He did not bring any specially-made Antarctica flags in Whitney Smith's design, which pre-dated Bartram's by a decade. In the following year Kaye submitted [a 'scientific' paper](#) (surprise), describing the first appearances of Bartram's flag on the continent that it represents, courtesy of the magnanimity of Ted Kaye.

The author of this diatribe views Kaye's antics in Antarctica as an intentional butter-up of Bartram and as an intentional slight of Smith. She is of the opinion that the entire 'Kaye family adventure', like everything else that Kaye has done since the turn of the century, was meticulously planned and executed for the express purpose of promoting Ted Kaye, as well as his still-nascent pamphlet, which is of course mentioned in the final sentence of his 'What I Did On My Holiday' chronicle. She thinks that all of it worked just as Kaye intended it to work, or at least for a good long while.

Now, Kaye looks to his 'legacy'. As of October 2021, the following notification has been added to the bottom of [NAVA's main GFBF download page](#): "For Ted Kaye's recollections of compiling and updating *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, see [Vexillum 10 \(June 2020\), pp. 19–20](#)." Like the rest of the non-NAVA public, this author will have no access to that document until mid-2022, but she can make predictions: Kaye will say that it was not he, but 20 sages, who chiselled 'five commandments of flag design' into GFBF, the full tale being yet one more in his long line of self-serving humblebrags.

See vexations like Kaye as the puffed-up poseurs whom they they really are, glorified flag hobbyists who like anyone *may* have some useful advice to lend, but who are by no means vessels of flag design expertise, let alone the authoritative arbiters of what makes a flag design good or bad. There have always been critics of every art form, but whether they were praising or pillorying painting, sculpture, theatre, opera, literature, music, film, fashion, architecture, or any other area of art or of design, they have never presumed to tell the artists and designers what to do or how to do it. Persons who presume to dictate what 'beauty' is, in flags or in anything else, have ugly souls. Studying the history, symbolism, and uses of flags does not make one's personal opinions of how flags should be designed superior in any way to those of a butcher, a baker, or an undertaker. Vexillology is not some kind of alchemy that transmutes leaden opinions into golden principles, and the only award that Ted Kaye and others of his ilk deserve is the one depicted on the next page.



Choose your truths wisely:

<p>“GOOD” FLAG, “BAD” FLAG</p> <p>How to Design a Great Flag</p>  <p>USE 5 BASIC PRINCIPLES TO CREATE AN OUTSTANDING FLAG FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION, CITY, TRIBE, COMPANY, FAMILY, NEIGHBORHOOD, OR EVEN COUNTRY!</p> <p>COMPILED BY TED KAYE</p> <p>North American Vexillological Association The World's Largest Organization of Flag Enthusiasts and Scholars</p>	<p>GOOD FLAGS, “BAD”-TAGGED</p> <p>How to Malign Great Flags</p>  <p>USE 5 BASELESS CRITERIA TO BELITTLE ANY FLAGS NOT REPRESENTING YOUR ORGANISATION, CITY, TRIBE, COMPANY, FAMILY, NEIGHBOURHOOD, OR EVEN COUNTRY!</p> <p>A PILE OF IT BY TED KAYE</p> <p>North American Vexillologits Association The World's Largest Organisation of Pretentious Flag Hobbyists</p>
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Final note: This diatribe has not been an example of the '[tall poppy syndrome](#)', because for that to be the case, one needs to have a tall poppy to hand for the cutter's blade, and not just a tall weed.



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As of October 2021, the following notification was added to the bottom of NAVA's main GFBF download page: "For Ted Kaye's recollections of compiling and updating *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, see *Vexillum 10* (June 2020), pp. 19–20." Previously that document was not available to the general public, but the author of "When Vexillologists are Vexations" predicted that like everything else Kaye has said about his moronic pamphlet, it would be a self-serving humblebrag. Now that mid-2022 has been reached, the document is publicly-available, and readers can judge for themselves whether the prediction was correct.

In the spring of 2020, NAVA published an updated edition of Ted Kaye's compilation of guidelines for flag design, "Good" Flag, "Bad" Flag. A copy is being provided to each NAVA member, the title is being made freely available as an

electronic publication on the NAVA website, and print copies are available for sale through the NAVA Shop and on Amazon.com. We spoke recently with the compiler about the history of his publication and the reasons for its update.

