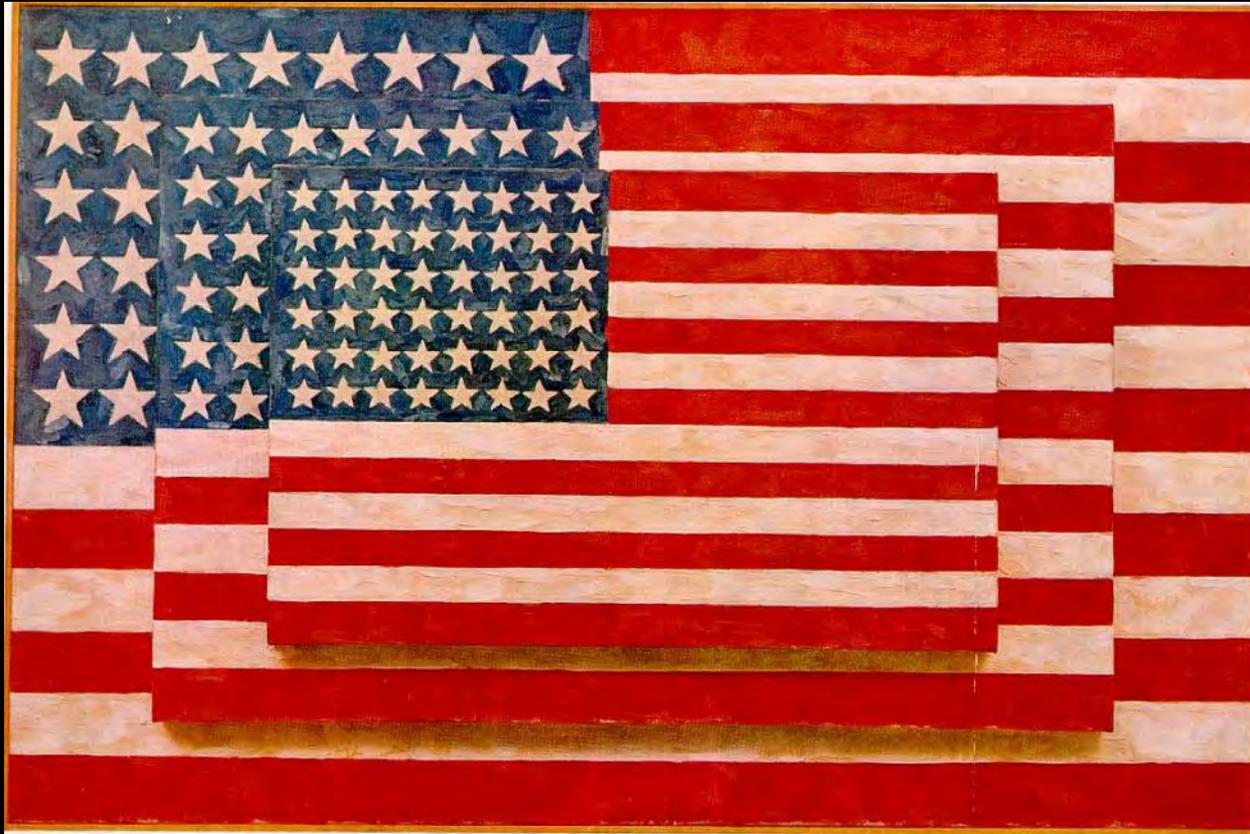


American Flag Redux



The American flag serves as the primary patriotic image of our nation. But its power also works in reverse: the more we see it, the less we *know* it as something personal. We celebrate the unity of a democratic Republic in its stars and stripes, but the flag also infers the concept of the individual, “free” citizen that resides in the republic.



Which asks the question: Can our nation be truly “united” and coherent in an aggressively *individualistic* society?

Three Flags, Jasper Johns, 1958

Because of its high profile and easy recognition, the American flag has been used by visual artists as a means of asking another question: how is an individual's identity intertwined with our nations' actions and ambitions?

