



Revisiting the Flag at Prospect Hill: Grand Union or Just British?

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Recent research has questioned whether the Grand Union flag (a.k.a. “Continental Colors”) really flew at Prospect Hill, Boston, on 1 January 1776. Eye-witness accounts use the term “union flag” and a new interpretation theorizes this to have referred specifically to the British Union Jack and not the characteristic “union flag with 13 red-and-white stripes.” This paper rebuts the new interpretation and supports the conventional history through an examination of eighteenth-century linguistic standards, contextual historical trends, and additional primary and secondary sources.

Introduction

New Year’s Day in Boston can be a frigid affair, but on 1 January 2011 the weather was a balmy (by New England standards) 47 degrees. I was standing with a film crew in light, slushy snow on Prospect Hill located in the small Boston suburb of Somerville. Locals gathered to witness an annual commemorative event: the unfurling of the “first flag of America”—the Grand Union flag. (Figures 1 and 2)

A man on horseback costumed as General George Washington made a speech while the distinctive banner was hoisted to top Prospect Hill’s castle-like monument. The mayor of Somerville addressed the crowd along with several community leaders and local historians. Revolutionary War re-enactors fired a few flintlock volleys to a rousing (and historically accurate) “hip, hip, huzzah!” Patriotic songs were sung, hot cider served, and a few snowballs flew through the air. Our film crew captured it all—along with several man-on-the-street type interviews with re-enactors, historians, and serendipitously, NAVA’s founding father, Dr. Whitney Smith.



Figure 1. Revolutionary War re-enactors stand at attention during the Prospect Hill flag-raising ceremony in Somerville, Massachusetts, on 1 January 2011. The annual event commemorates General George Washington's unfurling of the "first flag of America," known as the Grand Union flag, at the dawning of America's Revolutionary Year. Source: Dave Rutherford, courtesy of House of Motion.



Figure 2. Illustration of the Grand Union flag featuring the British Union Jack and thirteen red and white stripes symbolizing the union of the American colonies. Considered the "first flag of America," the Grand Union was first displayed on the Continental Navy's flagship, Alfred, on 3 December 1775 and was in use until late 1777. Source: Courtesy of Duane Streufert for USFlagDepot.com.

Whitney and I discussed Peter Ansoff's excellent paper, "The Flag on Prospect Hill" (*Raven* 11 [2006]: 77–100), which "presents a hypothesis that the flag raised on Prospect Hill on that historic day was not, in fact, the so-called 'Grand Union', but simply a British Union flag." I was familiar with Ansoff's well-researched article and had even read online that Smith considered its arguments persuasive. We briefly discussed another running hypothesis about the Grand Union flag, namely, its nearly identical resemblance to the British East India Company flag—a design pre-dating Prospect Hill by over a

century.¹ While there is no “smoking gun” evidence of the Grand Union flag ever being connected to, or even influenced by, the East India Company colors, it’s important to note that history has yet to discover *any* primary source documents relating to the provenance of the Grand Union flag.² Its origin is shrouded in mystery as there is simply no historical record of when—or more importantly why—the Grand Union flag’s particular design was proposed and adopted. And yet, in a relatively uniform manner, starting in December 1775, the Grand Union became the de facto standard of the American colonies, and following the Declaration of Independence in July 1776, the “Union Flag of the American States.”

Ansoff’s paper asserts that no striped union flag flew at Prospect Hill, but rather only a British Union Jack. (Figure 3) Being that both flags have a British Union in their design, the distinguishing characteristic between the two would be the horizontal red-and-white stripes. Ansoff’s theory rests primarily on two legs: (1) In the years leading up to the revolutionary era, English colonists flew British Union Jacks in an *ad hoc* manner with words like “Liberty” emblazoned on them as a “symbol of united resistance to British policies”; and (2) George Washington and other eyewitnesses used the term “union flag” to describe the events that had transpired on Prospect Hill, New Year’s Day, 1776.



Figure 3. A British Union Jack, or “King’s Colours,” displayed by Revolutionary War re-enactors at Fort Ontario on Flag Day, 14 June 2013. This variation of the British Union flag was in use from 1606 to 1801 and featured the intersecting crosses of St. George and St. Andrew representing England and Scotland. Source: Steve Yablonski, *OswegoCountyToday.com*.

As mentioned earlier, this paper rebuts this theory and will show through primary source records it was entirely appropriate for Prospect Hill eyewitnesses to have referred to the Grand Union flag as a “union flag,” and the escalating war, late date, and other catalyzing events leading to independence make it highly unlikely for the British Union Jack to have been utilized in an official capacity inaugurating the Continental Army’s new establishment.

One eyewitness to the event mentions the “striped continental” being flown that day, and although somewhat confusing in either describing one or two flags, the bottom line is, stripes still flew at Prospect Hill. Further, secondary accounts report the striped flag at Prospect Hill and are supported by its coinciding and widespread adoption throughout the revolutionary enterprise. If these secondary reports were erroneous, as Ansoff suggests, nowhere were they corrected.

Revising history without clear and unambiguous primary source interpretation should not be taken lightly. With the fact that an eyewitness mentions the “striped continental” at Prospect Hill and numerous other contemporary accounts refer to the new striped flag as a “union flag,” a competing hypothesis to Ansoff emerges, one which affirms the traditional history.

Although there are many tales and myths about the Grand Union flag’s beginnings, the primary source evidence starts with the outfitting of the Continental Navy in Philadelphia. The first public display of the Grand Union flag—or what John Paul Jones calls the “Flag of America”—occurred less than a month before its unveiling on Prospect Hill, and the historical context of these two events make them intrinsically connected.³ To wit, the former essentially inaugurates a new navy, the latter a new army. Also known as the Continental Colors, Continental Union Flag, First Navy Ensign, Cambridge Flag, or just Union Flag (and many others), for purposes of simplicity this paper will utilize its most common appellation: Grand Union flag.

The History—Setting the Stage

In the months following the bloodshed of Lexington and Concord (April 1775) and the Battle of Bunker Hill (June 1775) “the British North American colonies from Maine to Georgia were in open rebellion.”⁴ In May, John Adams wrote “The martial spirit throughout this province is astonishing. It arose all of a sudden, since the news of the battle of Lexington.” This new militarized mindset went beyond the everyday citizen and was also carried by the Continental Congress which began necessary preparations for making war against the greatest military power in the world. As historian Kevin Phillips

summarizes, “Despite lack of international legal recognition, the Continental Congress functioned as a de facto war government. By the end of 1775, the United Colonies had also created an army (June 14), a navy (October 13), and even a marine corps (November 10).”⁵

The first ship to be commissioned by the Continental Navy was the *Black Prince*, a merchant vessel built in 1774. (Figure 4) It was owned by Willing, Morris & Co., a partnership between two of the most successful businessmen in North America, Thomas Willing and Robert Morris, “the financier of the American Revolution.”⁶ The *Black Prince* was renamed the *Alfred*, according to Adams, “in honor of the founder of the greatest Navy that ever existed.”⁷ Congress ordered the *Black Prince* to be fitted out as a man-of-war on 30 October 1775.⁸ The Continental Navy’s first flagship, mounting 30 guns, was publically reported as “finished” on 18 November.⁹



Figure 4. USS Alfred pictured in Philadelphia. Source: Courtesy of the Cochrane Collection, Navy Art Collection, Naval History and Heritage Command.

Four months earlier, the Continental Congress had dispatched an entreaty to England in an attempt to resolve the conflict (“Olive Branch Petition”), and yet, simultaneously, in the “Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms,” they laid before the “opinion of mankind . . . the justice of our cause,” by framing the escalating conflict as an existential dichotomy—either “slavery” at the hands of an overzealous parliament, “or resistance by force.”

The document’s authors, Thomas Jefferson and John Dickinson, were unambiguous as to which path the United Colonies would take: “The latter

is our choice. We have counted this contest, and find nothing so dreadful as voluntary slavery.”¹⁰

Both actions, the Olive Branch and Declaration, effectively neutralized one another despite the Crown refusing to receive the peace petition.¹¹ The Declaration’s tone was defiant and would suggest a casting of the die, so to speak: “Our cause is just. Our union is perfect. Our internal resources are great, and, if necessary, foreign assistance is undoubtedly attainable.” (Figure 5)

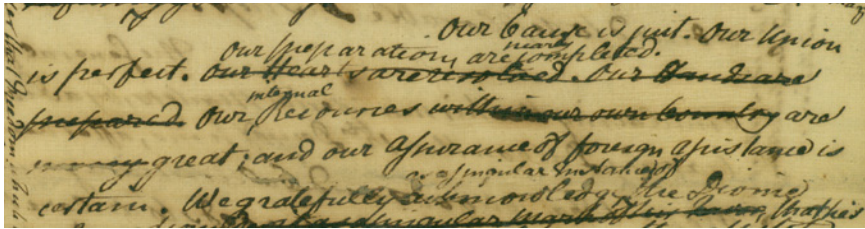


Figure 5. Detail of John Dickinson’s draft copy of the Declaration of the Causes and Necessity for Taking Up Arms which was issued by the Second Continental Congress on 6 July 1775. Note the phrase: “Our cause is just. Our union is perfect. Our preparations are nearly completed. Our internal Resources are great; and our assurance [sic] of foreign assistance is certain.” The final version deleted: “Our preparations are nearly completed.” Source: Collection of the New York Historical Society.

The Olive Branch, primarily made to mollify moderates within Congress, seems at first-blush totally contradictory when juxtaposed with the Declaration—but like the Grand Union flag itself, incorporating both British and American elements—these incongruous characteristics together are representative of the transitional nature of the nation-building series of events taking place. The unorthodox nature of what was transpiring during “the fifteen months between the shots fired at Lexington and Concord in April of 1775 and the adoption of the Declaration of Independence in July of 1776 can justifiably claim to be both the most consequential and . . . *strangest* year in American history.”¹²

Nations and governments are not easily born, and whether steps like the Olive Branch were sincere or merely delaying actions we will never precisely know. There is evidence that supports both contentions. A British informer in Philadelphia commented on Benjamin Franklin’s behind-the-scenes attitude toward the conflict suggesting a type of Fabian strategy: “Mr Franklin I find to be a daring artful insinuating incendiary: The doctrine he Preaches privately is, that if Ammerica can hold out for two years, they may have any term’s they require.”¹³

Franklin's prognostication may have been a few years short, but ultimately, the war of attrition, both politically and militarily, is what proved to be successful, with, of course, Washington assuming the role of "American Fabius."¹⁴ Perhaps devices such as the Grand Union flag and the Olive Branch were a form of "hedged bet" against the deadly consequences of treason should the revolutionary enterprise fail. If so, this could possibly explain the absence of historical detail—it was left out on purpose.

Despite the Olive Branch Petition and other unsuccessful attempts to resolve the conflict, all-out war was fast approaching. After rebuffing the petition, "On August 23, the King issued a proclamation that said the Americans had 'proceeded to open and avowed rebellion.'"¹⁵

Indeed, since open hostilities had broken out positions on both sides had calcified. The Royal Navy's commander of the North American Station, Admiral Samuel Graves, reflected this dangerous polarization in an opinion rendered after Lexington and Concord: "We ought to act hostilely from this time forward by burning and laying waste the whole country."¹⁶

Throughout the autumn of 1775, war preparations accelerated as the Continental Congress worked feverishly in the midst of an expanding conflict. A British spy wrote to London on 11 September, "military preparations still go's on with unceasing diligence."¹⁷ Secret proceedings had taken place both in the provincial assemblies and Congress to procure that most necessary substance for making war: gunpowder. George Washington's army besieging the British troops in Boston was in dire need of it. Its shortage was so desperate, orders were actually given to use wooden harpoons instead of guns.¹⁸ Merchants, like Robert Morris, "employed every form of subterfuge" in order to smuggle the war materiel into the colonies. By late summer and early autumn shipments of tons of powder began coming in from around the world. The cost of these initial procurements easily exceeded £100,000, a massive fortune worth approximately \$16 million in today's currency. (Figure 6)¹⁹

Figure 6. Philadelphia merchant Robert Morris, "the financier of the American Revolution," was one of only two men to sign the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution. He served with Benjamin Franklin on both secret committees of Congress and marshaled his international trading network to supply the Continental Army and Navy with gunpowder and other necessities. Source: Painting by Charles Willson Peale, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc/pnp/cph.3a07081>.



On 18 October 1775 the Royal Navy burned the town of Falmouth (modern day Portland, Maine) in a campaign that by New Year's Day had "bombarded, torched, or attempted to burn over a dozen American cities." British General William Howe, writing to Lord Dartmouth, dispassionately reported the results of the attack on Falmouth, which was "destroyed on the 18th of October, burning about five hundred houses, fourteen sea vessels, taking and destroying several others, without any loss on our part."²⁰ To George Washington "the burning of Falmouth was 'an outrage exceeding in Barbarity and cruelty every hostile Act practiced among Civilized nations.'"²¹

On 2 December, the day before the Grand Union's debut, Congress furthered its policy of open-war against the British ordering Colonel Benjamin Harrison "to proceed immediately to cruise on, take or destroy as many of the armed vessels, cutters, and ships of war of the enemy as possible" and directed the Naval Committee to prepare "a proper commission for the Captains or Commanders of the ships of war in the service of the United Colonies."²² Three hundred blank commission forms were ordered that day to be "immediately printed" and orders were given to the Colonel of the Pennsylvania Battalion to send a detachment to keep "a regular guard on the wharves of Messrs. Willing and Morris . . . to take care of the ships and stores belonging to the United Colonies."²³ Prisoners of war were to be treated as such, "but with humanity," and that an exchange of prisoners should be "citizens for citizens, officers for officers of equal rank, and soldier for soldier." The prior resolutions Congress had passed with respect to the "establishment of the new army" (the Army of '76), were ordered to be sent to General Washington in Cambridge "by express."