"Good" Flag, "Bad" Flag, Updated Edition Available Now

How did *Good Flag, Bad Flag* come about in the first place?

When I became *Raven* editor in 1996, the volume under way documented the flags of American Indian tribes.¹ As I edited that seminal work by Don Healy, I found myself regretting that so many tribal flag designs fell short of their potential, most likely being modeled on poorly-designed U.S. state flags. As more and more tribes were then adopting flags—spurred by native sovereignty laws, casino construction, and the upcoming Lewis & Clark bicentennial commemoration (for which I was serving as executive director in Oregon)²—I began to wonder about the relationship between vexillologists and those who design and adopt flags.

Then in 1999 the concept of a general-interest flag-design guidebook arose during the 18th International Congress of Vexillology (NAVA 33), held in Victoria, B.C. A panel discussion exploring "Vexilligraphy—Guides for Flag Design" (featuring flag merchants Doreen Braverman, Jim Ferrigan, and Peter Orenski) deplored the sad current state of flag design, as evidenced by the poor quality of the flags proposed by their customers. As the panel wrapped up, I rose to assert that we flag experts had no business criticizing the public's vexillographic attempts until we successfully shared the basic principles of flag design. I then impulsively volunteered to draft such a guidebook, promising it for the next ICV, in York, England, in two years' time.

What guided your editorial decisions in creating *GFBF*?

I compiled the text by consulting the writings of about 20 vexillographic thinkers—in the U.S. and Canada and around the world. Many had explored flag design in great detail, advancing important ideas in articles, pamphlets, and booklets. They didn't agree on everything, of course. But finding that they seemed to agree on five basic principles, I made those the core of the guidebook. It appeared, however, that most writers attempted to squeeze too much into their guidance—resulting in over-long, in-the-weeds, touch-every-base materials. Their work failed to market good flag design with a catchy title and short-and-sweet concepts.

And—perhaps most importantly—most focused on what TO do, usually ignoring what NOT to do. Because the North American public had very poor examples to guide it (bad flag design predominates in the United States at the city and state level—often "seals-on-bedsheets"), I thought it important to explicitly show and reject poor designs. That led to the idea of providing examples of designs which followed each principle and designs which did not.

What inspired the title?

Those two concepts—needing a catchy title and presenting "good" and "bad" examples—led to *Good Flag, Bad Flag*. That construct was already familiar to readers in such phrases as "good cop, bad cop" and "good dog, bad dog" (coincidentally the name of a favorite lunchtime haunt of mine in Portland—a hot dog take-out restaurant which proudly posted the first draft of



the *GFBF* cover on its bulletin board, along with photos of customers' dogs).

Tell us about the publication history of *GFBF*.

I'm the compiler, not the author, of *GFBF*—the authors are really the 20 writers on vexilligraphy

whose work I condensed and organized into a snappy format with a single editorial voice. I consulted directly with many of them after compiling the first draft.

I first created *GFBF* as a primitive 16-page booklet laid out in Microsoft Word. The NAVA board, led by President Dave Martucci, accepted the text and soon after NAVA webmaster Dick Gideon published it electronically on nava.

org. After sharing it with NAVA members³ and receiving helpful feedback (especially from Jim Croft, as well as Lee Herold, Clay Moss, Dev Cannon, and Peter Orenski), I made updates and revisions. A draft distributed at ICV 19 (York) in July, 2001, met with wide enthusiasm from attendees—the first being Kin Spain, FIAV secretary general and former NAVA president. Mike Hale, of Elmer's Flag & Banner, then pitched it to

members of the National Independent Flag Dealers Association, and made occasional printouts for customers. (Despite my preference for anonymity, my family insisted I put my name on it.) It remained available only in electronic form for five years.

In 2006, *GFBF* appeared in printed form with professional layout by Melissa Scott, a designer I'd found through a local art school. I funded the design and printing costs and contributed an ample supply to NAVA (over 1,500 copies). Since then NAVA has given one to each new member and made it available on Amazon.com and the NAVA shop. *GFBF* has been translated into Spanish, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Slovenian—through the generous work of fellow vexillologists (Gustavo Tracchia, Sophie Rault, Dieter Linder, Flavio Marchetto, Tiago Berg, and Aleks Hribovšek). All are available for download on the NAVA website at <https://nava.org/nava-digital-library-flag-design-resources>.

