

The Salt Lake Tribune

UTAH FLAG DESIGN CONTEST



A Report from the

North American Vexillological Association

March 2002

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SUMMARY

The NAVA committee recommends that *The Salt Lake Tribune* present to its readers the following ten flag designs as potential successors to the current 99-year-old Utah state flag. Each design would rank among the best U.S. state flags.



CURRENT FLAG

The current Utah state flag, first made in 1903, bears the state seal on blue. Sewing experts in the state's chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution created it and in 1911 the design was officially adopted as the state's flag. The Daughters of Utah Pioneers promoted its early use.



BACKGROUND

In 2001, the North American Vexillological Association (NAVA) conducted an Internet-based survey rating the designs of 72 U.S. and Canadian state, provincial, and territorial flags. On a scale of 0 to 10, New Mexico's ranked the highest with a score of 8.6, Georgia's ranked the lowest with 2.4, and Utah's ranked 58th out of 72, with a score of 3.5.

Utah's flag, dating from 1903, follows the standard "seal on blue background" pattern common to half U.S. state flags. While it has great historical significance and reflects the design standards of its era, it is overly detailed and virtually indistinguishable from other states' flags at any distance.

With 450 members in the U.S., Canada, and abroad, NAVA brings together people interested in the study of flags (vexillology), publishes a newsletter and a scholarly journal, hosts a website (www.nava.org), and holds annual meetings. NAVA's guide to flag design, *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, is available on its website.

CONTEST

The January 6, 2002 issue of *The Salt Lake Tribune* (SLT) announced a "New Flag Contest", asking readers to submit "new and . . . more attractive" designs. The article listed NAVA's five basic flag design principles: simplicity, meaningful symbolism, few colors, no lettering/seals, and distinctiveness. By the February 1 deadline the SLT had received over 1,000 entries, with two-thirds coming from schoolchildren.

The most common symbols included the beehive, the arch, mountains, seagulls, Utah's map, stars, snowflakes, the sego lily, rainbow trout, carts and wheels, eagles, the dates 1847 and 1896, the state's name, bees, elk, alpine sports, Mormon symbols, and Olympic rings. All of these have compelling symbolic meaning for the "Beehive State", with its distinctive shape, natural wonders, and strong sense of history.

Among the more unusual symbols were a salt shaker, paw prints, drag strips, military aircraft, atomic bees, a running-shoe sole, palm trees, hearts, a movie projector, and several representations of Jell-O.

The fields of the proposed designs ranged from a solid background to horizontally, vertically, and diagonally divided fields of two, three, or more stripes. Blue was the most common background color, with yellow, green, red, and white popular as well.

Some of the most successful designs merely simplified the existing Utah state flag to its basic components: the solid field, the gold beehive, and perhaps a ring around it.

JUDGING

At the request of the SLT, NAVA assembled a panel of judges representing a broad spectrum of flag design expertise:

- John Purcell, retired professor of Spanish education, Cincinnati OH, chair of NAVA's Flag Design Committee.
- Ted Kaye, financial executive, Portland OR, author of *Good Flag, Bad Flag*.
- Peter Orenski, lapel-flag manufacturer, New Milford CT, organizer of New Milford's flag design contest.
- Zach Harden, high-school junior, Havelock NC, flag dealer.
- Marc Stratton, retired art professor, Hawley MN, designer of the proposed new Minnesota flag.

The advance judge reviewed every one of the 1,000+ entries using the five basic flag design principles and selected 35 designs for final judging. They ranged from professionally prepared art to 4th-graders' crayon work; 10 of the 35 finalist designs were from schoolchildren. The graphics judge rendered each design in a JPEG image, creating graphically-enhanced and consistent artwork, allowing the designs to stand on their own merits and creating a "level playing field".

The identities of the designers were recorded separately and each finalist design assigned a number from 1 to 35. Four designs were rendered in two versions, shifting a central symbol toward the hoist as a second design (allowing for better display while flying and allowing for wear on the fly end of the flag).

Judges awarded each design a score on five criteria, with the results converted to a 0-10 scale for comparability to state flag scores from the 2001 NAVA survey. In the tradition of the Olympics, the highest and lowest score for each design were discarded, with the central three scores determining the overall score. Each judge also chose and rank-ordered his "top ten" designs.