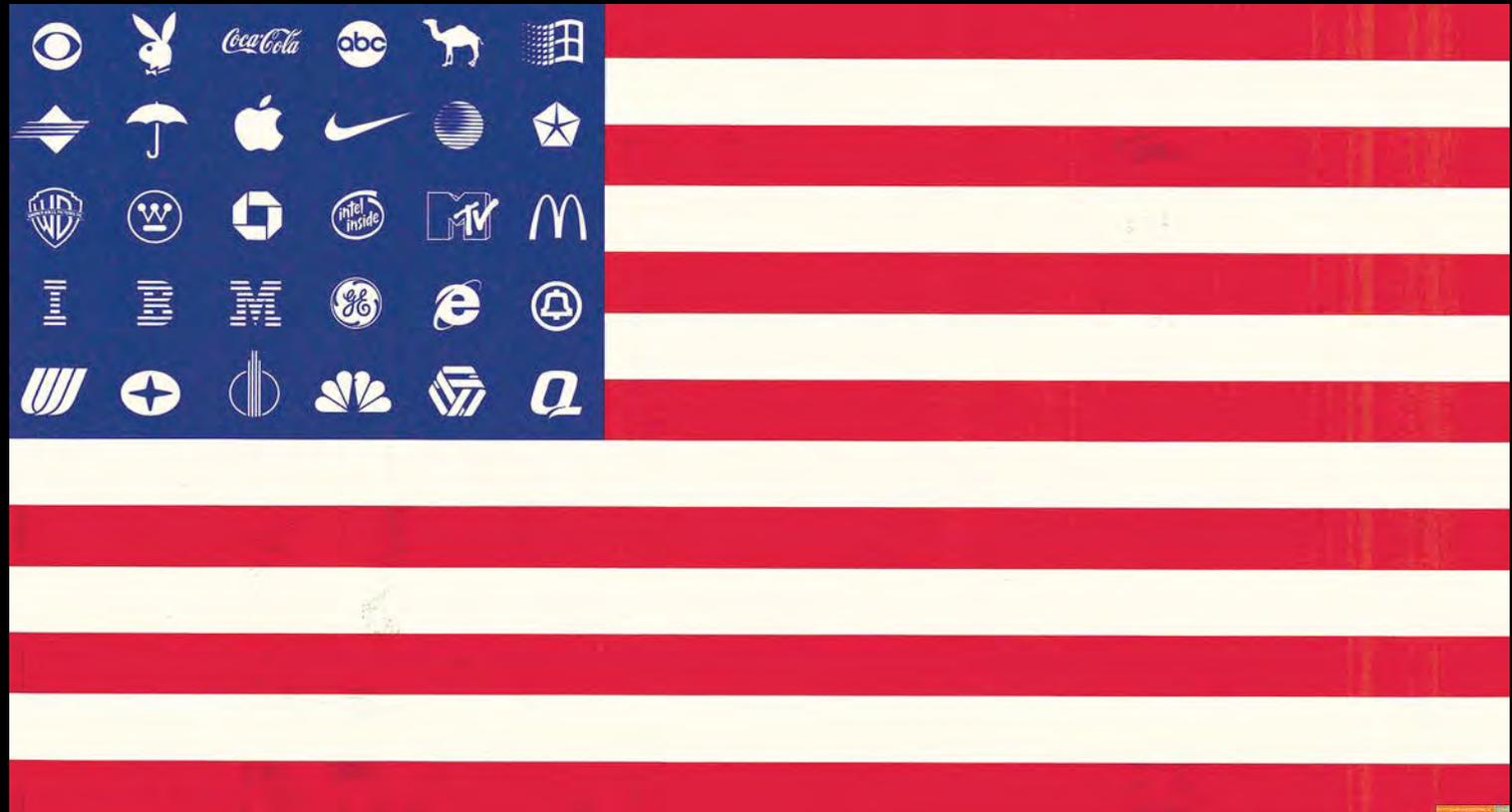


U.N.I.A., David Hammons, 2000



In its role as a universal symbol, the flag can be manipulated according to the needs of its user.

