

RESEARCH IN PRACTICE

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The definition of the word 'passion,' is 'strong and barely controllable emotion.' (Google Dictionary (Oxford Languages), 2022). One which perfectly describes the feeling of highly energetic patriotism. True pride in representing one's belief, culture or identity, has become more prominent in recent years with multiple shockwaves being sent through social media and displayed on the streets to advertise people embracing who they are, particularly the LGBTQ+ community. In addition to people celebrating their identity, a big part of identity is your nationality. Of course, the United States of America is particularly famous for this as it is very common to find patriotism propaganda on most streets there. Most commonly, the use of the USA flag. It is said that 85% of Americans consider themselves to be very patriotic, and over 63% of Americans own an American flag (Statista, 2022).



(USA Flag, 1960)

This is a common theme around a lot of public bars and most companies that are American founded will make it known that this is the case. In my opinion, the USA flag is so iconic, not only because it has been around since the 1700s when Betsy Ross first introduced the use of the stars to represent the states (PBS, 2022). This means it is a flag that includes all of its people, as every state has a star for them. Although

patriotism is thoroughly celebrated on a day-to-day basis in the United States, it is celebrated annually on the 4th of July, in what is known as Independence Day. This day represents celebrates the anniversary of their status as becoming a country, independence as it were. This is also regarded as a holiday to allow people to celebrate it. This is a big part of their identity, to which is also a part of their culture. This whole culture around American patriotism is a whole ideology, called Americanism. Americanism is built on the pride and passion that the military once fought for, as they fought representing the people, their families, their culture and rights, all represented in one flag. Loved people had died in battle for this flag, fighting for the country and its future. Especially in the Revolutionary war, which the United States won and resulted in their independence by signing the declaration of independence from the kingdom of Great Britain in 1776, which explains a lot as regards to why Americans celebrate the 4th of July so passionately.

The flag is so much more than the US states and stripes. Between 1777 and 1960 Congress passed several acts that changed the shape, design and arrangement of the flag and allowed stars and stripes to be added to reflect the admission of each new state. Today the flag consists of 13 horizontal stripes, seven red alternating with six white. The stripes represent the original 13 Colonies/states and the stars represent the 50 states of the Union. The colours of the flag are symbolic as well; red symbolizes hardiness and valour, white symbolizes purity and innocence, and blue represents vigilance, perseverance and justice (PBS, 2022). What I find most interesting is that the current flag wasn't professionally designed, it was designed from the heart by a proud American boy scout; an important part of American culture that isn't particular to other countries. who was in high school at the time. The current flag was designed by Ohio high school student Robert G. Heft. His

design beat thousands of others to be adopted as the official US flag (Business Insider, 2019). Every country has its own culture and Americanism is one that I particularly find interesting. It is based off core values that the vast majority of Americans stand by and most importantly are proud to do so.

Originally, they may have been simply decorative streamers, or perhaps ceremonial images. They were superior to many other emblems: cheap and simple to make; easy to carry and display; and attracting attention with their lifelike movement in the wind. Flags came to symbolise variously leaders, communities, gods, merchant and craft guilds, ships, and towns. A flag often gained the same respect as was accorded to the person or thing which it represented. In battle, the loss of a flag was a severe blow. The capture of the opponents' flag might be the turning point in a battle. Flags often bore religious symbols and were used in religious as well as state occasions. The modern national flag arose in the seventeenth century, with the creation of the first modern states. Before that most countries had only had the flag of the rulers. Some modern national flags are even now used only by the government and military, with a different flag (a civil flag) used by the people. An original, well designed flag will mark out a country that has confidence in itself, and is comfortable with its place in the world, its history and its future (School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2022).

Referring to the LGBT community, flags in general are arguably the most famous pieces of iconography in the world, the most common flag seen in the LGBT community is the LGBT Pride flag seen below.



(Baker, 1978)

Designed by one gay rights activist Gilbert Baker in 1978, the use of the rainbow colours is quite effective. As the message it gives is that there is a wide spectrum in terms of sexuality as there is with colour, and it is perfectly acceptable to be anywhere on it. But what the flag truly represents, is everyone in the LGBT community no matter who they identify as, as the colours of the rainbow go from one end of the colour spectrum, to the other, meaning that anyone identifying as LGBT is a part of the community and represents them too. More to what this flag has represented, is pride, hence the term 'gay pride,' and their passion for being who they truly are. This all depicted through one piece of iconography, the flag. The display of the flag in public and it being shared on posters, on social media, even companies on social media during pride month altering their logos slightly for it, has gained a lot of support from people and from this, society has learned to become a lot more

accepting than they were many years ago. “The gay rights movement in the United States has seen huge progress in the last century, and especially the last two decades. Laws prohibiting homosexual activity have been struck down; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals can now serve openly in the military. And same-sex couples can now legally get married and adopt children in all 50 states. But it has been a long and bumpy road for gay rights proponents, who are still advocating for employment, housing and transgender rights,” (History.com, 2021). This was all largely influenced by the accepting of the rainbow symbol and flag use today.

Not only do flags represent the people, they also portray who they are as a country to the rest of the world. It's why they are posted on most international borders, to get the migrants to see the country's identity straight off the bat. Much like a profile picture on social media, or a profile in general. The design of a country's flag itself is the obviously critical factor to this, you can really depict what a country's values are based on what their flag is like as this is what represents them. For example, if we take Libya. They changed their flag from an all-green canvas, to a much different design as seen below.



