Designing for Community: Fixing a Flag

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Introduction

I approached this research project intending to make a real change—even if it was small-scale. I zoomed in, identifying my city's municipal flag as an area for improvement.

Several years ago, I became curious about my city, Mt. Juliet, and its official flag. As I paid more attention, I found it rare to see the flag flying in the community. I wanted to know if a more sophisticated design with rich symbolism could improve civic engagement and pride. This year, during a class discussion, I asked, "Who thinks they could make a rough drawing of our city flag from memory?" Only one student raised their hand—and her dad is the mayor. Why are some flags ubiquitous symbols of pride and nationalism while others are unrecognizable to the citizens they represent? Mt. Juliet's city council adopted the current flag in 1990, but besides a note in the meeting's minutes, there is no official documentation or justification for the design and its elements.[1] I continued my search but found no local literature about the flag or its development. Mt. Juliet deserves a unique, unifying device, and when widely used, flags can be constructive symbols of pride and community.

My interests in design and history, combined with my 18 years of local experience (living, working, and attending school in the city), provide me with a unique perspective to tackle this topic. I used inspiration from existing flags and local history, culture, and geography to create a thoughtful, new flag. As I developed my redesign, I was guided by an underlying question: Using other flags as inspiration, how can I use my understanding of symbolism and design principles to create a sophisticated design for Mt. Juliet?

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[1] Mt. Juliet Board of Commissioners, "Agenda", 1990

Literature Review

Historical Background

Flags—or early versions of them—have been flown by humans for thousands of years.[2] According to DK Publishing's *Complete Flags of the World*, primitive flags were used first in ancient China before spreading throughout the Middle East, Egypt, and Greece.[3] Since the very beginning, flag-like objects were used to identify officials and groups.[4] The vexilloid was a staff usually made of wood painted and adorned with feathers, horns, or animal skins.[5] In China, the invention of silk fabrics made it possible to create strong, lightweight banners, according to *The World Encyclopedia of Flags* by Polish vexillologist Alfred Znamierowski.[6] An esteemed heraldist, illustrator, and author, Znamierowski designed hundreds of flags, seals, banners, and coats of arms during his career. Romans copied these proto-flags, using the mounted banner in military endeavors.[7] As European countries took to the sea, flags helped identify warships and trading vessels. Before the invention of radios, flags were the best way to communicate across the water.[8] In the Middle Ages, flags developed alongside a growingly complex heraldic structure.[9] "This visual system eventually took on a broader social role, as it indicated the class, rank, land, and hereditary titles held by nobility," according to a piece by Ben Nadler in *The Atlantic*.[10]

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[2] *Complete Flags of the World*, 10
[3] Ibid.
[4] Znamierowski, *The World Encyclopedia of Flags*, 9
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid., 8
[7] Ibid., 9
[8] *Complete Flags of the World*, 11
[9] Nadler, "Where Do Flags Come"
[10] Ibid.

The flags we are familiar with are a product of the Age of Revolution.[11] Znamierowski writes, "The design of these newly created flags reflected the idea that, with the abolition of monarchy, the heraldic system of identification was also rejected."[12] He continues, demonstrating how post-revolution flags abandoned the complex heraldic systems in favor of symbolic colors and designs representing social and political ideas.[13] Nadler makes an essential distinction, adding that these new flags were simple, streamlined representations of the entire citizenry instead of symbols of the ruling family.[14]

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, flags took on a new role. "As a nationalist technology, flags are incredibly effective," continues Nadler in *The Atlantic*.[15] Groups started using flags to identify themselves in political demonstrations, sporting events, and other gatherings.[16] In the United States, cities did not start adopting flags until the late 1800s.[17] "Many citizens felt that the only flag needed was the national flag, and to show allegiance to any other was unpatriotic," writes John Purcell, a vexillologist and author in *American City Flags: 150 Flags From Akron to Yonkers*.[18] He continues, noting that many states did not adopt flags until the twentieth century.[19]

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[11] Znamierowski, *The World Encyclopedia of Flags*, 18
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 19
[14] Nadler, "Where Do Flags Come From"
[15] Ibid.
[16] *Complete Flags of the World*, 12-13
[17] Purcell, *American City Flags*, x
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

Current Discussion

We are amidst a flag design renaissance. Around the world, vexillological societies have existed for decades. Organizations like the North American Vexillological Association (NAVA), for example, are "dedicated to vexillology, the study of flags and their cultural, historical, political, and social significance," according to the international non-profit's website.[20] Aided by the internet, however, scholars and enthusiasts have engaged casual audiences in the greater vexillological discussion.

