The World Flag Project

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Children in Darjeeling, India, with the
World Flag Mikma Lepcha
The World Flag Project:
Creator of “Flag of Flags” Seeks to Promote Common Understanding Around the Globe

BY SARAH GRIGG

The United States flag was born amid war, South Africa’s flag from the end of apartheid. The World Flag’s creation also began with painful and unusual circumstances—a truck hitting a guy on a bicycle. In 1988, Paul Carroll was biking near New Canaan, Conn., when he was struck by a cargo van and incapacitated. With only partial use of his limbs, Carroll passed hours of bed rest using his only fully functional muscle—his mind.

Carroll emerged from his rehabilitation with a clear and compelling vision: to create a symbol of world unity and cooperation that would be universally recognizable and comprehensible. This ambitious project ultimately produced the “World Flag”, which has flown around the world, from the World Trade Center in New York to Nepal, and continues to find new places to fly today. The World Flag Project was initiated to promote multi-cultural understanding with a focus on geography and common world issues through the global exposure of the World Flag.

Designing the Flag

In 1988 Paul Carroll envisioned a global image that would resonate with the people of the world. He chose flags as the mark-making system for his original design. Because of their inherent symbolic, nationalistic, and subconscious power, individual flags offered inherent possibilities for his vision. “Moving individual flags into the global realm—transcending borders, race, and religions—creates unique impact from micro to macro and back,” Carroll wrote. The New Scientist noted that “[t]he power of symbols to both inspire and unite people finds its most relevant and meaningful perfection in the national flags and banners of the world.”

As Carroll strove to create a meaningful global symbol, some thought him crazy; others encouraged him. While recovering from his accident he began the arduous task of assimilating and arranging the flags of the world.

Working on the floor with a set of 4” x 6” U.N. flags, Paul spent his days configuring and reconfiguring different designs for the original World Flag. His ultimate goal—a flag whose design and underlying symbolism could not only be interpreted globally, but also be produced and manufactured, the first World Flag to fly around the globe.

The challenge of assembling 160 flags into a meaningful, engaging image was daunting. The options and combinations were virtually unlimited. For Carroll, the mission was well beyond a piece of art or a one-time experiment. He set out to create a global symbol that would change and evolve as the world changed and evolved. He wanted the World Flag to grow organically, creating historical documents in time. His 1988 design represented the 159 members of the United Nations, plus the U.N. flag. In order to create a 13 x 13 “flag” rectangle, Carroll eliminated a 3 x 3 area in the center. Placing Buckminster Fuller’s sky-ocean (Dymaxion) map in this space made it the core around which the design would grow. With Carroll’s awareness of history, philosophy, and geopolitics, the first World Flag was born. Major global concerns—the Cold War, apartheid, the Middle East, and other political and social issues—all influenced the design.

Flying the Flag

Flying the World Flag would prove even more difficult than creating a vibrant global symbol. Carroll’s original flag (fabric on canvas) as well as the second image (paper on canvas) were incredibly labor-intensive and in essence original works of art, continued on page 8
World Flag Project Seeks New Unity

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not meant to be flown. Flag manufacturers’ capabilities were not up to the task and creating a “real flag” proved impossible. Carroll then looked outside the flag world to the billboard industry for the needed large-scale printing expertise for the first flag.

In 1988 Carroll’s parents introduced the World Flag to delegates from the Society of Prayer for World Peace based in Tokyo, Japan. Impressed, they invited Paul to participate in the upcoming United Nations Prayer for World Peace in December 1989. This became the first public unveiling of the World Flag. Attended by Dr. Noel Brown, Director of the U.N.’s Environmental Program and Friends of the U.N., the event was auspicious and timely.

The publicity led New Jersey’s governor to appoint Carroll as Hoboken’s U.N. Representative. After attending the U.N. event with Carroll, his long-time friend Don “Poz” Pozarycki joined the effort to bring the World Flag to the people, as did his brother John. They took to the road to promote the project at various venues, building a freestanding structure to hang a large World Flag to display at each event. They attended environmental symposiums, school assemblies, concerts, street fairs, and international events, sharing the vision with thousands of people around the United States.

They found a California billboard company that produced large banners for both indoor and outdoor use, employing a roller dot process with low-resolution imagery. They commissioned two banners, 13’ x 18’ and 30’ x 50’. Working with the 20th Anniversary Earth Day Committee in 1990, Paul secured locations at the World Trade Center and in Central Park to hang the World Flag. Although some officials felt that the image was too political, they eventually agreed to allow the larger banner to hang on Tower One. Local unions donated all labor costs, through the intervention of the Carrolls’ father, a long-time union steamfitter.

The day of the flag’s unveiling began sunny and very windy. Despite the wind, the union men hoisted the 30’ x 50’ World Flag well over 100 feet. The flag created an amazing visual image for the assembled press and all who passed by. Eighteen minutes later, a severe gust howled through the courtyard, tearing the huge banner diagonally. Just before the press conference began, the World Flag came tumbling down. Fortunately, the larger banner was unfurled days later at the Earth Day concert in Central Park. There, hanging on the MTV press tower, it was seen by close to a million people.

Evolving the Flag

The World Flag’s design next changed in 1992. With the Cold War ending, the fall of apartheid in South Africa, and the continuing trend toward a more interconnected global economy, Carroll believed that the new design should encompass the entire world, not just United Nations members. This brought the next incarnation of the image to 216 flags and used the resources of the Flag Research Center. He also changed the depiction of Earth to a more recognizable map. The 1992 version debuted at the Alliance for Environmental Education conference in Washington, D.C. Shortly afterwards, the World Flag Project took a hiatus until real flags could be manufactured.

In 2006, project founders reunited in Portland, Ore., and updated the design. They researched the possibility of finally creating a real flag. Annin & Co. used its latest advanced digital printing process to produce flags in February 2007. Technology had caught up with the vision of the World Flag.

Working with local web designers, John Carroll has spearheaded the first concepts for a World Flag web site, initially planned to use the World Flag as an educational tool to learn about geography, languages, environmental treaties, and regional relations. The website is creating a living text available to people around the world, enabling them to upload their unique daily rituals in real time.

The World Flag Today

The Project hopes to see the World Flag fly in every country around the world. The World Flag Project is offering people from all walks of life—educators, backpackers, mountaineers, scientists, and all concerned citizens, and especially children of the world—an opportunity to act as ambassadors in delivering the flag to classrooms, hostels, sea vessels, national parks, organizations, businesses, homes, cities, towns, and villages. In 2008 the flag has already visited elementary schools in the U.S., Panama, and Belize. Soon, volunteers will deliver the World Flag to remote corners of the globe, including Antarctica. Expeditions to the world’s highest summits are also in the works.

The project’s founders see the World Flag celebrating cultural diversity while inspiring unity in all matters of global concern. In their vision, children everywhere will grow up sharing a common symbol of hope uniting them all. Their motto is: “Teaching Unity—Sharing Diversity”. One World, One Flag.

As proud new NAVA members, the World Flag team is excited to be a part of the study and history of flags. As they continue their ambitious project they are seeking manufacturers, retailers, educators, sponsors, and all others who may help achieve these goals.

The World Flag is available in 2’x3’, 3’x5’, and 5’x8’ versions. For more information, visit www.theworldflag.org. A portion of proceeds are donated to non-profit and charitable organizations with an emphasis on education. For details about the First Annual World Flag Day and Events contact Paul@theworldflag.org.
For Saint Patrick’s Day

The Irish tri-color flag flies proudly over the General Post Office building in Dublin, Ireland. The building served as the headquarters of the leaders of the Easter Rising of 1916, the first major conflict of the modern Irish independence movement. Mark Joyce

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