The Grand Union Debut

On 3 December 1775, in Philadelphia, First Lieutenant John Paul Jones hoisted the Grand Union flag on the *Alfred*, marking its first documented appearance. (Figure 7) Jones later used the terms "Flag of Freedom"²⁴ or "Flag of America" to describe this event.

The day before, Commodore Esek Hopkins accepted the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Navy and in the day book of James Wharton, a Philadelphia ship chandler outfitting the fleet, there is record of payment to flag-maker Margaret Manny for an ensign for the *Alfred*.²⁵ The design and colors of this flag can be accurately established by several primary source eyewitness accounts and other corroborating records of the period.



Figure 7. Artist's depiction of John Paul Jones unfurling the Grand Union flag for the first time on 3 December 1775 on the Continental Navy's flagship, *Alfred*. Source: Painting in oils by W. Nowland Van Powell, U.S. Navy Art Collection, Washington, D.C., Donation of the Memphis Council, U.S. Navy League, 1776.

“The Continental Flag”

After twice touring “eight of the thirteen United Colonies” since the battle of Lexington, Bernard Page, a Loyalist clergyman, wrote the Earl of Dartmouth on 20 December 1775, warning of the growing colonial resolve toward independence and their capacity to secure it.²⁶ Page also mentioned the appointment of Commodore Hopkins and the Grand Union flag's first appearance on the *Alfred*: “A Continental and Provincial currencies, to facilitate this great undertaking [war with England], are emitted, which circulate freely, and are daily exchanged for silver and gold. Their harbours by the spring will swarm with privateers. An Admiral is appointed, a court established, and the 3d instant, *the Continental flag on board the Black Prince, opposite Philadelphia, was hoisted*”²⁷ (emphasis added).

During the Revolutionary War, the term “continental” was used to refer to devices and institutions concerning the whole of the North American colonies (viz. Continental Congress, continental currency, etc.). By referring to it as “the Continental flag,” Page seems to recognize that this flag was emblematic of the United Colonies. As we shall see, other eyewitness accounts and even pictorial evidence confirm this general understanding of what the new standard represented.

In another letter dated 6 December 1775, containing intelligence from Philadelphia, the Continental Navy's first flagship and her new flag are also mentioned: "we are fitting out here [Philadelphia] a number of ships with the greatest expedition to attack him [Lord Dunmore]; they will sail, or at least fall down the river in a few days, viz. The Black Prince [Alfred], a fine vessel, I believe you know her well, *she carries a flag* and mounts from twenty to thirty twelve and sixteen pounders, besides swivels, and fights them mostly under deck"²⁸ (emphasis added).

"English Colours but More Striped"

On 4 January 1776 British spy James Brattle made a detailed spreadsheet of the newly outfitted Continental fleet comprised of five vessels led by the *Alfred* and *Columbus*—another Willing, Morris & Co. merchant ship converted to man-of-war. In his role as spy, Brattle posed as a servant to congressional delegate James Duane of New York, and evidently, had access to very detailed intelligence. In his report he lists the ship's commanders, the number of marines assigned to each vessel, and their armaments. Brattle also describes a novel flag flying aboard the *Alfred*: "[Esek] Hopkins Commands the *Alfred*, she has Yellow sides, her Head the figure of a Man, *English Colours but more striped*"²⁹ (emphasis added).

In context, "English colors but more striped" undoubtedly describes the Grand Union flag comprised of the British Union and thirteen red-and-white stripes. It also illustrates quite clearly the initial difficulty and confusion in describing the new design as either being British or American. As other historians have concluded, we can safely assume this flag to have been the "ensign" made by Margaret Manny, mentioned by Bernard Page, and hoisted by John Paul Jones on the *Alfred* on 3 December.³⁰

"What They Call the Ammerican Flag"

On 5 January, as the nascent Continental Navy was finally ready to set sail, the Naval Committee of Congress issued orders to Commodore Hopkins. Addressed "America To Esek Hopkins Esquire, Commander in Chief of the Fleet of the United Colonies"—the orders were unequivocal in their war-making powers:

Sir: The United Colonies directed by principles of just and necessary preservation against the oppressive and cruel system of the British Administration whose violent and hostile proceedings by sea and land against these

unoffending colonies, have rendered it an indispensable duty to God, their country and posterity to prevent by all means in their power the ravage, desolation and ruin that is intended to be fixed on North America. As a part and a most important part of defence, the Continental Congress have judged it necessary to fit out several armed vessels which they have put under your command having the strongest reliance on your virtuous attachment to the great cause of America, and that by your valour, skill and diligence, seconded by the officers and men under your command our unnatural enemies may meet with all possible distress on the sea . . . you will send forward a small swift sailing vessel to gain intelligence of the enemies situation and strength. If by such intelligence you find that they are not greatly superior to your own you are immediately to . . . search out and attack, take or destroy all the naval force of our enemies that you may find there.³¹

On 10 January 1776 Gilbert Barkly, another British spy writing from Philadelphia, provided details about the American flotilla to Sir Grey Cooper “per express to New York” and mentions the Grand Union as “what they call the Ammerican Flag”:

Sir The two ships and tuo [*sic*] briganteens I mentioned in my last fell down the river the 4th Curr. the ships has 250 men including marine’s each of them, and the Briganteens 100 men each, they are Joined by a sloop of 12 guns from New England, there is also a Briganteen, and a Sloop fitted out at Baltimore in Marry land which Joins them before they leave this river: the reason (no doubt) for their shipping such a great number of men, is that they intend to board their antagonists sword in hand: they have hoisted *what they call the Ammerican Flag viz the British Union, with thirteen stripes red and white, for its field, Representing the thirteen United Collonies.*³² (Emphasis added)

Barkly’s account leaves no doubt as to the design of the Grand Union flag; indeed he cites a similar term to what John Paul Jones used years later (compare “Ammerican Flag” with “Flag of America”). It is notable that Barkley mentions the colonists referring to this new flag by name, “what they call the Ammerican Flag.” Both Page’s and Barkly’s descriptions introducing the new flag identify it as representative of a united colonial effort in opposing the British. Despite the absence of congressional records or other primary source documents revealing the Grand Union’s origin or purpose, it does seem, at least anecdotally, that there were contemporary perceptions of the Grand Union flag embodying nationalistic characteristics.³³

Pictorial Evidence

Images of the Grand Union flag on contemporary powder horns and illustrations of the period confirm the written descriptions.

A 10 February 1776 letter to the North Carolina Council of Safety from that state's delegates in Congress, mentions shipment “by the wagon” of, “Drums, Colours, Fifes, Pamphlets and a quantity of powder.” The colors mentioned were purchased by Joseph Hewes from ship chandler James Wharton and charged on 8 February 1776. The bill is itemized as “1 Union Flag 13 Stripes Broad Buntg and 33 feet fly”³⁴ (emphasis added).

This flag was most likely flown in Edenton, North Carolina, and two months later, on 2 April 1776, the Grand Union flag was enshrined on a seven-and-a-half dollar bill. (Figure 8)



Figure 8. Grand Union flag representative of the United Colonies displayed on North Carolina currency, dated 2 April 1776. Since its debut over the Continental Navy on 3 December 1775 and Army on 1 January 1776, the new flag was quickly adopted throughout the revolutionary enterprise. Source: Courtesy of Tyron Palace, New Bern, NC, accession TP.1986.032.001.

The formation of a national identity—made more distinct in the face of escalating British violence—was quickly materializing. Rituals and symbols, some heraldic, some novel, began to encapsulate the birth of the American nation.

Four days later, on 6 April 1776, the words “united states of America” first appeared publically in print published by the *Virginia Gazette* in Williamsburg.³⁵

In the summer of 1776, a watercolor painting of one of the Continental Navy's ships, Captain Wynkoop's *Royal Savage*, shows the Grand Union flag

in full color. (Figure 9) Although the British Union in the canton is slightly smaller than the North Carolina seven-and-a-half dollar depiction, this establishes without question what the “Ammerican flag” or “Flag of America” looked like. Because each flag was hand-sewn most likely there were slight variations, for instance in the the size of the canton.



Figure 9. Watercolor painting of Captain Wynkoop’s Royal Savage displaying the Grand Union flag on Lake Champlain by Marine Lt. John Calderwood. Source: Manuscript and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

It is conspicuous to note that many of the surviving early reports of the new device come from the British side or from unofficial accounts in the colonial press—and only a few from American decision-makers. Most of these reports are brief and perfunctory. As stated earlier, any detailed record of the Grand Union flag’s adoption or purpose has yet to be discovered. This seems to suggest one of three things—the story of the flag’s origin wasn’t documented; researchers have been unlucky in discovering the relevant sources; or, for various reasons, there may have been concerted documentary suppression during or after the fact.

“Ship. Amaraca.”—First Portrayal of the Grand Union?

The earliest discovered pictorial evidence of the Grand Union flag seems to be a coarse rendering engraved on a powder horn dated 9 March 1776. (Figure 10) Major Samuel Selden’s powder horn loosely depicts the British and American lines in the closing chapter of the Siege of Boston eight days before the British withdrawal.

The scrimshaw design includes an image of a three-masted warship labeled “SHIP. AMARACA.” The vessel appears to be flying the Pine Tree flag on its main-mast and a union flag with thirteen stripes at its stern. This prominent



Figure 10. Earliest pictorial evidence of the Grand Union flag on Major Samuel Selden's powder horn, dated 9 March 1776. Source: Photo by John Bell, courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

portrayal of “SHIP. AMARACA.” was perhaps intended as a metaphor for national unity and an abstract representation of the United Colonies—akin to Plato’s proverbial “ship of state.”³⁶ Other symbolic images on the Selden powder horn include a hefty mortar cannon most likely depicting the large brass mortar captured from the British ordnance brig *Nancy* by Captain John Manley on 28 November 1775.

Flying from the position of honor, at the farthest aft staff on the vessel’s stern, is a union flag with thirteen stripes, albeit poorly rendered.³⁷ It is significant to note that national ensigns are customarily flown from this position—the

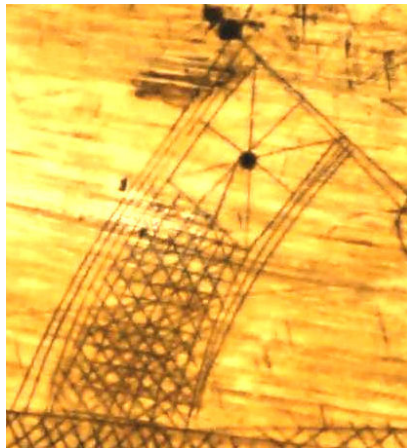


Figure 11. Detail of the Selden powder horn showing a union flag with thirteen stripes. Although a poor rendering, it shows the intersecting crosses of St. George and St. Andrew and fourteen solid lines moving from one end of the flag or canton to the trailing edge which constitute the thirteen stripes.

stern of a vessel—as was the Grand Union flag since its first appearance on the *Alfred*. (Figures 2, 4, and 7)

Presenting the Grand Union in this fashion comports with earlier eyewitness accounts describing the new colors as “what they call the Ammerican flag” or otherwise embodying nationalistic characteristics being “emblematical of the thirteen united colonies.” Terms such as “Flagg of the United Colonies” and “New Provincial Flagg” in use at the time most likely referred to the new standard further supporting its perceived national character.³⁸ Outside the remote possibility that the Selden powder-horn artist intended to represent some other flag, this scrimshaw illustration can safely be assumed to place the Grand Union flag in Boston as a “national ensign” approximately two months after Washington’s flag-raising ceremony on Prospect Hill.

Prospect Hill: “We Had Hoisted the Union Flag in Compliment to the United Colonies”

Tradition has it that on New Year’s Day, 1776, General George Washington unfurled what is considered the first “unofficial” flag of the United States of America to commemorate the Continental Army’s “new establishment.” (Figure 12) As has been established, this flag featured thirteen characteristic red-and-white horizontal stripes with the British Union Jack in the canton.



Figure 12. “Raising the First American Flag” illustration by Clyde Osmer De Land under the supervision of Howard Pyle. Published by Harper’s Weekly in 1898, De Land stated in an accompanying essay: “It was doubtless the union jack in the corner of the flag hoisted at Cambridge that caused the English to misinterpret it—to suppose that the Americans intended to submit once more to the rule of George the Third.” Source: Picture Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

The Grand Union was hoisted atop a 76-foot liberty pole on Prospect Hill—a strategically important fortified high-ground overlooking British-occupied Boston.³⁹ There are three primary source eyewitness accounts of the Prospect Hill flag-raising. The most famous, as Ansoff reports, was written by Washington to his military secretary, Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Reed, three days after the event:

Cambridge, 4th Jany 1776

Dear Sir

...