In 2006, Ted Kaye compiled the frequently-referenced booklet *Good Flag, Bad Flag*. From 1996 until 2013, Kaye was the editor of *Raven: A Journal of Vexillology*, the peer-reviewed academic journal issued by NAVA. Published by NAVA in print and digitally, the pamphlet acts as a "How To" guide to flag design. He introduces the booklet:

> "A flag's purpose is to represent a place, organization, or person, generally on a rectangular piece of cloth, to be seen at a distance, often moving, and reproduced in quantity and in many sizes. The five principles of good flag design will lead to a successful flag that accomplishes that purpose."[21]

Kaye says an effective flag should be simple, use meaningful symbolism, contain only a few basic colors, have no lettering or seals, and be distinctive.[22] Znamierowski agrees, writing in his book, "As a medium of communication, a flag must be easily recognizable."[23] He continues,

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[20] "About NAVA", n.d.
[21] Kaye, *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, 2
[22] Ibid, 3
[23] Znamierowski, *The World Encyclopedia of Flags*, 29

echoing Kaye's emphasis on simplicity.[24] *Good Flag, Bad Flag* references several examples of "good" flags, including those of Amsterdam, Ukraine, and Alaska.[25]

From left to right: The flag of Amsterdam, Ukraine, and Alaska.

The study of flags received another popularity boost in 2015 when radio host and author Roman Mars presented a TED Talk titled "Why city flags may be the worst-designed thing you've never noticed." The lecture, which has nearly seven million views on the organization's website and almost five million views on YouTube, builds upon Ted Kaye's guide. During the TED Talk, Mars imparts his love for the ubiquitous flag of Chicago, explaining, "It's adaptable and remixable. The six-pointed stars, in particular, show up in all kinds of places."[26] Stickers, cups, badges, and other everyday items in the city feature the design, according to his presentation.[27] Mars offers a quote from Kaye: "[There is a] positive feedback loop between great symbolism and civic pride."[28] A successful flag design, Mars argues, extends beyond the flagpole.

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24 Znamierowski, *The World Encyclopedia of Flags*, 29
25 Kaye, *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, 5, 7, 8
26 Mars, "Why City Flags May"
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.

 "The marriage of good design and civic pride is something that we need in all places.

The best part about municipal flags is that we own them. They are an open-source,

publicly owned design language of the community… A great city flag is something that

represents a city to its people and its people to the world at large. And when that flag is a

beautiful thing, that connection is a beautiful thing."[29]

Mars's Ted Talk inspired a new group of designers and concerned citizens. In 2017, Ted

Kaye presented "American City Flag Redesign: a Welcome Change" at the 27th International

Congress of Vexillology. Subsequently published online, Kaye analyzes over 70 city flags that

were in the process of being redesigned as a result of Mars's TED Talk. He writes, "Watching,

advising, and interacting with [flag redesign] efforts can provide vexillologists with an active

laboratory of flag design and adoption."[30] Though most of the redesigns Kaye analyzed have yet

to be adopted, they generally follow the principles of his booklet, *Good Flag, Bad Flag*.

Most of the more than 70 redesigns replace old designs featuring municipal seals on solid

backgrounds. Though not investigated in Kaye's report, Columbia, South Carolina, is a recent

example. In 2020, the capital city officially adopted its new flag, according to an article in

NAVA's quarterly *Vexillum*.[31] The author humorously refers to the old flag, adopted in 1912, as a

"seal-on-a-bedsheet."[32] The new design, which is rich in unique symbolism, is simple and

distinguishable—characteristics that NAVA and Znamierowski believe make an effective flag.[33]

All the resources I explored agreed on a general set of vexillological design conventions.

They also noted patterns of historical, cultural, and religious symbolism in modern flags. Using

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[29] Mars, "Why City Flags May"
[30] Kaye, *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, 2
[31] North American Vexillological Association, "New Flag: Columbia, S.C.," 4-5
[32] Ibid.
[33] Kaye, *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, 4, 6, 12

my new understanding of flags and their history, I am prepared to tackle a redesign of my city's

municipal flag.

Method

Addressing Mt. Juliet's Current Flag

Before developing my design, I needed to prove that Mt. Juliet's flag required a change in

the first place. I needed to ensure that I had a complete understanding of the city's current flag

and its creation. As a basis for my project, I retrieved and examined any city ordinances or

documents about the flag and communicated with the city recorder.