Undercarriage of Stealth bomber, USAF



Corporate America Flag, designer unknown

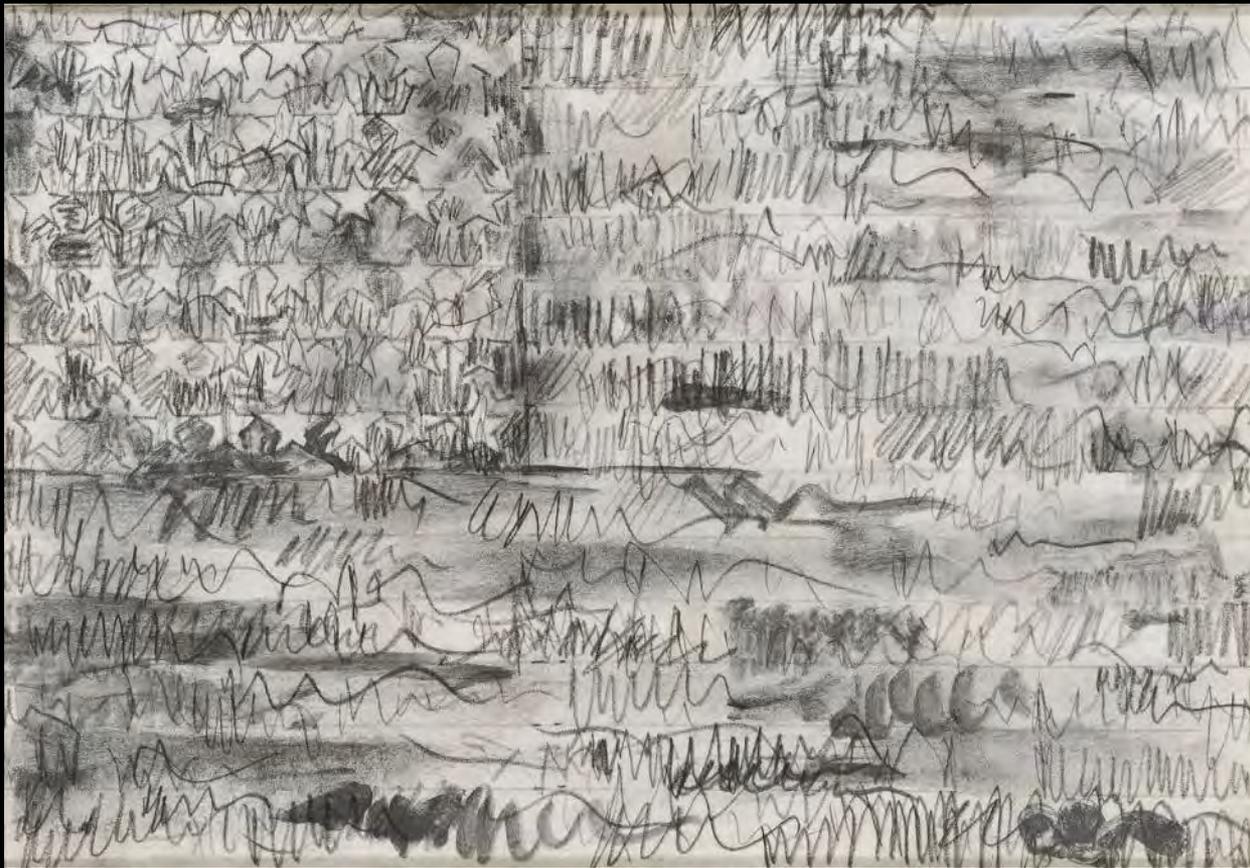


Sometimes the flag's symbolism is stretched far beyond its normal use.



And sometimes it is used as a way of relating to America's history, a history that the flag itself obscures.

1851, Tony de los Reyes, 2009



So we are left with an interesting image to relate to, an image that is well-known and consistent, yet one that derives its power from what it *implies*. The slightest change in its structure makes us aware of this.

Flag, Jasper Johns, 1958

SBMA High School Lesson Plan – Tony de los Reyes/*Chasing Moby-Dick*

Title: American Flag Redux

Thesis: Contrary to its operation as a fixed icon, the American flag exists as an “open symbol” in that its social utility is flexible and continually under scrutiny. It serves as the primary patriotic image of our nation, but its power also works in reverse: its ubiquity belies the vulnerability at the core of American democracy. For as we celebrate the unity of the American Democratic Republic in its stars and stripes, the flag also infers the concept of the individual, “free” citizen that resides in the republic. A question then arises: How can states be truly “united” and coherent in an aggressively individualistic society?

Project: Students are asked to redesign the American flag according to a personal philosophy that incorporates both their role as a citizen and as a *critical response* to their image of the state of the union.*

Specifics: This reimagining of the flag can be accomplished either as a new graphic (which can be made with paint, colored pencil, etc., or digitally), or as a collage with inlaid images. The key is to keep the flag essentially “readable” in its basic contemporary design of fifty stars and thirteen stripes. Teachers can find simple black and white outline drawings of the flag with which to begin the composition of student work (google images of “American flag outline”).

Context: It is important to remind the student is that this is not a desecration of the flag, or even an explicitly political act, but rather a way of viewing the flag more personally through the creation of a new paradigm. The flags may be complex or simple, contain photographic images or be abstracted, but regardless students must be able to *argue their design* as a critical response. (Written responses in particular are valued) This project is an exercise of analyzing how the nation traditionally represents itself versus how it actually operates in the mind of the student.

Ideally, a PowerPoint presentation should precede this project, along with student input regarding how they see the American flag, the concepts behind America, and the idea of citizenship. The teacher should encourage debate and personal responses as a means of inspiring interesting results.

*See definition of “The State of the Union” address as given by the President:

“He shall from time to time give to Congress information of the State of the Union and recommend to their Consideration such measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.”

— Article II, Section 3 of the U.S. Constitution