We are at length favour'd with a sight of his Majesty's most gracious speech, breathing sentiments of tenderness and compassion for his deluded American subjects; the echo is not yet come to hand, but we know what it must be, and as Lord North said, and we ought to have believed (and acted accordingly,) we now know the ultimatum of British justice. The speech I send you; a volume of them was sent out by the Boston gentry, and farcical enough, we gave great joy to them (the red coats I mean), without knowing or intending it, for on that day, the day which gave being to the new army, (but before the proclamation came to hand) *we had hoisted the Union Flag in compliment to the United Colonies*; but behold! it was received in Boston as a token of the deep impression the Speech had made upon us, and as a signal of submission, so we learn by a person out of Boston last night By this time, I presume, they begin to think it strange that we have not made a formal surrender of our Lines.⁴⁰ (Emphasis added)

Ansoff concludes that the term “Union Flag,” in this specific instance, can only allude to the British Union Jack and not the continental union flag. He states: “Washington referred simply to the ‘Union Flag’, and there is no indication that he meant anything other than what he said.”⁴¹

The Grand Union Is a “Union Flag”

In modern parlance, it would be correct to assume the term “union flag” most likely refers to the British Union Jack—especially from a flag-expert or flag-centric perspective. The British Union is featured prominently in vexillology as it can be found, even today, incorporated into the design of many of the world's flags. But in the American Revolutionary War, the meaning and usage of the word “union” is not so easily ascertained. The argument could be made that the more pertinent “union” in the minds of American Founders, and, perhaps, even the British, was the one taking shape.

Nevertheless, notions of how the word “union” was employed by both British and American actors during the revolutionary era are issues of nuance and will be explored later, because there is a far more compelling argument that brings Ansoff’s theory into question. Simply, the striped continental union flag was exactly that—a *Union Flag*.

The problem with interpreting Washington’s account from a strictly modern and/or literalist point of view, is that there are numerous references to the Grand Union flag during the months preceding and following Prospect Hill that utilize the *exact same language*—albeit some more descriptive and complete than others. This establishes, through primary source records, the linguistic convention of referring to the Grand Union as a “union flag.” Contemporary observers used the term “union flag” to identify the new striped colors—not the “old colours” which were often referred to as “English colours” or the “English flag.” In fact, the majority of contemporary primary sources during the period of its introduction refer to the new striped continental as a “union flag.”

Here is a list of primary source references to the Grand Union flag using the term “union”:

These descriptions are strikingly similar to Washington’s own eyewitness account, “we had hoisted the Union Flag in compliment to the United

- “Union Flag” (12 December 1775)⁴²
- “UNION FLAG of the American States” (15 May 1776)⁴³
- “Union flag, and striped red and white in the field” (2 December 1775)⁴⁴
- “Continental Union Flag” (11 May 1776)⁴⁵
- “1 Union Flag 13 Stripes Broad Buntg and 33 feet fly” (8 February 1776)⁴⁶
- “union flag with thirteen stripes in the field emblematical of the thirteen United Colonies” (9 February 1776)⁴⁷
- “a Continental Union Flag” (20 April 1776 and 20 June 1776)⁴⁸
- “striped under the union with thirteen strokes” (3 March 1776 and multiple citations)⁴⁹

acclamations of all pretent:

1. *The American independent States.*
2. *The Grand Congress of the United States, and their respective legislatures.*
3. *General Washington, and victory to the American arms.*

The UNION FLAG of the American States waved upon the Capitol during the whole of this ceremony, which being ended, the soldiers partook of the refreshment prepared for them by the affection

Figure 13. Photographic excerpt from the Virginia Gazette dated 17 May 1776 using the term “UNION FLAG” to describe the Grand Union flag. It was “waved upon the Capitol” of Williamsburg during a celebration following a public reading of the 15 May unanimous vote by the Virginia Convention declaring the United Colonies “Free and Independent States.” Source: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

Colonies.” In fact, it bears repeating that *any* flag including the British Union in its design could have been called a “Union Flag.”

As primary source records show, British Red, Blue, or White Ensigns could also be referred to as “union flags.” Dated 8 March 1775, the following is an “Account of the Meetings” that took place in New York concerning the decision to send delegates to the Continental Congress:

Early on *Monday* morning preparations were made for the meeting at the Exchange. *A Union Flag, with red field*, [emphasis added] was hoisted on the Liberty-pole, where, at nine o’ clock, the friends of Freedom assembled, and having got in proper readiness, about eleven o’ clock the body began their march to the Exchange. They were attended by musick; and two standard bearers *carried a large Union Flag, with a blue field*, [emphasis added] on which were the following; inscriptions: On one side, *George III.—Rex* and the Liberties of *America—No Popery*. On the other: The Union of the Colonies, and the Measures of Congress.⁵⁰

While the Red Ensign (a.k.a “Meteor Flag” or “Red Duster”), Blue Ensign, and Grand Union flags all have British Unions in their cantons, the difference between these flags is their fields. The Red Ensign’s field is all red (Figure 14) and the Blue Ensign’s field all blue, while the Grand Union’s is striped. In any event, as the above account shows, these flags could all be referred to as “union flags.” At the time of the introduction of the new striped union flag this was the best abbreviated way to describe it.



Figure 14. The British Red Ensign was used by the Royal Navy and British merchant vessels. One theory about the Grand Union posits its relatively easy creation by applying six white stripes to an existing Red Ensign. Source: Source: Daderot (username), commons.wikipedia.org.

Therefore we must conclude that it was entirely suitable for Washington and others to have referred to the Grand Union flag as a “Union Flag.” Ironically, as Ansoff writes, “there is no indication that he [Washington] meant anything other than what he said,” is actually true. But Washington wasn’t describing an “English flag” or the “King’s standard”—he was summoning the most available descriptive term at the time—the striped continental colors was a “union flag.”

It is noteworthy that contemporary accounts using the term “union” could have either been motivated by the most prominent feature of the flag, the British Union Jack, or by the thirteen stripes intimating the union of the colonies—or both. To wit, the reason Washington used the term “union” might have been different than why the other two eyewitnesses—both British—used the term “union.”

Joseph Reed: Washington’s Favorite Military Secretary

To further understand Washington’s choice of words it is important to take into consideration the intended recipient of the letter. Was Washington attempting to make an exact description, like a historian or flag-expert to a neutral party? Or was the recipient sufficiently familiar with the issues at hand? And if so, how familiar?

Ansoff describes Washington’s account of the Prospect Hill flag-raising as a “letter to his friend,” and while Lt. Col. Joseph Reed was certainly a friend of Washington’s, their association was largely professional. Their well-known correspondence of the period covered highly sensitive military topics, prevailing political concerns, and operational details of the office of Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army.

On 15 June 1775 Congress appointed Washington commander-in-chief and dispatched him to Boston to take command of what Washington called “the Troops of the United Provinces of North America.” He arrived shortly after the Battle of Bunker Hill—for the British, one of the bloodiest encounters of the entire war. At that time the continental forces besieging the British were loosely formed and composed mainly of New England militias and what the redcoats termed “country people.” Lt. Col. Joseph Reed (Figure 15) accompanied Washington on his journey from Philadelphia and discovered “the Army was a scene of disorder and confusion . . . the Officers were not only ignorant and litigious, but scandalously disobedient, and in the last action [Bunker Hill] many of them proved such notorious cowards that the very



Figure 15. Lt. Col. Joseph Reed accompanied Gen. Washington from Philadelphia to Cambridge to take command of the Continental Army. Reed worked closely with Washington in reforming what were largely New England militia into the “new establishment”—the Army of ’76. Source: Courtesy of Pennsylvania Capitol Preservation Committee, <http://cpc.state.pa.us>.

existence of the army, and consequently the salvation of America, depended upon immediate reform.”⁵¹

The task at hand for Washington and his aides and staff was daunting as the Americans were faced with confronting the full force of British military might, and to put it simply, they weren’t ready. Washington wrote: “An Army without Order, Regularity & Discipline, is no better than a Commission’d Mob,” and for the nascent force to achieve any measure of success he needed to unite and pull together men from different colonies into one coherent fighting unit.⁵²

The challenge was herculean and those closest to the general feared he might collapse under its weight. Reed was Washington’s right-hand man and the general trusted him implicitly. He resided with Washington at his Cambridge headquarters (now Longfellow House) and was intimately involved in every aspect of the commander-in-chief’s duties. Washington often referred to Reed as a member of “his family.”⁵³ During this critical period of reformation, Reed mentions “everyone around him [Washington] in whom he could confide” assisted him “to execute this necessary work.” Reed worked side-by-side with Washington, issuing orders, writing letters, sitting in council—all from within the confines of Washington’s headquarters. He was committed to see him through this “sea of difficulties.”⁵⁴

Aside from building and ensuring the integrity of their defensive lines against the British, their primary goal was to reform the ragtag provincial troops into what would be considered the first real Continental Army. Upon Washington’s recommendations and other considerations, the Continental Congress in Philadelphia issued regulations, commissions, and orders for the new army just like it had done for the new navy.⁵⁵

After spending the summer and early autumn at Washington's side in Cambridge, Reed returned to Philadelphia on 29 October 1775. Washington kept diligent contact with Reed who often times acted as the general's agent and confidant in dealings with the Continental Congress. It is impossible to divorce the orders, directives, and intelligence contained in Reed's papers from the most critical aspects of the prosecution of the revolutionary enterprise—in a phrase, like Washington, he was at the heart of the matter.

Ten days before departing Cambridge for Philadelphia, Reed wrote one of only a handful of surviving explicit flag directives of the period. Addressing Colonel Glover and Stephen Moylan, esq. at Salem, Reed makes the suggestion of utilizing the Pine Tree flag so “our vessels may know one another.” He describes the “particular Colour” as a flag “with a white ground, a Tree in the Middle, the motto (*Appeal to Heaven*)[.] This is the Flag of our floating Batteries.”⁵⁶

Clearly, this shows Washington and Reed were not only aware of and concerned with the colors the continentals would be flying, but were also involved in deciding which flags would be used. When Washington wrote Reed on 4 January relaying the story of the Prospect Hill flag-raising ceremony, it can safely be assumed Reed knew to what Washington was referring when he said “we had hoisted the Union Flag in compliment to the United Colonies.” Their close working relationship on these matters may have obviated the need for additional clarifying detail.

Flag historian Edward W. Richardson, in his *Standards and Colors of the American Revolution*, reached a similar conclusion. He mentioned Reed was at Washington's side while they met with the Congressional Committee sent to confer on the needs and budget of the Army in October 1775. Richardson concludes “Washington did not describe the flag to Reed. He speaks of it only as ‘the union flag’ which indicates that Reed knew the design.”⁵⁷

Ansoff disagreed, adhering to a new interpretation of what Washington meant when writing Reed: “All modern accounts assume that the flag to which Washington referred was the Continental Flag of 13 stripes with the British union in the canton. Neither his words or the context would seem to support this assumption.”⁵⁸

Firstly, it is not only “all modern accounts” of the event at Prospect Hill that depict the Grand Union flying there, but all the secondary sources of the period, newspaper articles, etc. report the same conventional history, and, if erroneous, nowhere were they later corrected until Ansoff. Additionally,

Washington's words do "support this assumption," and consequently, support the conventional history—that the Grand Union flag was flown that day to commemorate the army's new establishment. Contemporary primary sources show that Washington's words—"union flag"—were many times employed to describe the new American colors.

"Which is Here Supposed to Intimate the Union of the Provinces"

The second eyewitness account of the New Year's Day flag-raising at Prospect Hill was an anonymous British merchant ship captain writing his ship's owners in London. Dated 17 January 1776, he wrote: "I can see the Rebels' camp very plain, whose colours, a little while ago, were entirely red; but, on the receipt of the King's speech, (which they burnt,) they have hoisted *the Union Flag, which is here supposed to intimate the union of the Provinces*"⁵⁹ (emphasis added).

As mentioned earlier, this use of the term "Union Flag" by a British subject might have been motivated by different reasons than why Washington used the term. What the British reacted to was the transition from an "entirely red" device to a union flag of any type, striped or otherwise. Indeed, in Washington's letter to Reed, he mentions the confusion caused to the British by the flag-raising ceremony on Prospect Hill.

Washington relays that the British mistakenly thought the King's speech made the Americans have a change of heart. As a consequence, the rebel's colors transition from an "entirely red" flag—a common signal for protest, duress, and rebellion—toward that of a British Union (albeit striped in the field).⁶⁰ From a British perspective, it must have been the weight of royal authority wielded by their Sovereign that precipitated the shift from rebellious red flag to the loyal "union flag."⁶¹

As indicated by Washington, this was confused, and, perhaps, wishful thinking on the part of the British. It was an emotionally satisfying interpretation—sighting the British Union atop the rebels' camp gave the red coats the false hope that they might not be forced to carry out a bloody campaign with the provincials after all. Most likely memories of the carnage at Bunker Hill still featured prominently in their thinking.

William Carter, a British officer of the 40th Regiment of Foot, commented in his diary on the unrelenting industry of the Continental Army and the desperate living conditions the British were suffering under (the following entry was made the day before the flag-raising at Prospect Hill):

Boston, 31st December, 1775.

On the 11th instant, the remainder of the troops on Boston Common went into winter quarters, as did also the troops on Charles-Town Heights. The cold is so intense, that the ink freezes in the pen whilst I write by the fire-side; yet, notwithstanding the severity of the season the Provincials are still at work. They are throwing up a redoubt on the hill, from whence our Light Infantry and Grenadiers took some cattle last month. . . . This day puts a period to the year; and happy should I be to have it in my power to say, it also did to this most unhappy contest. Our little army has suffered severely from the dampness and season, and from living totally on salt provisions, without the smallest portion of vegetables.⁶²

Lt. Carter's somewhat despondent attitude reveals a frame of mind that would welcome any hopeful sign. That sign came a day later in the form of a "union flag (above the continental with the thirteen stripes)," and for a brief period, the hoisting of this flag over the rebel's camp was construed by the British as indicative of a war avoided.