Next, I have proven that the current flag meets my definition of ineffective. For my

purposes, I define an effective flag as one used and recognized by the individuals that belong to

the group or body it represents. Further, an effective flag must be used in non-governmental

applications; I do not consider it effective if it only flies at city buildings. I use flags like those of

Chicago, Washington D.C., Tennessee, and even the United States as a benchmark for

effectiveness. As demonstrated in the images below, these popular designs are flown frequently

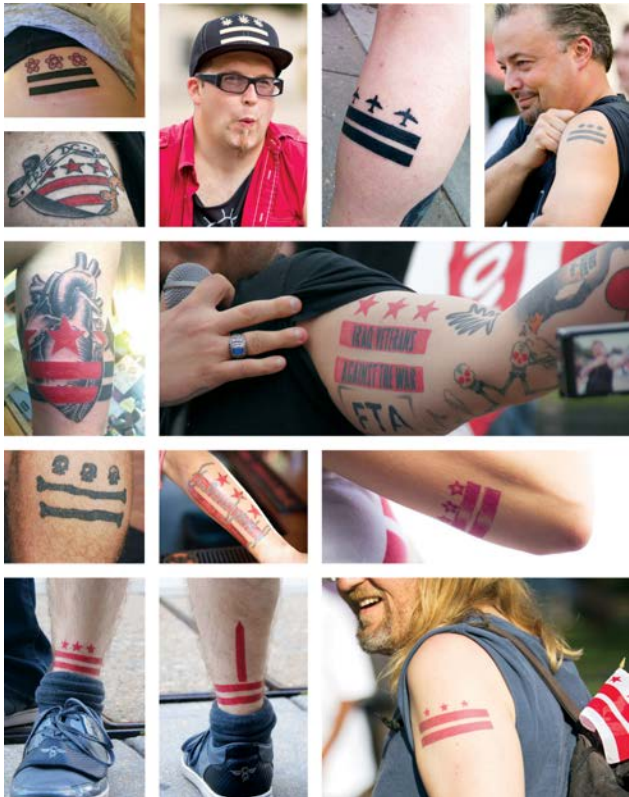and adapted into merchandise, logos, and even tattoos.

Right: Chicago's flag appears on merchandise in a gift shop. The flag can be seen flying on buildings throughout the city.[34]

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[34] Rumore, "The Chicago Flag Design"

Left: "Denizens of the nation's capital are known for sporting flag-themed tattoos," according to Vexillum.[35]

[35] North American Vexillological Association, "D.C. Flag Tattoos," 6, 7

Left: Tennessee's flag is remixed and adapted into logos for businesses, sports teams, and political campaigns.[36]

To prove that Mt. Juliet's current flag is ineffective (scarcely used and generally unknown to local citizens), I have documented every instance of the city flag I saw over two weeks. My observation was a passive search—during the two-week period, I kept track of each time I saw

[36] Knowlton, "Evocation and Figurative Thought," 24-25

the flag by taking a picture with my phone. Mt. Juliet is a medium-sized city, so I was able to experience most areas of the municipality during my observation period. During this test, I paid extra attention to locations like city hall, the library, the police station, and local parks. Executing a more passive search allowed me to closely mimic the interactions a citizen would have with the flag on a typical day.

Developing a New Flag

I had two main concerns: the flag's design and its symbolism. (Essentially, its form and function.) First, my flag should follow the graphic design guidelines laid out by Ted Kaye and other vexillologists; based on my research and personal observation, effective flags follow most—if not all—of these basic rules. Second, my design should be unique and meaningful to Mt. Juliet. An effective flag is more than just visually attractive—I must be intentional and thorough as I identify the features of the city's history, culture, and geography that I want to incorporate into the design. According to Encylopedia Brittanica, "The colors and designs of national flags usually are not arbitrarily selected but rather stem from the history, culture, or religion of the particular country."[37] This strategy is not unique to national flags, as my research has demonstrated that the flags of subnational governments and organizations generally take the same approach. Based on my personal observation, city, state, and national flags often have graphic elements that signify formative historical events, distinctive cultural attributes, or remarkable geographic characteristics.