The size was intentional: 16 pages seemed the outer limit for what a flag-store customer could process or a flag-selection committee could digest, but met the lower limit for a book to receive favorable United States Postal Service Media Mail postage rates!

How was *GFBF* received when it was first published?

The little booklet soon saw action with the Georgia state flag redesign effort in 2003—Ed Jackson, serving as staff to the senate committee developing an alternative to the flag adopted in 2001, circulated *GFBF* to successfully guide members of the General Assembly in their deliberations.⁴ The results of NAVA's 2004 American City Flag Survey presented a powerful validation of the principles in *GFBF*, which predicted the survey results with 89% accuracy.⁵



After its print publication, Annin & Co. (flagmakers since 1847) added *GFBF* to its catalog and several commercial members of NAVA began sharing it with their customers. NAVA members began using it in their own flag redesign efforts—especially at the city and state levels.

What has happened with *GFBF* in the years since it was published?

The booklet—and the principles it advances—appears to have shaped the discussion of vexillography within the vexillological world and in the broader public.

The *GFBF* page on the NAVA website consistently receives more hits than any other page (after the home page). NAVA members named it one of the top three “most important flag books” in the 2018 NAVA member survey—after Whitney Smith’s *Flags Through the Ages and Around the World* and Alfred Znamierowski’s *World Encyclopedia of Flags*.⁶ Participants in the r/vexillology subreddit and the Designing Flags Facebook group often cite *GFBF*.

Perry Dane delivered an insightful commentary on *GFBF* at the 2007 NAVA meeting in Hartford (winning the Driver Award for best paper). It presented a strong argument for considering flag designs in context—the “political, emotional, symbolic, and historical sensitivities that shape our reaction to flags”—saying “the austerity and dogmatism of [*GFBF*]’s approach should give considerable pause”, while calling it “probably the only systematic effort at developing any sort of coherent, systematic, prescriptive principles for flag design”.⁷

John Hartvigsen also cited *GFBF* extensively in his paper presented at the 2015 NAVA meeting in Ottawa. It compared several flag-design guides, concluding, “In addition to clean design, vexillographers should also consider history, heritage, symbolism, emotion, branding, and usage when proposing new flags.”⁸

Podcaster and radio show host Roman Mars featured *GFBF* and its principles in his widely-viewed 2015 TED Talk “Why City Flags May Be the Worst-Designed Thing You Never Noticed” (with 6 millions hits to date!), bringing vexillography to the public to an unprecedented extent and sparking a wave of municipal flag redesign that continues to grow.⁹

Others have since produced more expansive flag design materials. For example, the “Joint Commission” of NAVA and the Flag Institute produced a *Report on the Guiding Principles on Flag Design* in 2014.¹⁰ Tony Burton, editor of The Flag Society of Australia’s *Crux Australis*, published his 128-page *Vexillistics: An Illustrated and Practical Guide to Flag Design* in 2015.¹¹ French designer Martin Joubert published an 86-page “expansion” of *GFBF* in 2019, called *Modern Flag Design*.¹²

Most flag-design efforts in the U.S. now quote *GFBF*; it has accomplished its purpose of bringing vexillographic principles to the general public.

Why did the publication need to be updated?

A fundamental challenge to *GFBF* was that the term “bad flag” offended some who mistook a judgment about design with a valuation of the flag itself. While the title *Good Flag, Bad Flag* and the captions under the flag images used the shorthand of “good” and “bad” to mean “follows the principle in question” and “doesn’t follow the principle in question”, that shorthand raised some emotions when incorrectly perceived as denigrating a flag rather than just assessing its design on a single dimension.

Compounding that challenge, the public and the media often construed the basic principles articulated in *GFBF* as inviolable rules, castigating flags and designs that “broke” them, and leading to a perception of NAVA itself as a “judge” of flags.

With the print inventory of *GFBF* running low, I chose to address those issues and include other minor revisions before reprinting. I believed, however, that expanding beyond design into the larger factors cited by others would make the booklet too long and dilute its effectiveness. Its brevity and focus is its strength.

What’s different about the updated edition?