(ColourfulSmoke (via Wikimedia Commons), 2021)

As you can see, they have had quite a few changes, and this is interesting because it shows how important a representation of your country's history and future. They double backed on many decisions but in the end, they decided to stick with the original flag that they had used in 1951 for a multitude of reasons, this was the first flag they had adopted, so this would appear when they first started becoming a country which is obviously an iconic time in a country's existence. The flag now obviously stands for its original values when it first formed, which again makes the same impression. The flag that they had adopted for the most amount of time however was the plain green one as you see above. The main thing this flag tried to represent was Islam as green is often associated with Islamic culture, but it was simply too plain to represent a whole country with a lot of history with war and conflict. Henceforth the original flag was newly adopted again, again representing

Islam with the iconography in the centre, whilst also using the Islamic green colour within it too, keeping that feature from the last flag, as although it was outdated and inefficient as a flag it was still the flag for over 30 years, so it is a big part of the country's history. Another country to use green as a dominant colour for the purpose of representing religion would be Saudi Arabia, as their flag is believed to be a similar shade of green whilst having Arabic text in the centre with a katana like weapon. Still simplistic but more detailed than the previous flags, it is a great piece of iconic design to be able to be used by the people of Libya when being patriotic, due to its originality and the fact it is quite distinguishable even from afar. Because, they are one of the only countries to use black as a dominant colour for their flag. In fact, a referendum in New Zealand was started in 2014 to make black a dominant colour in the proposed new flag design that the people of New Zealand would have to vote for is shown below.



(Lockwood, 2015)

Although the flag represents everything about New Zealander culture, from the iconic silver fern used in the all-blacks national rugby team logo, to the stars you can see from the southern hemisphere, it is perfect for a flag. But the referendum was initiated and released, and the original flag with the union jack on it, was chosen with 57% of the vote going towards keeping it. This could be because the people of New Zealand feared change, and because their flag was a big part of their history and entailed their roots of being a part of the Kingdom of Great Britain.

Not only this, but the flag of a country would have been around since the start. This means it's a staple of not only the identity of a country but the history of the country itself, it's a lot of the time how history was helped linked to countries because of the flags that were used. Every important decision and event in the country's history was signified and represented by their flag and flying their flag with pride and unity. All the above reasons show that a good flag and a reaction to a flag can trigger patriotism in a person, an emotion that is more typically a good thing, semiotics within a flag bear a lot of power in the audience's subconscious. An example of this is the current Japanese flag, designed by one Hinomaru Yosegaki and was adopted in 1870. The circle represents friendliness and welcoming-like people. To which is a common thought about Japanese people due to their culture and customs. Also, "Circles have no beginning or end, they represent life and the lifecycle. The circle along with the oval is readily found in nature with the sun, moon and earth, not to mention fruit and flowers," (White River Design, 2019) to which are all a part of the Japanese culture, as well as Japan having one of the highest life expectancies on earth.

Each flag is designed in the same styles, but they are all completely distinguishable and no country's identities are the same. It is all uniform, but everyone has their own.

An example of the power a simple flag can have is the plain white flag. It is evident that in wars, flags were used to open communications with the enemy.

“From time immemorial a white flag has been used as a signal by an armed force which wishes to open communications with the enemy. This is the only meaning which the flag possesses in international law. The hoisting of a white flag, therefore, means in itself nothing else than one party is asked whether it will receive a communication from the other. It may indicate merely that the party which hoists it wishes to make an arrangement for the suspension of arms for some purpose; but it may also mean that the party wishes to negotiate for surrender. Everything depends on the circumstances and conditions of the particular case. For instance, in practice, the white flag has come to indicate surrender if hoisted by individual soldiers or a small party in the course of an action. Great vigilance is always necessary, for the question in every case is whether the hoisting of the white flag was authorised by the commander,” (The War Office, 1958).

It was such an act that brought upon the famed Christmas Truce in the first world war.

There are times where flags that represent different cultures and groups can have control over the person's emotions and can make the person gain even so much as fear in themselves. A good example of this is the series of ISIS terrorist attacks, where you would have seen their flag over social medias and in sites of certain terrorist attacks. When people see this black and white serious flag, they are fearful and expect something unpleasant and uncomfortable to be said or shown after seeing it. This led to an awful amount of racial prejudice, as the flag included Arabic writing and the terrorist themselves were of Islam. In recent years, the frequency of jihadi terrorist attacks around the world has risen. Various commentators argue that this

rise – alongside the resulting media coverage, successive waves of migration and drops in real living standards – has contributed to increased Islamophobia, general anti-Muslim sentiments, and a surge in populist politics in the west. Our research shows that in the UK, minority Muslim communities now face surges in hate crime that are especially evident after terrorist attacks far from where they live (London School of Economics and Political Science, 2019).

To reflect, such iconography and symbols such as flag can bring an awful lot of pride to oneself and make them feel a part of something, a community, making them feel like they belong, and they should be there and deserve to be. But they can also have negative impacts too as spoken about, and it is also evident a well-designed flag can have a good impact on the world around us. It is important to have such a flag or symbol to reach out the audience and communicate the values of a group or culture, the same as a logo would for a company, to give people an idea of your values and what is important to you. Except a logo changes overtime to adapt to trends, whereas a flag is a staple in history for the holder and represents all its history as it has been constant, as does a historic Coat of Arms. Flags are timeless, and therefore I believe they are the most important pieces of symbolism and iconography to the world today. Why is why my proposed question for my dissertation will be,

“Why are flags important?”