To create a design that follows vexillological guidelines, I let examples of other city, state, and national flags guide and justify my design choices. For this, I referenced three books:

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[37] Editors of Encyclopedia Brittanica, "Flag: Origins, Forms, and Functions,"

Complete Flags of the World by DK Publishing, *American City Flags: 150 Flags from Akron to Yonkers* by John M. Purcell with James A. Croft and Rich Monahan, and *World Encyclopedia of Flags: An Illustrated Guide to International Flags, Banners, Standards, and Ensigns* by Alfred Znamierowski. Revised in 2014, *Complete Flags of the World* features descriptions and illustrations of over 300 flags, including those of countries, subnational governments (like states and provinces), and international organizations (like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union). The authors define each flag's features and analyze their history and symbolism. Similarly, *American City Flags* is an exceptionally detailed examination of 150 American civic flags published by the North American Vexillological Association in 2004. Based on the 2000 census, the book covers the 100 largest cities in the United States, each state capital, or at least two cities from each state. The authors meticulously describe each flag's design elements and specifications while chronicling the process of each flag's adoption. Despite being nearly twenty years old, the book is still largely accurate and a valuable collection of design inspiration. Updated in 2022, Znamierowski's *World Encyclopedia of Flags* is a similarly thorough compilation of flags and symbols from around the world. This book was uniquely useful for its first chapter which detailed the history and development of flags and their complex social application. Referencing these three resources, I emulated the design processes and symbolism used in other effective flags across the United States and the world and applied those successful concepts to a unique flag for Mt. Juliet.

Next, I identified the unique characteristics I used to create my flag's symbolism. The most appropriate way to address this task was to analyze local literature and combine that information with my experiences and knowledge of living in Mt. Juliet. In addition to my local reading, I had a conversation with a local writer and historian; I contacted her via email to clarify

and expand upon some of the information in her published writing. Synthesizing my findings, I

identified the most significant aspects of the city's historical, cultural, and geographical identity.

This strategy, however, is somewhat subjective and has limitations I address in the conclusion of

this paper.

Finally, I combined all my findings (both those of flag design and Mt. Juliet civic

identity) into a robust, justifiable flag. Inspired by designs in *Complete Flags of the World,*

American City Flags, and *World Encyclopedia of Flags* and based on my new understanding of

Mt. Juliet's history, culture, and geography, I assigned specific characteristics of the city's

identity to corresponding graphic elements. I created the flag in Adobe Illustrator on my personal

computer, carefully defining the dimensions and proportions of the design.

Results

Discussing the Current Flag

Adopted on March 5th, 1990,[38] Mt. Juliet's official flag is the city seal on a tan field

outlined by a thin, black border.[39] According to the city council meeting's minutes, a local

student made the design as part of an Eagle Scout project, and the council passed the resolution

for its adoption unanimously.[40] The Mt. Juliet Deputy City Manager and City Recorder, Sheila

Luckett, noted that the city seal—and consequently the flag—was modernized "around 2015."[41]

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[38] Mt. Juliet Board of Commissioners, "Agenda, City of Mt. Juliet"
[39] Wyatt, Okazaki, and Fowler, "Mount Juliet, Tennessee"
[40] Mt. Juliet Board of Commissioners, "Agenda, City of Mt. Juliet"
[41] Luckett, Personal Communication

She confirmed that no official documents specify the flag's proportions or colors,[42] and I could

not find any records to explain the student's design choices.

Over two weeks, I noted every time I observed the official city flag flying (or otherwise

present) in the community. Despite my continued search, I saw the flag flying at only two

locations—both were city parks. Interestingly, the flag was not flying in front of City Hall, the

library, or the police station. Online, however, I located the current flag as part of the backdrop of

the headshots of several police officers[43] and government officials.[44] Further, the official design

is draped alongside the United States flag and the Tennessee state flag in City Hall.[45] I have

included images of my findings below.

Right: Mt. Juliet's current flag is the city seal on

a tan field outlined by a thin, black border.[46]

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[42] Luckett, Personal Communication
[43] Mt. Juliet Police Department, "Command Staff"
[44] City of Mt. Juliet, "City Management Team"
[45] City of Mt. Juliet, "Mt. Juliet BOC Workshop"
[46] Wyatt, Okazaki, and Fowler, "Mount Juliet, Tennessee"

Above: I only observed the flag flying in two locations; both were city parks.

Above: The current flag can be seen in the headshots of several police officers[47] and government

officials.[48] It is also draped inside City Hall.[49]

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[47] Mt. Juliet Police Department, "Command Staff"
[48] City of Mt. Juliet, "City Management Team"
[49] City of Mt. Juliet, "Mt. Juliet BOC Workshop"

My results suggest that, based on the definition established in my methodology, Mt. Juliet's current municipal flag is ineffective. Several hypotheses could explain the flag's limited usage. (Perhaps, for example, there was not a large enough campaign to promote the design when it was adopted.) However, based on my extensive analysis of other "effective" city, state, and national flags, I believe the problem lies within the design itself.

Mt. Juliet's flag is complicated and indistinct. Like the state flags of Nebraska, Minnesota, or Kentucky, our city flag falls into the category of ubiquitous "seal-on-a-bedsheet"[50] designs. A quick flip-through of Purcell's *American City Flags* reveals the dozens of municipal flags that follow the same tired pattern—of the 300 designs compiled in the book, I counted over 50 that included seals.[51] That said, there is nothing wrong with Mt. Juliet's seal, at least not from a graphic design standpoint.

Left: The seal's four quadrants represent family, recreation, education, and religion.[52] A scroll bearing the city's name between small illustrations of the American flag and the Tennessee state flag extends across the four quadrants.[53] A border that reads, in all-caps, "The seal of the city of [Mt. Juliet], established 1972" surrounds the design.[54]

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[50] North American Vexillological Association 2020, "New Flag: Columbia, S.C." 4-5
[51] Purcell, *American City Flags*, (insert)
[52] Luckett, Personal Communication
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

The problem lies in its application: Our municipal seal serves its purpose on official documents and government websites, but when viewed flapping in the wind, its elements are almost indiscernible. In *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, rule five specifically recommends against including lettering and seals: "Never use writing of any kind or an organization's seal."[55] The current flag disregards these rules of simplicity and recognizability, and its complicated design is a barrier to its potential as a symbol of civic pride.

In his 2015 TED Talk, Roman Mars argues that "the marriage of good design and civic pride is something that we need in all places."[56] Again, an effective flag would be a unifying symbol of our community's unique identity. But to achieve widespread use of Mt. Juliet's city flag, it needs more than a publicity campaign—it needs to be reimagined from the ground up.
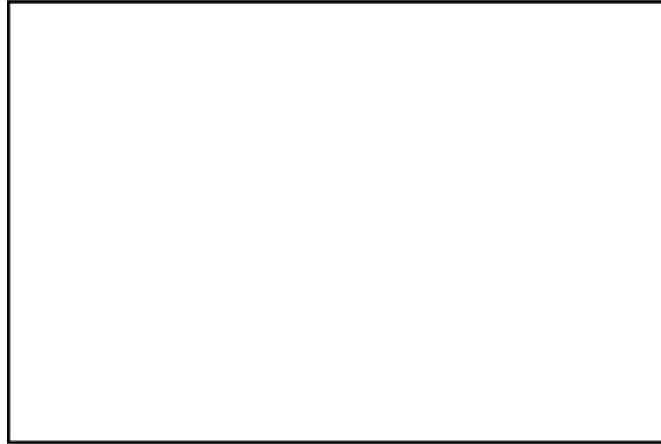
My Design

As specified in my methodology, I have connected my research of national, state, and city flags with my review of several local memoirs and historical resources. That information, combined with my experience living in Mt. Juliet, has equipped me to create a thoughtful redesign of our city's flag and defend every decision I have made during its development. For each design choice, I have provided an illustration.

Like the current flag, my redesign is rectangular. (Specifically, it is a 2:3 aspect ratio.) I decided this primarily out of convenience, as most city, state, and national flags follow this convention.[57] I assume a rectangular flag will be more recognizable and more cost-effective to manufacture.

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[55] Kaye, *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, 10
[56] Mars, "Why City Flags May"
[57] Znamierowski, *The World Encyclopedia of Flags*, 25

Much of my design's symbolism is geographical. Mt. Juliet's settlement and subsequent population growth were largely due to its location, and the flag should represent this. The city is between Old Hickory Lake to the north and J. Percy Priest Lake to the south—hence its nickname, "City Between the Lakes."[58] Both lakes are artificial; Old Hickory Lake is a reservoir on the Cumberland River[59] and J. Percy Priest Lake is a reservoir on the Stones River.[60]
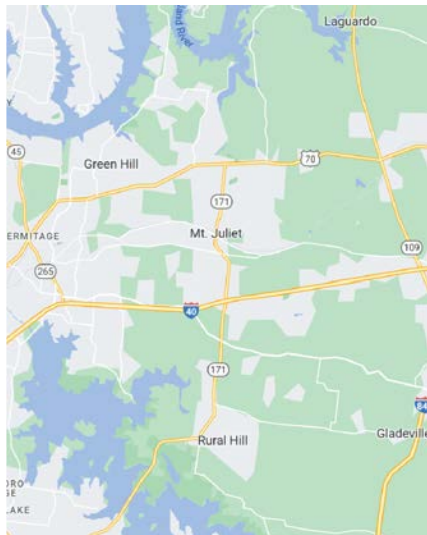
Left: On a map, Mt. Juliet's position between both lakes is apparent.

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[58] City of Mt. Juliet, "About Mt. Juliet"
[59] Army Corps of Engineers, "Old Hickory Lake"
[60] Army Corps of Engineers, "J. Percy Preist Lake"

The thick bars at the top and bottom edges of my design correspond to the locations of the lakes, suggesting their significance to Mt. Juliet's identity. An analysis of the hundreds of flags compiled in *Complete Flags of the World* and *American City Flags* suggests the unmistakable prevalence of stripes in city, state, and national flags.[61] They can serve various symbolic purposes, but there is a precedent for geographical metaphor; in Chicago's city flag, for example, the horizontal blue stripes symbolize Lake Michigan and the Chicago River and their importance to the city's economic and cultural development.

Another crucial element of Mt. Juliet's identity is its location along two major east-west throughways: U.S. Route 70 in the city's northern section and Interstate 40 in the south. In my design, the thinner lines on the inside mimic the locations of both highways relative to the lakes and city center—the thin line on the top represents U.S. Route 70, while the one on the bottom symbolizes Interstate 40. As a suburb of Nashville, Mt. Juliet's roadway connections attract

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[61] *Complete Flags of the World*, 22-25

workers that commute downtown.[62] Historically, Mt. Juliet served as a pitstop on the route that

connected Nashville with the East Coast.[63] Before the Tennessee and Pacific Railroad's

establishment in 1870, the then-small community clung to the Lebanon and Nashville dirt

road—an early unpaved east-west route "over which pioneer and much antebellum travel moved

between the Middle [Central] Basin and the East," writes Melody Jennings in *Homecoming*.[64]

Homecoming: The Stories of Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, is an anthology of essays, anecdotes, photos,

and newspaper clippings compiled and published by local historians in 2019. Jennings was raised

in Mt. Juliet and edited the nearly five-hundred-page book. "A famous stop on the old Lebanon

and Nashville dirt road… was the Eagle Tavern," the author continues.[65] Several local resources

reference the community's long-gone tavern, which—as legend has it—was frequented by

notable historical figures like Andrew Jackson, according to Donna Graves Ferrell.[66] Ferrell was

the president of the Mt. Juliet/West Wilson Historical Society. East-west routes through

Tennessee (like US Route 70 and Interstate 40) have a rich and complex history beyond the

scope of this paper; today, many of the state's modern highways follow the corridors of trails that

predate European settlement.[67]

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[62] City of Mt. Juliet, "About Mt. Juliet"
[63] Jennings, *Homecoming*, 6
[64] Ibid.
[65] Jennings, *Homecoming*, 6
[66] Ferrell, "Where Did Mt. Juliet Get the Name?"
[67] Rust and Smith, "Historic Trails"

In the center of my redesign, there is a four-pointed star. In vexillology, this center shape

is called a "charge."[68] The star is the most intricate element of my flag because it serves several

symbolic purposes.

At its most basic, the star is an extension of the geographic symbolism seen in the four

stripes. Much of Mt. Juliet's growth is due to its location—the city is a suburb of Nashville and

has unique connections to roads, rivers, and rails.[69] To represent that, the star resembles a

compass rose, the icon on a map that indicates the four cardinal directions. This decision was

inspired partly by the flag of Aruba, which features a four-pointed star to represent "the compass

and hence Aruba's connections by air and sea from all directions," according to Encylopedia

Britannica.[70] More specifically, the four-pointed star describes the intersection of the railroad

tracks and Division Street in downtown Mt. Juliet. According to *Homecoming,* the community

has been centered around the tracks since the Tennessee & Pacific Railroad's establishment in

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[68] Znamierowski, *The World Encyclopedia of Flags*, 29
[69] Jennings, Personal Communication
[70] Smith, "Flag of Aruba"

1870.[71] Historically, the post office, general store, Baptist church, and school were all built around this intersection.[72] "The railroad track, which ran east and west through the center of town, was often used as a reference point for giving directions," writes Ron Castleman in his memoir *Julip: Growing Up in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee Late 1940s through Early 1960s*.[73] I was inspired by the flag of Indianapolis, Indiana, which features a central star surrounded by a circle with four protruding lines.[74] Pictured below, Indianapolis's flag conveys the monument in the city's center and the streets that adjoin it to the north, south, east, and west.[75]

Left: The flag of Aruba includes a four-pointed star in the upper left corner. The icon symbolizes a compass rose and the island's connections in every direction.[76]

Above: Indianapolis's flag depicts the city center and the streets that extend from it.[77]

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[71] Jennings, *Homecoming*, 6
[72] Castleman, *Julip*, 4-6
[73] Ibid.
[74] Purcell, *American City Flags*, 157, 158
[75] Ibid.
[76] Smith, "Flag of Aruba"
[77] Purcell, *American City Flags*, 157, 158

The four-pointed star also evokes the four values represented in the quadrants of the city seal: family, recreation, religion, and education.[78] Kaye suggests it is "better to use some element from the seal as a symbol" instead of including the complicated emblem.[79] I did not want my flag to abandon the current design but rather adapt and modernize it.
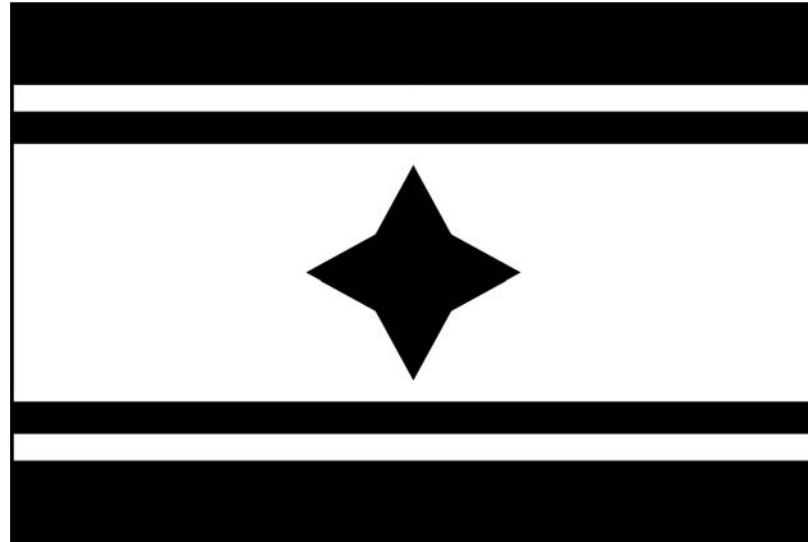
I left color for last. At first, it seemed like an easy decision—Mt. Juliet has always been black and gold, at least in my memory. The police cars, government websites, signs, overpasses, and school colors are all black and gold. Historical photos of Mt. Juliet High School's sports teams suggest the school's colors date back to at least 1905. But why is Mt. Juliet black and gold? Which came first—did the city adopt the school's colors, or did the school adopt the city's? I asked Melody Jennings, a local author and longtime Mt. Juliet resident. Over email, she told me, "Years ago, Vanderbilt University donated their old uniforms to us to be used as practice

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[78] Luckett, Personal Communication
[79] Kaye, *Good Flag, Bad Flag*, 10

uniforms for our football and basketball players. Those colors just stuck!"[80] Over 115 years later, those black and gold are used throughout the city.

I decided that black and gold were the only colors that made sense. Based on my thorough analysis of contemporary city, state, and national flags, it is clear that they typically adhere to a palette of simple colors.[81] Kaye and his collaborators reinforce this: "Limit the number of colors on the flag to three, which contrast well and come from the standard color set."[82] My proposed design contains two contrasting colors, which aligns well with the guide's emphasis on simplicity. Color is essential for symbolic meaning and recognizability; flags like Ukraine's and Canada's are popular and adaptable partly because their simple two-tone designs allow for it.[83] Ukraine's national flag is an appropriate example—since Russia's invasion in 2022, supporters worldwide have adapted and shared the bold, blue and yellow symbol to show their support for the country and its people.

Above: Supporters worldwide have adapted and shared the bold, blue and yellow symbol to show their support for Ukraine and its people.

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80 Jennings, Personal Communication
81 *Complete Flags of the World*
82 Kaye, *Good Flag, Bad Flag* 8
83 Znamierowski, *The World Encyclopedia of Flags*, 27

Here, however, my design breaks a rule. Most flags stick to *standard* colors; a review of *Complete Flags of the World* and *American City Flags* confirms that designs are typically red, yellow, blue, green, white, or black. (Occasionally, flags use orange or purple.)[84] Some descriptions denote "gold," but I have found that they are almost always golden-yellow. I decided to value local identity and tradition over vexillological convention; black and gold are so deeply ingrained in Mt. Juliet's culture that I do not believe a flag of any other color would resonate with citizens. I identified the exact golden color of the city seal and applied it to the background (or field, in vexillological terms)[85] of my flag.

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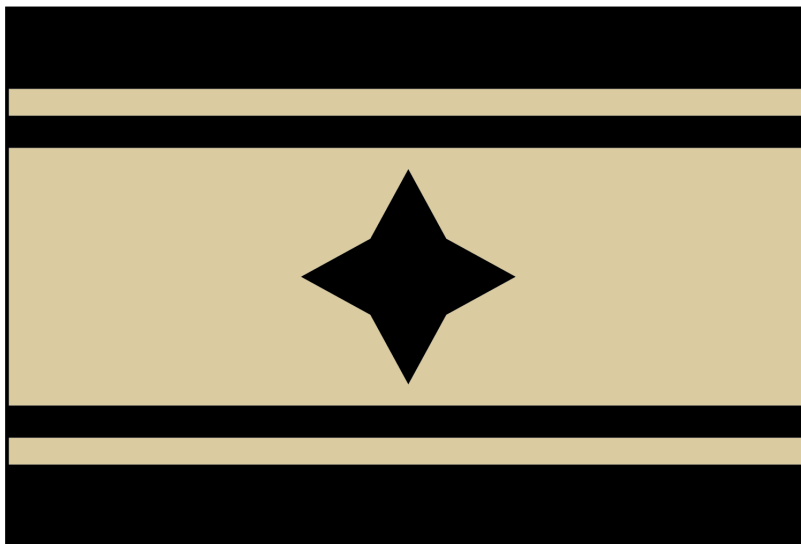
[84] *Complete Flags of the World*
[85] Znamierowski, *The World Encyclopedia of Flags*, 29
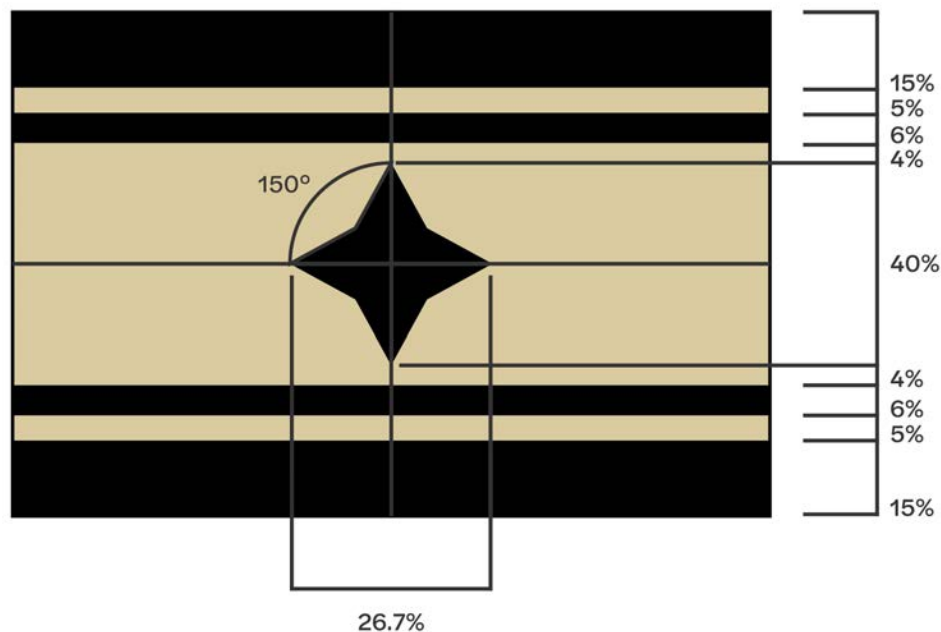
The proportions of my design are specified here. The exact proportions were chosen for visual balance and aesthetics.

Conclusion

My design is a culmination of months of research and trial and error. Though I strictly adhered to my methodology, my research was inevitably subjective.

An obvious limitation is my personal bias regarding the details of Mt. Juliet's identity I chose to represent in my design. To address this concern, I justified all my decisions with references to local historical literature. I also spoke with a local writer and historian born and raised in Mt. Juliet to substantiate several of my choices.

While I made every effort to ensure the quality and relevancy of my sources, one of my primary sources, *American City Flags* by John Purcell, is twenty years old. I used this resource for its commentary and description of municipal flags and cross-referenced the designs with online resources to ensure the flags were current. Vexillology is relatively constant, at least

compared to more fast-paced scientific or technological disciplines. I found even my older

vexillological resources to be up-to-date and accurate.

Next Steps

      Now my design is in the hands of the public. My research topic may seem trivial, but I

am sincerely committed to Mt. Juliet and the future of its flag. The process of officially adopting

a new design can be long and full of bureaucratic obstacles; during my research, I read of cities

spending years and thousands of dollars developing redesigns. I hope this paper sparks a

conversation in my community about our identity and the symbols we use to represent ourselves.

I am prepared to defend my design at every step of the process, and I believe this paper serves as

a convincing justification for my flag and design process.

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