In place of “good” and “bad” as captions for examples, I substitute “yes” and “no”. Paraphrasing John Hartvigsen (with gratitude), the “Use Meaningful Symbolism” text now includes: “In choosing symbols, consider their history, cultural heritage, emotional value, branding, and usage—assure they resonate with the people or institutions represented.” The flags of California and South Africa provide additional examples of exceptions. A disclaimer clarifies that the publication reflects my opinion, not NAVA’s. A note on the back (reflecting the insightful thoughts of *Raven* editor Scott Mainwaring) addresses the place of *GFBF* in the broader scope of flag design.

Other revisions include updates (the years Libya used a solid green flag), corrections (fixing my confusion of salamander/dragon, seal/shield, crescent moon/crescent), and minor wording changes. The quote from the flag committee of the Confederate States of America is now attributed to its chairman, William Porcher Miles.¹³ At the suggestion of Steve Knowlton, *Vexillum* editor and Publications Committee chair, quotation marks in the title around “Good” and “Bad” temper the stark judgment some see in the booklet. And in the “Test Yourself” section I couldn’t resist adding the new flag of Pocatello, Idaho—to join the old flag (which came in last place in NAVA’s 2004 American City Flag Survey).

Did you have assistance preparing the update?

Correspondence with readers since 2001 provided helpful input, as did the thoughtful commentary of other writers, feedback solicited on the Designing Flags Facebook group page, and advice from the current *Raven* editor and members of the NAVA board—especially President Peter Ansoff. The original layout designer, now Melissa Meiner, updated her original work for the new version. I again financed it and have contributed another 1,500 copies to NAVA—enough for several more years.

What are your hopes for the revised “Good” Flag, “Bad” Flag?

I hope that *GFBF* will continue to promote NAVA and its broad approach to flag studies. I hope the updates temper the concerns some have expressed about it. I hope it will earn more money to support NAVA’s mission and find a place in NAVA members’ flag book libraries. Most importantly, I hope this little booklet will continue to guide any who design flags, reassure those who make decisions about their adoption, and inspire vexillographers worldwide.

¹ Donald T. Healy, *Flags of the Natives Peoples of the United States*, special issue, *Raven* 3/4 (1997).

² See Ted Kaye, “Tribal Flags Fly at Lewis & Clark Events”, *NAVA News* 38, no. 4 (September–December 2005): 6–9; and Edward B. Kaye, “American Indian Flags and the Lewis & Clark Bicentennial”, in *Colours of History: Flags and Banners in the World: Proceedings of the XXII. International Vexillological Congress, FlagBerlin 2007*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Board of the German Vexillological Society, 2009): 77–91.

³ Ted Kaye, “New Mexico Tops State/Provincial Flags Survey”, *NAVA News* 34, no. 2 (April–June 2001): 4.

⁴ Ed Jackson, “The Long Search for a State Flag”, *The Flag Bulletin* 212 (July–August 2003): 135.

⁵ Edward B. Kaye, “The American City Flag Survey of 2004”, *Raven* 12 (2005): 41.

⁶ “NAVA Members Choose Their ‘Most Important Flag Books’”, *Vexillum* no. 5 (March 2019): 17.

⁷ Perry Dane, “Flags in Context: A Discussion of Design, Genre, and Aesthetics”, *Raven* 15 (2008): 75–76.

⁸ John Hartvigsen, “Flag Design ‘Rules’: An Idea with Many Aspects”, *Vexillum* no. 4 (December 2018): 16.

⁹ Roman Mars, “Why City Flags May Be the Worst-Designed Thing You’ve Never Noticed”, https://www.ted.com/talks/roman_mars_why_city_flags_may_be_the_worst_designed_thing_you_ve_never_noticed.

¹⁰ Joint Commission on Vexillographic Principles of North American Vexillological Association and The Flag Institute, “The Commission’s Report on the Guiding Principles on Flag Design” (Boston: North American Vexillological Association, 2014), <http://nava.org/navanews/Commission-Report-Final-US.pdf>.

¹¹ Tony Burton, *Vexillistics: An Illustrated and Practical Guide to Flag Design* (Milsos Point, N.S.W.: Flags Australia, 2015).

¹² Martin Joubert, *Modern Flag Design: An Expansion of Good Flag, Bad Flag: How to Design a Great Flag* (Morrisville, N.C.: Lulu.com, 2015), <https://flagdesignbook.com>.

¹³ Devereaux D. Cannon, Jr., “The Genesis of the ‘Stars and Bars’”, *Raven* 12 (2005): 4.