This complete misreading of the Prospect Hill event by the British is not so unusual and is actually supported by recent neurological research into the visual cortex. The brain's perception of reality shows a very real propensity for people to basically see what they want to see, akin to someone hallucinating an oasis in the middle of the desert while dying of thirst. These studies show that what we perceive is heavily influenced by what we are searching for with test subjects quite literally morphing their perception of time and space to reach emotionally satisfying conclusions.⁶³ This may offer an explanation as to why the new flag was so confusing—for the reluctant and emotionally fatigued British, the Grand Union was the sign of capitulation they were desperately hoping for. This "potent mechanism of sensory noise filtration" provided a blinkered view of the impact the king's speech had had on the Americans—because the British were so focused on the Union flag that the Americans raised, it's quite possible they simply didn't see the stripes.⁶⁴

But the actual effect the King's speech had on the Americans was quite the opposite. In reality, George III's threats of violence only hardened American resolve toward independence.⁶⁵ There is even documentary evidence that seems to suggest this transition taking place in the minds of those present.

“Full and Ample Powers From the United States of America”

On 2 January 1776, the day after Prospect Hill and the receipt of the King’s speech, Washington’s aide-de-camp and Muster-Master General of the Continental Army, Stephen Moylan, esq., wrote what stands as the first documentary evidence of the phrase “United States of America.”⁶⁶ Written to Lt. Col. Joseph Reed, Moylan’s letter (Figure 16) makes clear that notions of independence were on the minds of the men operating in the heart of the revolutionary enterprise. He laments the fact that Congress has yet to declare independence, despite—for all intents and purposes—their “Most Gracious Majesty” accusing them of as much: “Look at the King’s speech—it is enclosed in this, or in the General’s letter to you . . .—will they [Congress] not declare what his Most Gracious Majesty insists on they have already done?”⁶⁷

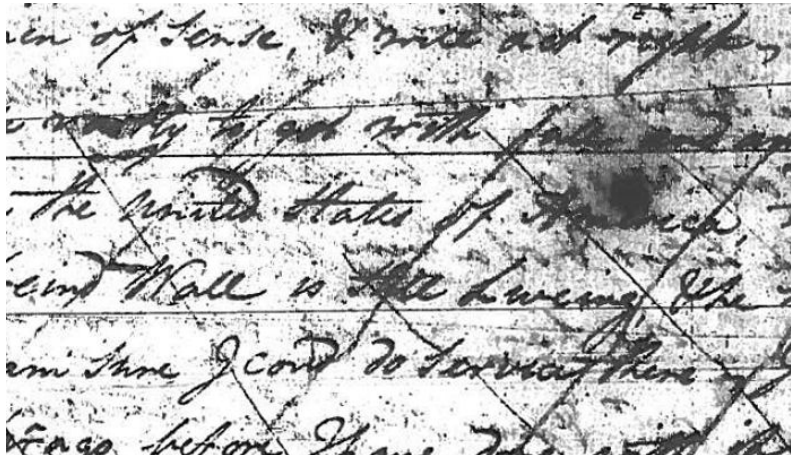


Figure 16. Detail of Stephen Moylan, esq., letter to Lt. Col. Joseph Reed showing the first documentary evidence of the phrase “United States of America”. Moylan, Washington’s aide-de-camp, wrote Reed from Washington’s Cambridge headquarters on 2 January 1776—the day after the Prospect Hill flag-raising. Source: Collection of the New York Historical Society.

Moylan then expresses his fervent desire to carry the “full and ample powers from the United States of America” to Europe to assist in the war effort. Whether precipitated by the King’s speech, the flag-raising at Prospect Hill, or by other reasons, Moylan’s shift from using the term “United Colonies” toward “United States of America” strongly suggests the congealing of an American national identity at that very moment.⁶⁸

Historian Joseph Ellis, in his *Revolutionary Summer: The Birth of American Independence*, mentions John Adams’s belief that his primary collaborator in

swaying Congress toward independence was King George himself. The king's bellicose speech was delivered to the continentals on New Year's Day, and in the months following, played a pivotal role in what amounted to the English king's tone-deaf handling of the American crisis:

MANY YEARS LATER, when John Adams was asked who deserved the lion's share of the credit for advancing the agenda toward independence in the Continental Congress, most of the questioners assumed that Adams would make a gesture of modesty, then claim the honor for himself. But he relished surprising them by bestowing the prize on George III. He was undoubtedly referring to the royal proclamation issued in August 1775 and the king's address to both houses of Parliament the following October. . . . By the start of the new year, then, George III had single-handedly undermined the reconciliation agenda of the moderate faction in the congress. For the moderates had invested all their hopes in a wise and loving monarch whose paternal affection for his American subjects would eventually bring the warmongers in the ministry and Parliament to their senses. Now George III had demonstrated that he was perhaps the most ardent advocate for war in the British government. The king had seized the initiative himself, and his advisers promptly lined up behind their sovereign. While the moderates were busy blocking any declaration of American independence from the British Empire, George III had in effect issued his own declaration of independence from them.⁶⁹

“The Continental With the Thirteen Stripes”

The third eyewitness account of the Prospect Hill flag-raising, also British, was made by the aforementioned Lieutenant William Carter, 40th Regiment of Foot. Dated a few weeks after the event, he documented the Continental Army celebrating the appearance of a “union flag (above the continental with the thirteen stripes)” at Prospect Hill on New Year's Day:

Boston, 26th January, 1776.

The Provincials have entered on the new year with spirit.

The King's speech was sent by a flag [of truce] to them on the 1st instant. In a short time after they received it, they hoisted *an union flag (above the continental with the thirteen stripes)* at Mount Pisga [Prospect Hill] their citadel fired thirteen guns, and gave the like number of cheers.⁷⁰ (Emphasis added)

Ansoff concludes that Carter is describing *two* distinct flags. He states: “Unlike the other two eyewitnesses, Lt. Carter mentions ‘thirteen stripes.’ However, it seems fairly clear from his phrasing that he is talking about a Union Flag flying above another, striped flag. As with the anonymous ship captain, Carter’s correspondents in Britain would not have any reason to think that ‘union flag’ meant anything different from what it usually meant.”

We have already established in contemporary primary sources that the Grand Union flag was referred to as a “union flag” for various reasons, including it being emblematic of the union of the colonies, and, like the Red Ensign, could be described as a “union flag” due to the fact it had a British Union in its design. Setting aside for the moment the fact that stripes flew at Prospect Hill, Ansoff’s conclusion from this account that *two* flags were present that day would make this report entirely unique among all relevant primary and non-derivative secondary sources.⁷¹ However, there is another, and perhaps more plausible interpretation of Lt. Carter’s narrative which conforms to the conventional history.

Contemporary sources describe the positioning of a flag’s “field” as contrasted with the positioning of the “canton” in various ways. One way to describe the field and/or canton was to portray it as being in a superior and/or inferior position to one another. Just as much as the field of a flag could be described as “below” or “under” the canton, the canton could be described as “above” the field. (Figure 17)

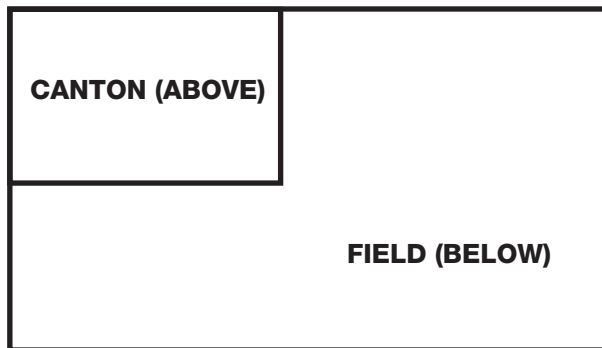


Figure 17. Diagram showing the positioning of a flag’s canton in relation to its field. Source: illustration created by the author.

One source showing this positioning convention was from 3 March 1776 and reprinted in numerous publications until late July 1776: “The colours of the American fleet (under Commodore Hopkins, which plundered the island of new Providence) were *striped under the Union with 13 strokes, called the Thirteen*

*United Colonies*⁷² (emphasis added). And another, possibly drawn from the same source: “Letter from New Providence, Bahamas (after the Continental fleet’s raid on New Providence), dated 13 May 1776, printed in *London Ladies’ Magazine*, July 1776: “The colors of the American fleet were *striped under the Union*, with thirteen strokes called the United Colonies, and their standard, a rattlesnake; motto—Don’t Tread on Me!”⁷³ (emphasis added).

Taking this philology into account, Lt. Carter’s report of “an union flag (above the continental with the thirteen stripes)” could be interpreted as describing one flag—the Grand Union flag, which, from a positioning perspective, has the British Union Jack above and in a superior position to the field of stripes below. (Figure 17)

Contemporary language describing the positioning of the canton and field was not confined to the above/below convention as the following record illustrates. Here, the Grand Union’s canton is described as being “next” to the staff: “(COPY) July [29] 1776 . . . Sir I arrived here the 27th Instant between one and two o’clock, and immediately waited upon the Governor of this place, and deliver’d your Message, which he sent to the General of the Island at Port Royal, and the same evening returning from him a little before Dark I saw a Sail in the Offing with Colours which I was unacquainted with (*being red and white striped, with a Union next the Staff*)”⁷⁴ (emphasis added).

George Washington: Careful, Calculating, Cautious

Many historians have written about the political and public character of George Washington, that he was careful, cautious, and calculating, and that he was uniquely aware of his place at the center of the American Revolutionary stage and played his part excellently. (Figure 18)



Figure 18. *George Washington* by Rembrandt Peale, ca.1850. Washington conspicuously wore the uniform of a Virginian colonel at the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, and was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army in 1775. Source: National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C., via DcoetzeeBot (username), commons.wikimedia.org.

Two additional ideas brought forward in Ansoff's article on Prospect Hill deserve reflection. One is that in the years running up to the revolutionary era, English colonists sometimes flew British Union Jacks with words like "Liberty" emblazoned on them as a "symbol of united resistance to British policies," and the other is, that at the time of Prospect Hill, the commander-in-chief (or anyone else in Boston) had not yet heard about the Grand Union flag's existence.

Early examples of British American colonists flying British flags are provided by Ansoff, ostensibly to set the stage and give credence to his Prospect Hill theory that a wholly British device was flown on New Year's Day, 1776. The example with the latest date he provides is from a British officer's diary on 1 May 1775 following the outbreak of hostilities at Lexington and Concord: "The Rebels have erected the Standard at Cambridge; they call themselves the King's Troops and us the Parliaments. Pretty Burlesque!"

This confirms that Americans sympathetic to the colonial cause flew English colors—there is no question about this. However, these examples are of actions that were conducted in a relatively *ad hoc* manner as contrasted with the Grand Union flag's debut on the *Alfred*, or Washington's Prospect Hill ceremony inaugurating the army's "new establishment." They occurred before the bloody escalation at Bunker Hill and the appointment and command of Washington as commander-in-chief—two developments that necessitated heightened levels of military discipline, seriousness, and formality.

As mentioned earlier, the massive challenge associated with organizing the new army of '76 took place from July 1775 until the downbeat of the new establishment on New Year's Day (and efforts at reform continued thereafter). During this time, the war was escalating throughout the colonies, with ships and stores seized, forts captured, and cities burned. It was a harrowing autumn and winter; and Washington was facing the very real deadline of army commissions closing out at the end of the year.

Historian Paul K. Longmore, in *The Invention of George Washington*, likens the general's role during this time as an orchestrator of implicit "acts of sovereignty":

In October, a congressional committee huddled with him [Washington] at Cambridge to hear his recommendations. The alterations he proposed would move the United Colonies much farther down the road toward independence. Congress adopted every one. The army would be augmented. Courts-martial would have authority to enforce stricter discipline by imposing stricter punishments. Captured British spies would face the death penalty.

Mutiny and sedition by officers and soldiers in the Continental Army would now also be tried as capital crimes. These last two acts, voted by Congress in the first week of November, were implicitly acts of sovereignty by an independent nation. They had originated with the commander-in-chief.⁷⁵

On New Year's Day, the day of the flag-raising ceremony on Prospect Hill, Washington issued orders from Cambridge communicating his opinion of the nature and character of the new army: "This day giving commencement to the new army, *which, in every point of View is entirely Continental*, the General flatters himself, that a laudable spirit of emulation will now take place, and pervade the whole of it. Without such a spirit, few officers have ever arrived to any degree of reputation, nor did any army ever become formidable" (emphasis added).

The formality and official nature of the occasion is unambiguous. Washington, as a well-known Freemason (along with many of his generals), was accustomed to strict adherence to ritual and ceremony as not only being a question of virtue, but one of honor. (Figure 19) For Washington, the dawning of what would become known as the "Revolutionary Year" was significant—he was inaugurating the new army he had pained so tirelessly to build. The surrounding circumstances seem to suggest the perfect opportunity for the flag's disclosure—it seems unimaginable that he would fly the enemy's colors on this historic occasion.



Figure 19. Artist's depiction of George Washington leading an elaborate Masonic ceremony laying the cornerstone for the U.S. Capitol on 18 September 1793. Washington was a well-known Freemason and recognized the importance of ceremony, ritual, and symbolism. Source: Allyn Cox, Oil on Canvas, 1973–74, Architect of the Capitol.

In a 2009 *Boston Globe* article by Danielle Dreilinger, Suffolk University historian Robert Allison also disagrees with Ansoff's revisionist Prospect Hill flag theory: "Enlistments for the all-volunteer army expired Dec. 31, 1775; Washington was issuing a call to arms for the forces to keep them all from going home. 'Raising the flag is a sign' of differentiation and change in this context, Allison said. 'Washington, probably more than any of his contemporaries, knew the importance of symbols.' During the siege of Boston, the rebels made a mental transition from angry Brits to independent Americans."⁷⁶

Washington's orders on New Year's Day capture the intensity and integrity of what he wanted to impart to his men of the "new establishment":

His Excellency hopes that the Importance of the great Cause we are engaged in, will be deeply impressed upon every Man's mind, and wishes it to be considered, that an Army without Order, Regularity and Discipline, is no better than a Commission'd Mob; Let us therefore, when every thing dear and valuable to Freemen is at stake; when our unnatural Parent is threat'ning of us with destruction from every quarter, endeavour by all the Skill and Discipline in our power, Discipline in the continental army to acquire that knowledge, and conduct, which is necessary in War—Our Men are brave and good; Men who with pleasure it is observed, are addicted to fewer Vices than are commonly found in Armies; but it is Subordination and Discipline (the Life and Soul of an Army) which next under providence, is to make us formidable to our enemies, honorable in ourselves, and respected in the world; and herein is to be shewn the Goodness of the Officer.⁷⁷

In light of the seriousness of the occasion, Washington's attention to issues of formality, and the aforementioned deliberate "acts of sovereignty" that had originated with him, it would be wholly uncharacteristic for him to hoist the King's colors, a British Union Jack—a flag completely English in design—in a celebration to commemorate the Continental Army's new establishment. Doing so would seem haphazard, nay, even capricious, and is plainly not supported by the surrounding circumstances. As MIT historian Pauline Maier succinctly summarized in the *Globe* piece, "You wouldn't want a flag that was the same flag as the people [you were fighting]."⁷⁸

This is why Washington was *surprised* by the British reaction to Prospect Hill and found it hilarious—to wit, if he had hoisted a wholly English flag, *of course* it would be seen as a token of submission and/or loyalty to the British. It wouldn't be ironic—it would be obvious. But the humorous tone of his 4 January letter to Reed was based on the confusing message the new

flag unwittingly transmitted (being composed of both British and American elements).⁷⁹ Washington was delighted to report the unintended effect that the new flag had on the “redcoats”—a flag, by the way, which Reed was most certainly well aware of, which brings us to the second issue.

Ansoff suggests that Washington was “probably not aware” of the existence of the first flag of America when Washington wrote Lt. Col. Joseph Reed about Prospect Hill and the King’s speech: “The Continental Flag was created in Philadelphia for use by the embryonic Continental Navy. It was never officially adopted or promulgated, and there is no mention of it in any of Washington’s extensive correspondence with the Continental Congress between July and December of 1775. When he wrote his letter to Reed, Washington was probably not even aware that it existed.”⁸⁰

Firstly, we don’t have direct evidence about the Grand Union’s provenance; therefore, its creation story should not be narrowly confined solely to the purpose of “use by the embryonic Continental Navy.” If this were true, the Grand Union flag would not have been used as a garrison flag in February 1776 at Fort Mifflin (Fort Island), or as the standard hoisted by the American troops during July in New York.⁸¹

Additionally, it would be inaccurate to claim that the Grand Union flag “was never officially adopted or promulgated” only that we don’t have *direct evidence* of its adoption. On the other hand, its promulgation throughout the colonies is self-evident.

Lastly, because there is an absence of primary source documents detailing Washington’s awareness of the new standard does not mean he didn’t know of its existence. Indeed, there is no mention of the flag in Washington’s “extensive correspondence” with Congress between July and December 1775, but this only adds to the vacuum of *any* evidence about the Grand Union’s provenance beyond the brief accounts in a smattering of primary sources.

Washington was the Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army and was at the heart of the revolutionary enterprise. If a British spy, writing on 10 January 1776, mentions the Grand Union as “what they call the Ammerican flag,” it is not too far of a stretch to presume—at the very least—that knowledge of that flag (and what it evidently represented) had passed from Philadelphia to Cambridge among principals of the American war effort. After all, they *were* the ones being accused of calling the new device “the Ammerican flag.”

Further, Bernard Page’s 20 December description of the *Alfred’s* ensign as “the continental flag” also establishes the general awareness of the new standard’s

function and purpose, as do the February minutes from the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety calling the Grand Union the “Flag of the United Colonies.”

In the weeks and months following these initial reports, the Grand Union flag began appearing throughout the colonies. As discussed earlier, it was most likely etched on Samuel Selden’s powder horn on 9 March 1776—and in the first week of April was engraved and presented as a symbol of national unity on colonial currency. For the times, relatively speaking, a rapid rate of adoption.

In an anonymous report of the British retreat from Boston, eight days after the Selden powder horn’s etching, there is mention of an “Ensign Richards carrying the standard” upon the Continental Army’s entry into the newly evacuated city.⁸² Because we’ve established through several earlier contemporary records the perception of the Grand Union flag as a national emblem, there is every reason to conclude (as have previous histories) that Ensign Richards was carrying the Grand Union “standard” as the Continental Army entered Boston after the British retreat.⁸³

In defense of Ansoff, there is no direct evidence of Washington “knowing” about the existence of the Grand Union flag by 1 January 1776, but there may be a good explanation. The fact remains that key Washington documents and papers were purposefully suppressed and/or destroyed, and along with them, possibly, our Grand Union creation story.

Washington’s Missing Papers

It is an ongoing and fascinating mystery that history has yet to discover any primary source evidence of when the Grand Union flag’s adoption was decided upon, or more importantly, the purpose behind the design. As mentioned earlier there are a few letters between members of Washington’s staff covering the details of specific flags—Washington’s secretary Lt. Col. Joseph Reed wrote one of these flag directives (to Stephen Moylan, esq., etc.) during the period in question.

Conspicuously, there are numerous Reed letters to Washington covering this critical period that are missing from the record. We know these letters existed because Washington references them in his correspondence with Reed and they have never been found.⁸⁴ Additionally, there is evidence of concerted documentary suppression of Washington’s papers which go beyond the missing Reed letters. It goes without saying, that “unknown unknowns” are exactly that—we don’t know what we’re missing, only that there is strong evidence of at least one individual culling Washington’s papers. Colonel Tobias Lear V,

Washington's secretary from 1784 to 1799, was in possession of the Washington papers for a full year after he died. Lear was also present when Washington died in December of 1799 recording his last words, "tis well." (Figure 20)



Figure 20. Colonel Tobias Lear V was Washington's secretary from 1784 to 1799. He handled many of Washington's personal affairs and was at his side throughout the Washington presidency. Source: Portrait by Constantina Coltellini, Courtesy of the R.W. Norton Art Gallery, Shreveport, Louisiana.

In Richard Zacks's *The Pirate Coast: Thomas Jefferson, the First Marines, and the Secret Mission of 1805* we find the story of the mishandling of Washington's papers in the year following his death:

Now came [Tobias] Lear's least finest hour: the missing Washington papers. The case plays out like a whodunit. Instead of nephew Bushrod, Supreme Court Justice John Marshall wound up volunteering to write a biography of George Washington. He received the papers from Lear, who had kept them for a year. Marshall, who didn't examine the whole trunk of papers right away, was quite upset when he discovered swaths of Washington's diary were missing, especially sections during the war and presidency, and that a handful of key letters had also vanished.

Lear, in a long rambling letter to Marshall, denied destroying any of Washington's papers, but Lear's own correspondence would later surface to refute his own denial.

A letter has survived that Lear had written Alexander Hamilton to offer to suppress Washington documents.

"There are, as you well know," Lear had written, "among the several letters and papers, many which every public and private consideration

should withhold from further inspection.” He specifically asked in the letter if Hamilton wanted any military papers removed. (Interestingly, while almost all the presidential diary is gone, Washington’s entries for his New England trip to Lear’s family home have survived.)⁸⁵

Lear may have been carrying out a “dying wish” in removing specific documents, acting on wishes from Martha Washington, or operating on his own accord, or perhaps all of the above. What we do know is that the twelve missing Reed letters from November to December 1775, in addition to other Washington documents and correspondence that may have been suppressed, could very plausibly have contained historical details about the Grand Union flag.

Conclusions

The mystery of the Grand Union flag’s origins has flummoxed vexillologists for nearly two centuries. Its missing creation story may have been washed away attached to other documents that, for unknown reasons, were never allowed to see the light of day. Or, there may have been specific concerns about the Grand Union flag itself that coerced the record of its adoption to be suppressed. These are at least two plausible explanations for the lack of historical evidence for such an important national icon. Other possible explanations include the records merely being lost or that no notes were taken when the flag issue was decided upon. It must be remembered that the topic of independence was a highly sensitive one and even deadly in as much as openly professing and actively opposing the crown could invite charges of treason.

The Founders were doing a delicate dance and although historians have identified many different “Rubicons” and points of “no return” for the Americans toward independence, waving around a new national standard and promiscuously identifying it as such may have been perceived premature by those attempting to traipse lightly on the issue of separation with their “unnatural threatening parent.” After all, the Continental Navy’s creation (October 1775) and Prospect Hill’s New Year 1776 flag-raising ceremony both occurred before the publication of Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*, which made plain and popular the arguments against not only the English parliament, but, for the Americans, their neglectful sovereign. It is not an insignificant fact that the very public and outspoken cheerleader on these points was relatively unknown.

What this paper has established is that the Grand Union flag was referred to as a “Union Flag” in contemporary primary sources thereby bringing into question any conclusion that eyewitnesses to Prospect Hill were undoubtedly reporting a wholly British device. Further, one eyewitness mentions the “striped

continental” as flying that day (with an accompanying gun salute) which also confirms the conventional history.

The advanced stage of formality and organization carried by the Americans, brought on by escalating British violence and the accelerating war preparations, likewise points toward the conventional history of the Grand Union flag hoisted in a ceremony to commemorate the new army. This conclusion is further supported by Washington’s character and personal attention to issues of formality, ritual, and his stated intention to build a new force—like the Grand Union flag itself—that was representative of the United Colonies. After all, the topic of American independence and notions of nationhood were clearly maturing in this exact time and space with the first documentary evidence of the phrase “United States of America” being written at Washington’s headquarters immediately following the flag-raising ceremony at Prospect Hill.

This paper has established that before the flag-raising on Prospect Hill, the Grand Union flag was seen as a national standard embodying nationalistic characteristics and throughout late 1775 and early 1776 it quickly promulgated throughout the colonies. There is evidence it was utilized as a garrison flag in February and July; it was depicted as a national ensign in Boston in March; and enshrined as a national symbol on continental currency in April. In Edenton, North Carolina, it flew courtesy of congressional delegate Joseph Hewes. In May, the Grand Union flag played a central role in celebrating colonial independence flying above the capitol of Virginia. By the end of 1776, the Grand Union flag was uniformly recognized as the de facto American colors by foreign nations. (Figure 21)



Figure 21. In October and November 1776 Denmark and the Republic of the United Netherlands were, respectively, the first foreign nations to salute the new American colors—the Grand Union flag. This painting depicts the Continental Navy brig Andrew Doria receiving a gun salute from the Dutch fort at Sint Eustatius on 16 November 1776. Source: Donation of Colonel Phillips Melville, Navy Art Collection, Naval History and Heritage Command.

Although British Union flags at an earlier period had been displayed by Americans in connection with united opposition to British policies, by New Year's Day 1776 things had progressed far beyond the *ad hoc* nature of the actions led by groups like the Sons of Liberty, et al. The preponderance of reports and sightings of the new American flag immediately before and after Prospect Hill make the King's colors flying there highly dubious. As an extraordinary claim, it requires more than linguistic interpretation from an era when orthography was clearly not established, not to mention any of the rigors employed by modern historians. The inexactitude of eighteenth-century language is notorious and researchers should be careful not to take a modern literalist point of view when interpreting primary source accounts. Because of the lack of direct narrative, this paper has had to explore the historical context and corroborating records to divine what the few Grand Union primary sources are really saying.⁸⁶

The Founders carefully metabolizing the issue of separation was perhaps one of the reasons the Grand Union flag's specific design was adopted. With the British Union featured in the canton, it was plausibly deniable that designs for an "independent empire" were being harbored and actively pursued by the leaders of the rebellion. The ambiguity of the flag's design could be seen as a sort of "hedged bet." There are other possibilities, of course, including the Grand Union flag's nearly identical resemblance to the East India Company colors.

Modern historians often have to dispel myth and legend and debunk inaccuracies to arrive at more academically-sound history. But this doesn't mean that such efforts can sometimes overreach. Peter Ansoff has done excellent work in the study of flags and has shown great leadership in helping move the discipline of flag research and expertise forward. He is to be thanked for the opportunity to delve more deeply into this topic which this paper wouldn't have done if he hadn't opened the conversation with his paper "The Flag on Prospect Hill." It does speak to Ansoff's elegance and persuasiveness for his theory about the Prospect Hill flag to have been reprised in several recently-published historical works such as Nathaniel Philbrick's *Bunker Hill: A City, A Siege, A Revolution* (2013, Viking) and John Bell's *The Siege of Boston* (2012, U.S. National Park Service).

Doubtless this will be a continuing discussion and, hopefully, an undiscovered repository of revolutionary war documents will soon be revealed illuminating the provenance of this most interesting national treasure, the first flag of the United States of America, the Grand Union flag.



This paper was first presented at the 47th Annual Meeting of NAVA in Salt Lake City, Utah, in October 2013. Two appendices from the presentation are not included here and will be included in a stand-alone publication from NAVA.