CRITERIA

The judges used these criteria to score the flags, following the five basic flag design principles from *Good Flag, Bad Flag* (but substituting “attractiveness” for the fourth principle [“no lettering or seals”] since none of the finalists had lettering or seals):

- 1) Simplicity: Scalability—from large flag down to lapel pin; Ease of drawing from memory; Appearance when limp, flapping, or at a distance; Reversibility—doesn’t look “funny” on the reverse (but need not be symmetrical).
- 2) Symbolism: Unique to Utah—the symbols “say” UTAH to the viewer; Recognizable treatment—the symbolism can be easily identified; Significant, not a minor symbol (e.g. the Utah Jazz is unique but minor); Colors, if carrying meaning, count here in symbolism.
- 3) Color: Colors come from the standard color set, number 2 to 3; Rule of Tincture is honored: lights don’t border lights, darks don’t border darks; Design “works” in black & white version.
- 4) Attractiveness: Overall aesthetics—attractiveness to viewer; Balance; Timelessness—the design is not “trendy” (this is a conservative state).
- 5) Distinctiveness: Not easily confused with other existing flags, especially other US state flags; If similar to another flag, that should be purposeful.

RESULTS: TOP TEN

The top ten flags show the great diversity of the state of Utah and the talent its citizens brought to proposals for a new design. The beehive, the mountains, the arch, the map, and the seagull all can form striking designs. The scores are not recommended for publication to SLT readers (to prevent any bias toward or against “expert” opinion), rather they are presented here to show that each design’s score would rank it among the best U.S. state flags. In NAVA’s 2001 survey only seven U.S. state flags achieved a score over 7.0 points.

Commentary on each:



#4. The Arch, backed by desert and sky, recalls the state’s natural wonders and the current license plate. Score = 8.3



#11. A grand updating of the current state flag, presenting its basic theme, the Beehive, on a blue field bordered on gold. Score = 9.1



#7b. A striking simplification of the current state flag, presenting its basic theme, the Beehive, in a ring and using the same colors, blue and gold. Score = 9.5



#12. The Map of Utah, a very recognizable shape, on a distinctive field of red. Score = 7.7



#8. An abstract design, perhaps representing clasped hands, shows the vital sense of community for which Utah is known. Score = 7.2



#13. A clever combination of sky, mountain, arch, and beehive, in colors recalling the flag of neighboring Colorado. Score = 8.5



#23. The abstract desert sun and sandstone monument, in colors recalling the flag of neighboring New Mexico. Submitted as a square design, its monument should shift right. Score = 8.9



#28. The Seagull, the state's bird, soars between two strong background colors. Score = 8.7



#25. Utah's mountain peaks, presented abstractly in a design which inverted could show the state's symbolic seagulls. Score = 9.0



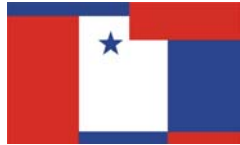
#31. Sand, salt, water, mountains, sky represent natural Utah in a strong horizontal rendition. Score = 7.9

RESULTS: NEXT TEN

If for any reason the SLT wishes to substitute designs into the ten it presents to readers, these ten followed the top designs. These represent designs selected by judges highest in their “top ten” choices after their “top two”.



#1 Score = 9.1



#5 Score = 7.9



#14 Score = 8.6



#15 Score = 8.3



#17 Score = 7.6



#19b Score = 9.1



#20 Score = 6.3



#32b Score = 9.7



#33 Score = 8.2



#35 Score = 8.5

DESIGNERS

The designers of the 35 finalists (and the top ten entries) range from fourth-graders to professional graphic designers. They hail from across the state, from Ogden to St. George. None are members of NAVA. Their names and addresses have been recorded and supplied to the SLT separately from this report.

The original versions of the 35 finalist designs have been identified as finalists by a label on the back, and have been compiled and retained separately from the remaining entries. All finalist designs are available to the SLT in JPEG format.

CONCLUSION

NAVA is pleased to have helped the SLT promote the design, selection, and adoption of a new flag for the state of Utah. However, NAVA has neither designed nor selected a new flag: that role belongs to the citizens of Utah. A vote by Utahns on a few final designs may well be the best way to determine the final flag.

NAVA commends and encourages the SLT to work with the Utah state legislature to pursue a change in the official flag design by 2003, the centenary of the original flag. It cautions against allowing legislative additions or deletions to any proposals, which can often detract from the design and run counter to the wishes of the citizens (some other states that have recently embarked upon flag redesign have encountered last-minute and unfortunate changes). The best course will be to poll readers on the flag, and then present the winning design “as is” to the legislature for adoption.

The SLT can be proud of its readers’ commitment to state history, enthusiasm for Utah’s symbols, and strong sense of good flag design. NAVA wishes Utah luck on its new flag.

JUDGING CONTACTS

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APPENDIX

The following designs constitute those considered by the judges but falling below the top twenty:

