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## Hidden lessons in the flag

By **Dustin R. Strong**  
dstrong@morningsun.net

*"Resolved. That the flag of the thirteen United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation."*

—Second Continental Congress, 14 June 1777

Two hundred forty-seven years ago, the Founding Fathers first laid out the basic design for the official flag of a new country. Many flag makers played with the design, sometimes inserting a blue stripe or rearranging the stars in the canton. It wasn't until 1912 that the design of the flag became standardized.

We are all familiar with the symbolism of the flag. The stripes represent the 13 original colonies that freed themselves from British rule; the stars represent each state, with a new star being added on the Independence Day after a new state is admitted.

But there is a hidden geography as well. Look at the design relationship between the stripes and the canton. When each of the colonies were first founded, they claimed territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific, but as more were established, some had to relinquish these claims, but the desire to tame the continent never waned in us as a people.

Imagine the blue field representing the Great

Lakes and the fly edge of the stripes as the eastern seaboard. Notice there are seven stripes that do not pass the Great Lakes. Of the 13 colonies, seven are hemmed in by the lakes or other states: New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, and Delaware. The remaining six — Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia — extend all the way across the flag, across the continent, to the Pacific.

The field of stars is an interesting design choice. Maybe it symbolizes the first English settlers arriving in America or explorers and pioneers settling of the continent, using the stars to navigate westward as people looked for a new life, a fresh start, and a bright future. It could symbolize the heavens as man looks for guidance from a greater power or to explore space itself. We are, after all, the only country to ever land a human on another celestial body — and bring them home safely.

There is another hidden lesson within the flag, one that the Founding Fathers could not have seen but is still there, hiding among the stripes. Over almost two and half centuries, nearly 1.3 million American soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines have given their lives in service to the country, or 100,000 Americans for each stripe. And for further con-

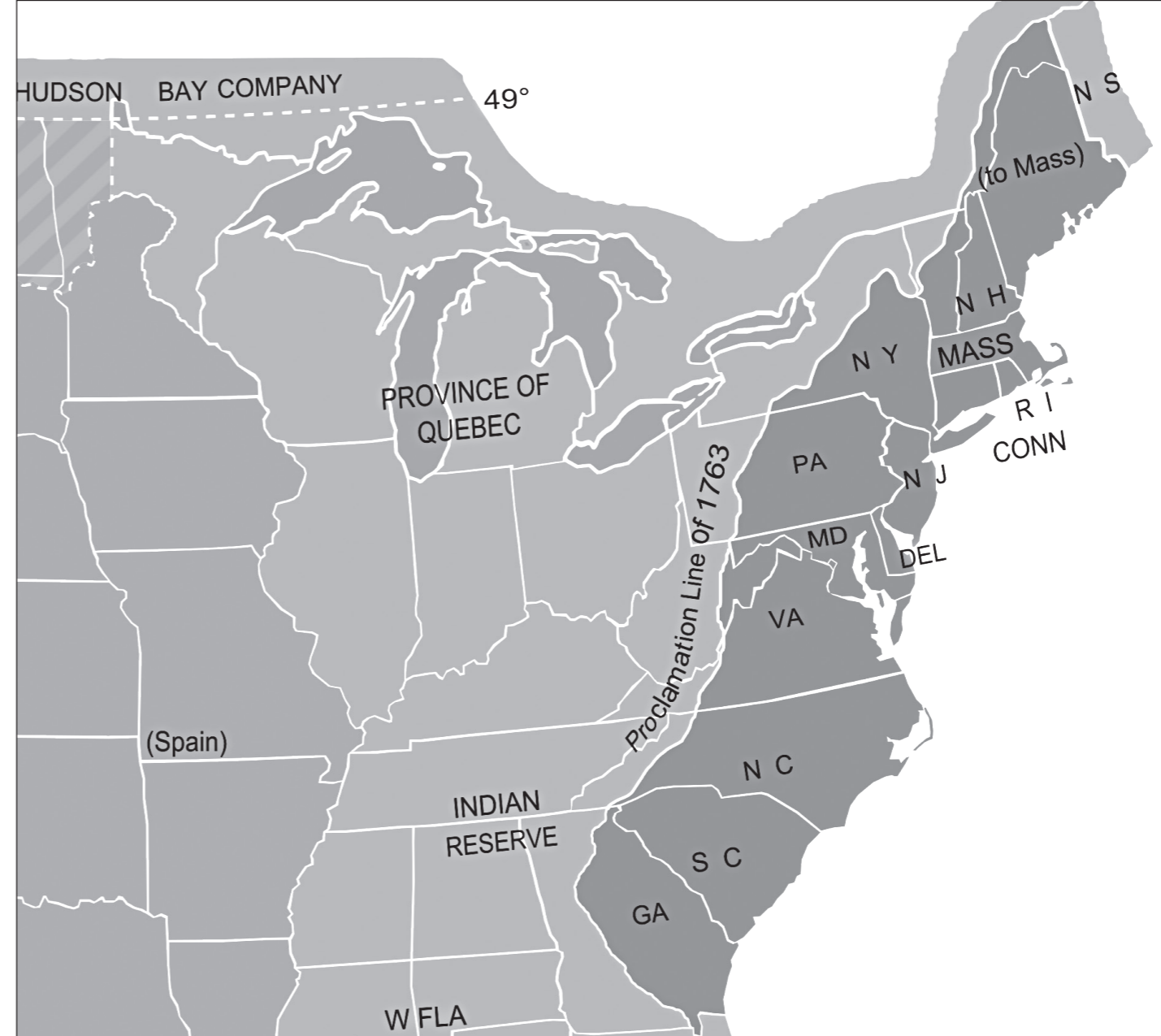
text, 10 of those stripes are just for the Civil War and World War II.

Even the colors are symbolic. White represents purity and innocence; blue is vigilance and justice; and red is for valor and hardiness. These are our aspirations, what we as a country strive to be. We are to be the Beacon Upon the Hill, a shining example to the rest of the world.

While we often tend to fall short of those lofty goals, we never stop trying. Winston Churchill said that Americans will always do the right thing, eventually, after they've tried everything else. Several times in our short existence, we have been on the wrong side of history and have many skeletons in our national closet, but we have always, in the long run, tried to plot the right and honorable course among our stars. Our triumphs far outweigh our failures.

Lastly, the choice to have multiple colors on our flag. We have always been a melting pot of races, religions, ethnicities and cultures. More so than any other nation on the planet. From the beginning, we were a diverse nation and that has always been one of our greatest strengths as a people. Like those three colors, we are inexorably tied together by the threads of history.

*From the many, one. E pluribus unum.*



The Thirteen Colonies in 1775 with modern borders overlaid

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