End Notes

1. Sir Charles Fawcett, "The Striped Flag of the East India Company, and its Connexion with the American Stars and Stripes," *The Journal of the Society for Nautical Research* 23 (October 1937), passim.
2. It remains a mystery why no record has been found concerning the origin of the Grand Union flag. In addition to undiscovered and/or destroyed secret proceedings of Congress, there are missing George Washington letters and papers, most notably from his secretary Lt. Col. Joseph Reed for the period surrounding Prospect Hill. Reed was the recipient of George Washington's 4 January account of the flag-raising at Prospect Hill (one of three primary source records) and is the author of one of the only existing flag directives of the immediate period in question. A month-and-a-half before John Paul Jones unveiled the Grand Union on the Continental Navy's flagship *Alfred*, Reed wrote on 20 October 1775 to recommend the Pine Tree Flag. Colonels Glover and Moylan replied the following day: "That as Broughton and Selman, who sailed that morning, had none but their old colors, they had appointed the signal by which they could be known by their friends to be 'the ensign up to the maintopping lift.'" It may be surmised that by "old colors," they meant either the British Red Ensign or British Union Jack.
3. Beginning in 1779, there are several statements made by John Paul Jones laying stake to the claim of hoisting the "Flag of Freedom" or "Flag of America" for the first time in December 1775 on the Continental Navy's first flagship *Alfred*. In his letter to Robert Morris dated 10 October 1783, Jones states: "It was my fortune as the senior first lieutenant to hoist the flag of America the first time it was displayed." Of note, Morris was the sole naval agent for much of the Revolutionary War serving on the Naval or Marine Committee, the former owner of the Continental Navy's flagship *Alfred* (as partner in Willing, Morris & Co.), and proprietor of the staging area where the embryonic navy was outfitted. Further, Morris was one of Jones's chief advocates, and eventually, the executor of his will. Considering his audience, it is highly unlikely that Jones would attempt to spin this account too wildly in a self-serving manner, as some historians have suggested. In his letter to Morris, Jones concludes—perhaps in an attempt to temper the braggadocio—"Though this was but a slight circumstance [raising the "flag of America" for the first time], yet I feel for its honor more than I think I should have done if it had not happened." When Jones relayed the same story in letters to Samuel Huntington (President of Congress, 7 December 1779), Baron Van Der Capellen (Dutch Colonel), and the King of France, he does not make light of the event, but rather fully basks in its glory.

4. E. Gordon Bowen-Hassell, Dennis M. Conrad, and Mark L. Hayes, *Sea Raiders of the American Revolution: The Continental Navy in European Waters* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, Naval Historical Center, 2003), viii.
5. Kevin Phillips, *1775: A Good Year for Revolution* (New York: Penguin Group, 2012), 19.
6. Charles Rappleye, *Robert Morris: Financier of the American Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), passim. According to Rappleye, Morris founded the first bank in America in order to support his operations as the financier of the American government, established the idea of free capital markets as fundamental to American liberty, and is the architect of the American financial system.
7. “Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, Philadelphia, December 6, 1775,” reprinted in *Naval Documents of the American Revolution* [hereafter *NDAR*], Volume 2, ed. William Bell Clark (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1966), 1305. It is notable that the day after the name of the Continental Navy’s first flagship was announced (*Alfred*, 17 November 1775), *The Pennsylvania Evening Post* published an extract from *Entick’s Naval History* depicting the Anglo-Saxon King Alfred as the “innovator of a new naval order.” (John J. McCuster, *Alfred: The First Continental Flagship 1775–1778* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1973), 3.
8. “Journal of the Continental Congress, 30 October 1775,” reprinted in *NDAR*, Volume 2, 647.
9. “Extract of a letter from Philadelphia, Dated Nov. 18,” *Dunlap’s Maryland Gazette* (Baltimore, 21 November 1775), reprinted in *NDAR*, Volume 2, 1068.
10. The “Olive Branch Petition” was passed by Congress in July 1775 attempting to stave off total war. “The Declaration of the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms” was also passed in July 1775 and was written chiefly by Thomas Jefferson and John Dickinson.
11. Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making of the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Random House, 1997), passim.
12. Joseph J. Ellis, *American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies in the Founding of the Republic* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf/Random House, 2007), 20 (emphasis added by the author).
13. Geoffrey Seed, “A British Spy in Philadelphia,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (January 1961), 19.
14. George Washington was often called the “American Fabius” honoring him with the memory of Quintus Fabius Maximus (c.274–203 BCE), a Roman politician and general known for his delaying military tactics in facing a superior armed force in the Second Punic War. For this reason Fabius Maximus is sometimes considered the “father of guerrilla warfare.”
15. Maier, *American Scripture*, passim.

16. Allen French, *The First Year of the American Revolution* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), 20.
17. Gilbert Barkly to Sir Grey Cooper, Philadelphia, 11 September 1775, cited in Seed, "A British Spy in Philadelphia," 19.
18. David McCullough, *1776: "Orders from Nathaniel Greene . . ."* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 60.
19. Charles Rappleye, *Robert Morris: Financier of the American Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 36. In the summer and autumn of 1775, provincial Committees of Safety and the Continental Congress began accelerating their pursuit of gunpowder, supplies, and armaments, with Philadelphia merchant Robert Morris playing a pivotal role: "In September, the Congress called on Morris himself, and advanced him a total of eighty thousand pounds to obtain powder in Europe. It was by far the largest munitions contract Congress had yet made." (Rappleye, *Robert Morris*, 36—37.) In *Force*, there are numerous other accounts of additional materiel procurement during the summer and autumn of 1775.
20. "Letter from General Howe to the Earl of Dartmouth, Nov. 27, 1775," reprinted in Peter Force (comp.), *American Archives*, Series 4, Volume 3 (Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1837–1853), 1678.
21. Kevin Phillips, *1775: A Good Year for Revolution* (New York: Penguin Group, 2012), 343.
22. "Journal of the Continental Congress, December 2, 1776," reprinted in *NDAR*, Volume 2, 1231–1232.
23. *Ibid.*
24. John Paul Jones stated: "America has been the Country of my fond election, from the age of thirteen, when I first saw it. I had the honor to hoist, with my hands, the flag of Freedom, the first time it was displayed on the River Delaware; and I have attended it, with veneration, ever since on the ocean." Why would Jones use the term "flag of Freedom"? Aside from obvious allusions to American liberty and freedom, the context of his letter to Dutch Colonel Baron Van der Capellen was an attempt to answer the British press who Jones had thought "censured [him] unjustly." Although having been born in England, Jones explains "I do not inherit the degenerate spirit of that fallen Nation, which I at once lament and despise. It is far beneath me to reply to their hireling invectives: they are strangers to the inward approbation, that greatly animates and rewards the Man, who draws his sword only in support of the dignity of Freedom" (John Paul Jones, *Memoir of the American Revolution Presented to King Louis XVI of France by John Paul Jones*, trans. Gerard W. Gawalt [Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2001], 93).
25. On 2 December 1775 Esek Hopkins accepted his commission as Commander-in-Chief of Continental Navy ("Samuel Ward and Stephen Hopkins to Nicholas Cooke," reprinted in *NDAR*, Volume 2, 1233), and the day book of ship chandler James Wharton lists the quantity and cost of the fabric purchased for the Alfred's

- new ensign with a payment to flag-maker Margaret Manny (“Cr Margt Manny for makg an Ensign £ 1.2.8”), reprinted in *NDAR*, Volume 3, ed. William Bell Clark (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1968), 1380. John Paul Jones hoisted the Grand Union ensign for the first time on the Alfred the following day. Note the term “ensign” is used to signify a national flag when used at sea and is customarily flown from the “position of honor” at the stern of a vessel.
26. In loyalist Bernard Page’s effusively obeisant letter to Lord Dartmouth—at that time the expected approach toward nobility—he advances the often repeated notion of American frontiersmen being highly capable marksmen and soldiers. Evidently, Page’s agenda was to prevent the expansion of hostilities into a broader war by painting a dire picture for England: “In marching through woods, one thousand of these riflemen would cut to pieces ten thousand of your best troops. I don’t, my Lord, speak at random, or write partially. I have travelled too much among these men to be insensible of their abilities. O, my Lord! if your Lordship knew but one half what I know of America, your Lordship would not persist, but be instantly for peace, or resign. But, my Lord, construe this epistle as you please; nevertheless, my meaning is that it should not in the least convey, or even hint any thing about the legality or illegality of the unhappy dispute.” (Reprinted in Force, *American Archives*, Series 4, Volume 4, 358.)
 27. Dartmouth Papers, William Salt Library, Stafford, Staffordshire, England. “Permission to reproduce the letter in full was given by the then Earl of Dartmouth to Admiral William R. Furlong.” (Rear-Admiral William Rea Furlong and Commodore Byron McCandless, *So Proudly We Hail: The History of the United States Flag* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1981), 95. Bernard Page’s letter to Dartmouth can be found in Force, *American Archives*, Series 4, Volume 4, 358, and is also reproduced in *NDAR*.
 28. “The Town and County Magazine or Universal Repository of Knowledge, Instruction, and Entertainment for January, 1776,” *Domestic Intelligence* (Philadelphia, 6 December 1775), 54. This letter was also published in the *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* on 20 January 1776.
 29. “Intelligence from Philadelphia, Transmitted by Captain Hyde Parker, Jr., R.N., January 4, 1776,” reprinted in *NDAR*, Volume 3, 615–616.
 30. Edward W. Richardson, *Standards and Colors of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 63–64: “The above entry identifies Philadelphia seamstress, Margaret Manny, as the maker of the first United Colonies ensign for the Continental Navy.”
 31. “Naval Committee to Commodore Esek Hopkins, Philadelphia, 5 January 1776,” *NDAR*, Volume 3, 637–638.
 32. “Gilbert Barkley to Sir Gray Cooper, ‘per express to New York,’ Philadelphia, January 10, 1776,” *NDAR*, Volume 3, 721–722; *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* LXXXV (n.d.), 28–30, from the collection (Sir Henry Barkly Papers) of Mrs. Mona MacMillan of Long Whittenham, Berkshire, England. Sir

Grey Cooper was a Member of Parliament and Secretary of the Treasury. Gilbert Barkly, once a relatively successful merchant in Philadelphia, was the consignee for the East India Company's shipment of tea to Philadelphia on Captain Ayres's tea ship, *Polly* in 1773. This ship was sent back to England avoiding the more inflammatory result that had occurred in Boston.

33. British spy Gilbert Barkly, in an intelligence dispatch made on 20 May 1776, mentioned the Continental Navy as being referred to as the "American fleet" supporting the notion that both the fleet and its new flag embodied nationalistic characteristics. "Since my last 16th. March, the Ammerican fleet (as they are Called) arrived at New London in New England" (Seed, "A British Spy in Philadelphia," 32).
34. Like the aforementioned "Flag of America" ensign which was hoisted by John Paul Jones on the *Alfred*, most likely this "Union Flag 13 Stripes" purchased by Joseph Hewes was also made by Margaret Manny. Hewes, a congressional delegate from North Carolina, was also on the "committee charged with fitting out its newly acquired ships. The friendship between Jones and Hewes went back to Scotland where, as John Paul, the former joined a Masonic fraternity at Kircudbright; his application was attested by James Smith. This James Smith was the brother of Robert Smith, a partner of the mercantile firm of Hewes and Smith of Edenton, North Carolina, whom James later met when he came to the colonies. Another fellow townsman from Scotland was David Sproat, who settled in Philadelphia. When Jones went from Virginia to Philadelphia in the fall of 1775 to seek employment in the ships being fitted out by the Continental Congress, letters were addressed to him in care of David Sproat. By late September or early October Jones was in Philadelphia. Joseph Hewes arrived there on October 22. On October 30, Hewes was one of the four members added to the naval committee to hasten the work of outfitting the ships of the Continental Navy. As a member of that committee, Hewes may well have called upon Jones to help with the job" (Furlong and McCandless, *So Proudly We Hail*, 90). This may explain why Jones took part in the Grand Union flag-raising on 3 December 1775, while not having officially received his naval commission until 7 December.
35. Byron DeLear, "Who coined the name 'United States of America'? Mystery gets new twist," *Christian Science Monitor* (16 August 2012). The A PLANTER essay, number two of three, published in the *Virginia Gazette* on 6 April 1776, stands as the first publically printed evidence of the phrase "united states of America." Interestingly, Peter Force's *American Archives* describes the essay as a "political pamphlet" and in his transcription capitalizes "United States of America" whereas the *Virginia Gazette* renders it as "united states of America." The author made this discovery as part of research for this paper and was published by the *Christian Science Monitor*, NBC News, Yahoo News, the UK's *Daily Mail* among others. (Reprinted in Force, *American Archives*, Series 4, Volume 5, 798; "To the Inhabitants of Virginia," *Virginia Gazette* 1287, 6 April 1776.)

36. The term “ship of state” was popularized by book VI of Plato’s *Republic*. Written around 380 BCE, the use of the phrase compares the governance of a city-state to the command of a naval vessel.
37. Several flag histories such as *So Proudly We Hail* (1981) and *Our Flag Number* (National Geographic Society, 1917) identify this flag as being the Grand Union flag. John Bell, author and webmaster of the well-known *Boston 1775*, graciously shared his photo of the Selden powder horn and indicated doubt about this flag representing the Grand Union. He thought it might reveal a different and heretofore unknown flag. Firstly, the artist was working with accuracy limitations typically associated with scrimshaw; namely, a difficult medium to work with, an abstract *ad hoc* composition, and a lack of readily available precise information. Additionally, the spelling of America as “AMARACA” brings the artist’s level of literacy into some question only because it was such a common word in print. As clearly visible in Figure 11, the British Union “canton” is centered on the staff as opposed to being in the upper hoist corner of the flag, and in the middle of the flag’s field, is a “cross-hatch” etching pattern, an etching technique used to indicate color and shading. As there are no Revolutionary War flags yet discovered that feature a British Union “canton” centered on its field and staff, this hints at the possibility the artist produced poor flag renderings in general. Certainly the Pine Tree flag on the main topmast is a little coarse. Taking this into consideration, it seems that the best candidates for what the artist intended with this “striped/cross-hatch union flag” would be either a Red or Blue Ensign—or the Grand Union flag. Regarding stripes—upon closer inspection, one can see complete and uninterrupted stripes on both edges of the flag, three on top and two on the bottom. When you count *all* the uninterrupted “stripe lines” on the flag, including the “cross-hatched” ones, there are a total of fourteen solid lines which frame thirteen stripes. “Thirteen stripes” is one of the Grand Union’s chief characteristics being “emblematical of the thirteen united colonies,” and in numerous period primary sources is utilized to describe the flag. Thirteen stripes is a crucial clue which would seem to support the Grand Union flag theory—it would be more of a stretch to think that after engraving a union flag with thirteen stripes that the artist intended something other than the Grand Union flag. This pictorial evidence presents the Grand Union flag as a “national ensign” placing it in the Boston theatre approximately two months after the flag-raising event at Prospect Hill.
38. Two other primary sources in the first quarter of 1776 support the idea of the Grand Union flag embodying nationalistic characteristics: “Minutes of the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety, dated Feb 24, 1776: “That Capt. Proctor procure a Flagg Staff for the Fort, with a Flagg of the United Colonies.” (Reprinted in *NDAR*, Volume 4, ed. William Bell Clark (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1969), 71); and, the “Diary of Major Barnard Elliot” of the 2nd South Carolina Regiment, dated 9 March 1776: “If Men of War [are sighted] the New Provincial Flagg will be hoisted & lowered as many times as there are Men of War seen.” (Reprinted in *NDAR*, Volume 4, 277.) As mentioned in Peter Ansoff’s “Flags of the State Navies in the Revolutionary War” (*Raven* 17 [2010]: 23–46), Captain

Barnard Elliot described signal flags to report ships approaching the harbor and his 9 March 1776 entry states: “Johnsons Fort will hoist the old common blue Fort Flagg or Jack.” There is cause to believe this to be the blue Crescent flag of South Carolina being that it was made in September 1775 and that the “New Provincial Flagg” mentioned in the above quote possibly referred to the Grand Union flag. The February reference “Flagg of the United Colonies” (and possibly the aforementioned “New Provincial Flagg”) further establishes the contemporary perception of the Grand Union being the de facto “flag of America.” Because the Grand Union was described by numerous observers in “continental” and nationalistic terms immediately before and after the flag-raising event at Prospect Hill, there’s no compelling reason to think that General Washington and his staff were not aware of the new “union flag” by New Year’s Day, 1776.

39. During the Siege of Boston on 1 August 1775, a tall liberty pole was erected on Prospect Hill, a fortified high-ground overlooking the road to British-occupied Boston. The 76-foot-tall liberty pole was originally a ship’s mast that had been recently captured from the British armed schooner HMS *Diana*, in the aftermath of the Battle of Chelsea Creek on 27–28 May 1775.
40. George Washington to Joseph Reed, Cambridge, 4 January 1776, in *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745–1799*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, Vol. 4 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Officer, 1931), 210–211.
41. Peter Ansoff, “The Flag on Prospect Hill,” *Raven* 11 (2006): 77–100.
42. Chief among this bullet list is the 12 December 1775 reference to “Union Flag” because it uses the exact abbreviated description that Washington used in his account of the flag raising on Prospect Hill. Ansoff concludes Washington’s account to indicate a British Union flag rather than the new striped continental, or Grand Union flag. The 12 December record is from Philadelphia ship chandler James Wharton’s account book and can be found in *NDAR*, Volume 3, 1382. Wharton’s account book lists items procured for the outfitting of the first Continental Naval fleet consisting of two ships, two brigs, and a sloop (*Alfred*, *Columbus*, *Cabot*, *Andrew Doria*, and *Providence*). As mentioned, John Paul Jones had the distinction of hoisting what he termed the “Flag of America” (the Grand Union flag) for the first time on the *Alfred* on 3 December 1775. The 12 December reference lists “1 Union Flag” procured for the second ship of the Continental Navy, *Columbus*, which displaced 200 long tons and mounted 28 guns. For clarity on this primary source, the author contacted Dr. John Hattendorf, Ernest J. King Professor of Maritime History at the U.S. Naval War College, expert on sailing warships of the revolutionary era and author of several books and articles on the same. Hattendorf is credited with assisting the online publication of the Naval Documents of the American Revolution on www.navalrecords.org. Professor Hattendorf was of the opinion that “1 Union Flag” for the *Columbus* on 12 December 1775, could only refer to the Grand Union flag, as any “old colours,” namely, the

British Red Ensign or British Union flag, were readily available and not needed for the initial outfitting of the Continental Navy's first flotilla.

43. The *Virginia Gazette* 68 (17 May 1776) (A. Purdie, printer) used the term "UNION FLAG" to describe the Grand Union flag: "The UNION FLAG of the American states waved upon the capitol during the whole of this ceremony, which, being ended, the soldiers partook of the refreshment prepared for them by the affection of their countrymen, and the evening concluded with illuminations, and other demonstrations of joy; every one seeming pleased that the domination of Great Britain is now at an end, so wickedly and tyrannically has it been exercised for these twelve or thirteen years past, notwithstanding our repeated prayers and remonstrances for redress."
44. "Letters of Delegates to Congress: Volume 2, September 1775–December 1775, Naval Committee to the Virginia Convention, written by Richard Henry Lee," reprinted in *NDAR*, Volume 3, 640–641, and dated 5 January 1776. However, as Ansoff mentions, there is evidence to suggest this letter was written in December 1775, perhaps as early as 2 December, the day before the Grand Union's unveiling. If so, it stands as the first detailed description of the Grand Union flag. The Library of Congress website transcribes the date of this letter as 2 December, while the University of Virginia transcription leaves out the day, but indicates the month: "Philadelphia [December ?, 1775]." This confusion was primarily due to the fact that the fleet could not set sail due to ice and freezing conditions despite being ready in December. A footnote to "Letters to Delegates to Congress" states that Lee left it [the date] blank, "apparently in the expectation that it would be filled in later, and in which passages referring to vessels ordered to the Chesapeake are cast in the past tense, suggesting that the letter was to be sent when the fleet was ready to sail and the orders for its commander were ready." The fleet eventually cast off on 5 January. In the letter, Lee informs the Virginia Convention of the creation of the Continental Navy's first flotilla, a "small fleet of Armed Vessels," intended to "seize and destroy as many of the Enemies [*sic*] ships and Vessels as they can." To facilitate this mission, Lee makes the request for "a Person of unquestioned honor, understanding, and secrecy" to board the fleet when it arrives off the Capes of Virginia and provide the commander-in-chief with enemy intelligence. For the purposes of identification, Lee lists the fleet as consisting of "Two Ships, two Brigateens, and one Sloop,"—but for greater certainty in identifying the Americans—"the largest Ship [Alfred] will carry at her Mizzen Peak a Jack with the Union flag, and striped red and white in the field."
45. "Resolution of the Conventon [*sic*] of Virginia, Williamsburgh, May 11, 1776," reprinted in Force, *American Archives*, Series 4, Volume 6, 462: "On *Wednesday* last the honourable Convention of this Colony came to the unanimous resolution of giving instruction to our Delegates in Congress, at *Philadelphia*, to propose a final separation of these Colonies from *Great Britain*, by declaring them free and independent States. The day following the troops in this city, with the train of artillery, were drawn up, and went through their firings and various other military

- manoeuvres [*sic*], with the greatest exactness; a Continental union flag was displayed upon the Capitol, and in the evening many of the inhabitants illuminated their houses." A photographic image of the *Virginia Gazette* renders the pertinent phrase as, "continental union flag" (*Virginia Gazette* 1293 [18 May 1776], 3.)
46. "North Carolina Delegates in the Continental Congress to the North Carolina Council of Safety," reprinted in *NDAR*, Volume 3, 1205: "The colors [Grand Union flag] referred to were purchased by Joseph Hewes, from James Wharton, ship chandler, and charged for February 8, 1776. The bill is itemized in James Wharton's Day Book, HSP, and reads: 1 Union Flag 13 Stripes Broad Buntg and 33 feet fly."
 47. "Account of the sailing of the first American fleet, Newborn [*sic*], North-Carolina, February 9, 1776," reprinted in Force, *American Archives*, Series 4, Volume 4, 964: "They sailed from Philadelphia amidst the acclamations of many thousands assembled on the joyful occasion, under the display of a Union Flag, with thirteen stripes in the field, emblematical of the Thirteen United Colonies."
 48. *Virginia Gazette* (20 April 1776), 3: "Williamsburg, April 20: The Roebuck has taken two prizes in Delaware bay, which she decoyed within her reach by hoisting a Continental Union Flag, one containing 7000 stands of arms and quantity of ammunition, the other linens, &c. To counterbalance this disagreeable piece of news, soon after she had sailed with her prizes, a cargo of 1100 casks of gunpowder got safe up to Philadelphia." This report was republished in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* dated 20 June 1776.
 49. "Striped under the union with thirteen strokes" appears in several publications in various forms between March and late July 1776: "March 3, 1776. The colours of the American fleet (under Commodore Hopkins, which plundered the island of new Providence) were striped under the Union with 13 strokes, called the Thirteen United Colonies" (Henry B. Dawson, ed., *The Historical Magazine and Notes and Queries Concerning the Antiquities, History and Biography of America*, Vol. 3, Second Series [Morrisania, N.Y.: Henry B. Dawson, 1868], 299); "Letter from New Providence, Bahamas (after the Continental fleet's raid on New Providence)," dated 13 May 1776, printed in *London Ladies' Magazine* (July 1776): "The colors of the American fleet were striped under the Union, with thirteen strokes called the United Colonies, and their standard, a rattlesnake; motto—'Don't Tread on Me!'" (Naval History and Heritage Command, <http://www.history.navy.mil>); *Public Advertiser* dated Friday, 19 July 1776: "York, July 16. . . . The Colours of the American Fleet were striped under the Union with 13 strokes, called the Thirteen United Colonies" (reprinted in William James Morgan, ed., *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, Volume 6 [Washington, D.C.: Naval History Division, 1972], 477); and the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 22 July 1776: "The colours of the American fleet were striped under the Union with 13 strokes, called the Thirteen United Colonies" (*Edinburgh Evening Courant*, 22 July 1776, 2). George Henry Preble in his seminal works, "Our Flag . . ." (1872) and "History of the Flag . . ." (1880) transcribes "strokes" as "stripes."

50. "Account of the Meetings on the Evenings of Thursday, Friday and Saturday Last, and on Monday Morning, the 6th Instant, When it was Determined, by Large Majorities, to Send Deputies to a Provincial Congress Authorized to Choose Delegates to the Next Continental Congress," New York, Wednesday, 8 March 1775, reprinted in Force, *American Archives*, Series 4, Volume 2, 358.
51. Martin I. J. Griffin, *Stephen Moylan: Muster-Master General Secretary and Aide-de-Camp to Washington Quartermaster-General Colonel of Fourth Pennsylvania Light Dragoons and Brigadier-General of the War for American Independence* (Philadelphia: Garrett Press, 1909), 9.
52. George Washington, General Orders, Head Quarters, Cambridge, 1 January 1776, in *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745–1799*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, Volume 4, 202.
53. Letter from General Washington to Joseph Reed, urging his return to Head-Quarters: "Cambridge, January 23, 1776. DEAR SIR: Real necessity compels me to ask you, whether I may entertain any hopes of your returning to my family." (Reprinted in Force, *American Archives*, Series 4, Volume 4, 831.)
54. Griffin, *Stephen Moylan*, 9.
55. On 29 September 1775 "the Continental Congress resolved: That a Committee of three members of this Congress be appointed to repair immediately to the camp at Cambridge, to confer with General Washington, and with the governor of Connecticut, and the lieut-Governor of Rhode Island, the council of Massachusetts, and the President of the convention of New Hampshire, and such other persons as to the said Committee shall seem proper, touching the most effectual method of continuing, supporting, and regulating a continental army. The next day, the Congress chose 'Mr. Lynch, Dr. Franklin, and Mr. Harrison' to comprise that committee" (J. L. Bell, *General George Washington's Headquarters and Home—Cambridge, Massachusetts* [Damascus, Md.: Penny Hill Press Inc., U.S. Department of Interior, 2012], 540). Washington, his generals, representatives from several colonies, and this congressional oversight committee sat in council for five days in Washington's army headquarters on 18–22 October 1775. The civil-military conference generated plans, pay and regulations for the new army.
56. "Colonel Joseph Reed to Colonel John Glover and Stephen Moylan, Salem, Head Quarters (Cambridge), 20 October 1775," reprinted in *NDAR*, Volume 2, 538.
57. Edward W. Richardson, *Standards and Colors of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 267: "Lt. Col. Joseph Reed, Washington's Secretary in 1775, had returned to his native Philadelphia in late 1775. He had been with the Congressional Committee which conferred with Washington on needs and budget for the Army in October 1775. It was to Reed that Washington wrote his often quoted January 4, 1776 letter which mentioned the hoisting of the 'Union' flag before Boston on January 1, 1775 [*sic*, 1776].

Washington did not describe the flag to Reed. He speaks of it only as ‘the union flag’ which indicates that Reed knew the design.”

58. Ansoff, “The Flag on Prospect Hill,” 84.
59. “Extract of a Letter from a Captain of an English Transport at Boston to his Owners,” reprinted in Force, *American Archives*, Series 4, Volume 4, 710.
60. Ansoff mentions this “entirely red” flag as possibly being Israel Putnam’s regimental flag (3rd CT) as do other flag histories. If so, this flag had the “armorial bearings of Connecticut,” with an abbreviation for “Qui Trastulit Susinet” on one side and the words “An Appeal To Heaven” on the reverse. Nevertheless, from a distance, it still could have been perceived as “entirely red,” and functioned as such for both armies. It is possible it was just a “plain” red flag as described by the anonymous ship captain whose report was reprised by later secondary sources. Red flags were used in Rome as a military signal for the *Comitia Centuriata* to assemble on the Field of Mars, and, upon an enemy’s approach, the flag would be struck as a signal to prepare for battle. It was used as a signal for assembly in the American colonies, as a letter written by Governor Bernard from 1768 mentions, “The Sons of Liberty request all those, who in this Time of Oppression and Distraction, with well to, and would promote the Peace, good Order, and Security of the Town and Province, to assemble at Liberty Hall, under Liberty-Tree, on Tuesday the 14th Instant, at Ten o’ Clock Forenoon, precisely . . .—And in that Consequence thereof, a Red Flag was hoisted Yesterday in the Afternoon at Liberty-Tree” (*Letters to the Ministry from Governor Bernard, General Gage, and Commodore Hood. And also Memorials to the Lords of the Treasury from the Commissioners of the Customs. With Sundry Letters and Papers Annexed to the said Memorials* [Boston: Edes and Gill, 1769], 120). A red flag is also mentioned in a British report during the American Revolutionary war: “Pearson spied through the morning haze a red flag flying over old Scarborough Castle on the Yorkshire coastline. The red flag signaled, ‘Enemy on Our Shores’” (Evan Thomas, *John Paul Jones: Sailor, Hero, Father of the American Navy* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003], 179.) The Marquis De Lafayette, a very dear friend of Washington and a recent hero of the American Revolution, raised a red flag on the Champ de Mars (Field of Mars) in 1791 in Paris to indicate a state of martial law. Because the red flag was an established signal for “enemy on our shores” and used as a general signal for emergency, duress, or rebellion, Putnam’s nearly all-red regimental flag would have added import and be entirely appropriate for use on Prospect Hill during the Siege of Boston while the continentals reformed while besieging the “enemy on our shores.”
61. The anonymous merchant ship captain’s report mentions the “Rebels” burning the King’s speech. Being that the account was dated more than two weeks after the Prospect Hill flag-raising, it shows the British were eventually disenthralled of their initial reaction to the hoisting of the Grand Union flag and that the King’s speech was not received warmly by the Americans.

62. Lt. William Carter, *A genuine detail of the several engagements, positions, and movements of the Royal and American armies: with an accurate account of the blockade of Boston and a plan of the works on Bunker's Hill, at the time it was abandoned by His Majesty's forces* (London, n.p., 1785; reprinted by Sabin America Print Editions 1500–1926).
63. Emily Balcetis and David Dunning, “See What You Want to See: Motivational Influences on Visual Perception,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 91 (2006): 612–625: “People’s motivational states—their wishes and preferences—influence their processing of visual stimuli. In 5 studies, participants shown an ambiguous figure (e.g., one that could be seen either as the letter B or the number 13) tended to report seeing the interpretation that assigned them to outcomes they favored. This finding was affirmed by unobtrusive and implicit measures of perception (e.g., eye tracking, lexical decision tasks) and by experimental procedures demonstrating that participants were aware only of the single (usually favored) interpretation they saw at the time they viewed the stimulus. These studies suggest that the impact of motivation on information processing extends down into pre-conscious processing of stimuli in the visual environment and thus guides what the visual system presents to conscious awareness.” Wharton Marketing, “Motivated Visual Perception: Seeing What We Want to See,” marketing.wharton.upenn.edu: “People assume that their visual experiences accurately reflect reality. Research in our lab questions this supposition. Instead, we argue that motivational forces color the perceptual representations that reach perceivers’ awareness. Data suggest that higher-order social motivations originally considered relevant to the domain of social thought—motives such as wishful thinking, cognitive dissonance, and desires—bias visual perception.”
64. Sarah Harrison, “Do We Only See What We Want To See? Experts Don’t Notice A Gorilla In Their Midst, 21 July 2013, Science 2.0 (<http://www.science20.com>).
65. Thomas Paine in a revised edition of his popular pamphlet “Common Sense” commented on the king’s speech delivered to the Continental Army on New Year’s Day, 1776: “Since the publication of the first edition of this pamphlet, or rather, on the same day on which it came out [10 January 1776 in Philadelphia], the king’s speech made its appearance in this city. Had the spirit of prophecy directed the birth of this production, it could not have brought it forth at a more seasonable juncture, or at a more necessary time. The bloody-mindedness of the one, shows the necessity of pursuing the doctrine of the other. Men read by way of revenge: and the speech, instead of terrifying, prepared a way for the manly principles of independence” (Thomas Paine, *Common Sense; Addressed to the Inhabitants of America* [Philadelphia: W. and T. Bradford, 1776], 37). Paine further describes the speech in an article printed on 27 March 1776 in the *New England Chronicle*: “The Speech if it may be called one, is nothing better than a wilful [*sic*] audacious libel against the truth, the common good, and the existence of mankind; and is a formal and pompous method of offering up human sacrifices to the pride of tyrants. But this general massacre of mankind is one of

the privileges, and the certain consequence of Kings; for as nature knows them NOT, they know NOT HER, and although they are beings of our OWN creating, they know not US, and are become the gods of their creators. The Speech hath one good quality, which is, that it is not calculated to deceive, neither can we, even if we would, be deceived by it. Brutality and tyranny appear on the face of it." In his article, Paine possibly alludes to Washington's own opinion of independence: "I shall chiefly confine my farther remarks to the following heads. First. That it is the interest of America to be separated from Britain. Secondly. Which is the easiest and most practicable plan, RECONCILIATION OR INDEPENDANCE? With some occasional remarks. In support of the first, I could, if I judged it proper, produce the opinion of some of the ablest and most experienced men on this continent; and whose sentiments, on that head, are not yet publicly known." Washington in a letter to Reed in January mentions independence and Paine's popular and persuasive pamphlet: "A few more of such flaming arguments, as were exhibited at Falmouth and Norfolk, added to the sound doctrine and unanswerable reasoning contained in the pamphlet "*Common Sense*," will not leave numbers at a loss to decide upon the propriety of a separation" (George Washington to Joseph Reed, Cambridge, 31 January 1776, in *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745–1799*, Vol. 4, 297).

66. Byron DeLear, "Who coined 'United States of America'? Mystery might have intriguing answer," *Christian Science Monitor*, 4 July 2013. On 2 January 1776 a letter to Lt. Col. Joseph Reed—Washington's favorite military secretary—was composed in the Continental Army Headquarters at Cambridge. The author was Stephen Moylan, esq., the Muster-Master General of the Continental Army, and in Reed's absence, Washington's aide-de-camp. While assisting the general the two men had lived with him in the Army Headquarters in Cambridge as members of—as Washington put it—"his family." Moylan wrote that he wished to carry the "full and ample powers from the United States of America" to Europe to assist in the revolutionary enterprise—most likely procuring much needed armaments and gunpowder. Their shortage of powder so desperate, at one point, orders had actually been issued to use wooden harpoons instead of guns. Moylan, born in Cork, Ireland, had been educated in Paris and worked in the shipping business in Lisbon before becoming a merchant in Philadelphia. He had partnered with many prominent business leaders in Philadelphia including co-owning a ship with Robert Morris, "the financier of the American Revolution." Moylan's experience as a merchant is what prompted another leading Philadelphian, John Dickinson, to write a letter of reference paving the way for the Irish immigrant's appointment as Muster-Master General of the Continental Army (George Washington to John Dickinson, Camp at Cambridge, 30 August 1775, in *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745–1799*, Vol. 3, 459).

67. Moylan letter as detailed in n66.

68. On Christmas Day, 1775—eight days before his “USA” letter—Washington’s aide-de-camp Stephen Moylan, esq., inscribed on the flap of a document, “On the service of the United Colonies.” The day after Prospect Hill, on 2 January 1776, Moylan expressed his wish “to take the full and ample powers from the United States of America” to Spain to assist in the revolutionary enterprise (see n66).
69. Joseph J. Ellis, *Revolutionary Summer: The Birth of American Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 10–11.
70. Lt. William Carter wrote: “A genuine detail of the several engagements, positions, and movements of the Royal and American armies: with an accurate account of the blockade of . . .” (Lt. William Carter, *A genuine detail of the several engagements*). The semi-colon after Mount Pisga has been removed according to publisher’s notes at the end of Carter’s diary publication.
71. Following the two-flag conclusion, Ansoff suggests the second flag could have been a “striped signal flag.” He writes that, “One can only speculate about what, if any, flag was really hoisted under the Union Flag on that historic day. Perhaps it was one of the signal flags that were commonly flown on Prospect Hill. Washington might have simply failed to mention it because it was not pertinent to the point he was making to Reed. Carter, on the other hand, might have seen a striped signal flag and assumed, in light of the salutes and cheers, that it was intended to represent the colonies.”
72. Dawson, *The Historical Magazine*, Vol. 3, Second Series, 299. (See n49 for a complete listing of publications citing this account.)
73. Naval History and Heritage Command (<http://www.history.navy.mil>).
74. “Captain John Chapman, R.N., to Vice Admiral James Young, Shark in Fort St. Pieres Bay, Martinico, [29] July 1776,” reprinted in *NDAR*, Volume 5, 1278.
75. Paul K. Longmore, *The Invention of George Washington* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 191.
76. Danielle Dreilinger, “Unfurling History of Prospect Hill,” *Boston Globe*, 31 December 2009 (online edition).
77. George Washington, General Orders, Head Quarters, Cambridge, 1 January 1776, in *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745–1799*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, Volume 4, 202.
78. Dreilinger, “Unfurling History of Prospect Hill.”
79. There is also the possibility the Grand Union flag—as a transitional device—was intentionally created with ambiguous components communicating conflicting loyalties. If this is the case, Washington’s letter to Reed was confirming the intended and/or anticipated effect.
80. Ansoff, “The Flag on Prospect Hill,” 77–100.

81. George Canby and Lloyd Balderston, *The Evolution of the American Flag* (Philadelphia: Ferris & Leach, 1909), 35: “The letter is a long one, dated July 25th, 1776, and contains the following passage: “They have set up their standard in the fort upon the southern end of the town. Their colours are thirteen stripes of red and white, alternately, with the English Union cantoned in the corner.” This reference to the Grand Union flag flying over an American fort in New York is also reprised in Samuel Abbott’s *The Dramatic Story of Old Glory* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919), 25: “Ambrose Searle, Confidential Secretary of Admiral Lord Howe of the British Navy, in a letter written July 25, 1776, spoke of the Grand Union flag at New York” and cites the same quote as Canby and Balderston. The Ambrose Searle letter is also referenced in *A Guide to Manuscripts Relating to American History in British Depositories: Reproduced for the Division of Manuscripts of the Library of Congress: “Ambrose Serle [sic] to the Earl of Dartmouth, A. L. S. New York Harbor, off Staten Island. July 25, 1776. No. 2040”* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 1946), 213. The primary source is: “Ambrose Searle to the Earl of Dartmouth, July 25, 1776,” facsimile in *B. F. Stevens’s Facsimiles of Manuscripts in European Archives Relating to America, 1773–1783*, 24 (London: Malby & Sons, 1889), 2040.
82. “Account of General Howe’s Retreat From Boston, Cambridge, March 21, 1776,” reprinted in Force, *American Archives*, Series 4, Volume 5, 422.
83. The rank of ensign traditionally denotes the junior officer charged with bearing the ensign colors, or national flag. In Noah Webster’s, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), 671, “ensign” is described as “The officer who carries the flag or colors, being the lowest commissioned officer in a company of infantry.”
84. “Dear Sir, Your letters of the 4th from New York—7th and—from Philadelphia (the last by Express) are all before me” (George Washington to Joseph Reed, Camp at Cambridge, 20 November 1775, in *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745–1799*, Vol. 4, 103). As cited by the National Archives these two letters from Reed are missing. From George Washington to Joseph Reed, Cambridge, 27th Novr 1775. “Dear Sir, Your Letter of the 16th by post now lyes [sic] before me,” As cited by the National Archives this 16 November 1775 letter from Reed is missing. Similarly, the National Archives cites additional missing Reed letters from 15, 17, 20, 21, and 28 November and 2, 7, 8, and 11 December 1775. These numerous missing letters cover a critical period of time immediately preceding and following the Grand Union’s first unveiling on the Delaware on the Continental Navy’s flagship *Alfred*. Reed was author of one of the only flag directives of the immediate period. Further, there may be additional missing Washington letters or documents that aren’t referenced explicitly, but were culled by Tobias Lear or merely lost.
85. Richard Zacks, *The Pirate Coast: Thomas Jefferson, the First Marines, and the Secret Mission of 1805* (New York: Hyperion, 2005), 218.

86. David Koeller, PhD, Professor of History at North Park University, Chicago, Ill., "Using Historical Sources, <http://www.unc.edu/~branhunz/hist151/documents/Hist151ReaderFall.pdf>: "Primary Sources do not speak for themselves, they have to be interpreted. That is, we can't always immediately understand what a primary source means, especially if it is from a culture significantly different from our own. It is therefore necessary to try to understand what it means and to figure out what the source can tell us about the past."