



ICONIC AMERICA: THE UNITED STATES MAP AS A NATIONAL SYMBOL

Highlights from the Fondersmith Collection of Cartographic Ephemera

September 11, 2012 to February 28, 2013



The focus of this exhibition is the widespread use in modern American culture of the outline map of the United States of America. So widespread is this motif, so pervasive its use, that it can truly be called “iconic.”

Americans began to search for symbols to represent their cultural unity even in the colonial era. With the Revolution and the War of 1812, the use of nationalistic symbols for the new country proliferated to encompass the eagle, the flag, Lady Liberty, and Uncle Sam.



Use of this patriotic quartet was quite unrestrained and they were used on all manner of everyday things, from pottery to pictures, carpentry to clothing. A persistent backdrop to *American* culture, and increasingly mass-produced, these patriotic icons have especially flourished throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century in times both of war and of the Centennials that celebrate U.S. history. Their use most recently surged in response to the events of September 11th, 2001.

“Logo maps” — outline maps of a country that can be used in conjunction with other imagery to help create a sense of national identity — appear only occasionally in the nineteenth century U.S.A., and then only for individual states. The modern boundary of the continental U.S.A. was achieved with the Gadsden Purchase of 1853, yet there remained a popular sense that future growth was still possible until the aftermath of World War I.

Although a late recruit to the pantheon of patriotic symbols, the logo map of the U.S.A. has become a potent symbol of Americanness.



Indeed, the outline of contiguous 48 states was so well established in the public mind that its use to represent the U.S.A. was quite unaffected by the addition of Alaska and Hawaii to the Union in 1959, as the 49th and 50th states. In atlases, Alaska and Hawaii are routinely crammed into the lower corner of the U.S. map, at different scales to the main map of the country. And it is very difficult to include the new states in coherent objects, like lapel pins. In the modern language of iconography, the shape of the Lower 48 is the United States of America.



In the second-half of the twentieth century, the growing awareness among advertisers and manufacturers of the map icon’s broad appeal to consumers led them increasingly to incorporate and exploit the map icon as a marketing tool to promote their commercial products. Like the ubiquitous sports logos, companies specializing in political paraphernalia have applied the patriotic map icon to T-shirts, baseball caps, and mugs as well as the more traditional campaign buttons and pins. A favorite device is to combine multiple patriotic symbols into one image.

This exhibition reveals the manner in which the outline map of the U.S.A. has pervaded our modern culture, from sporadic instances in the 1800s to the great variety in the 1900s of political cartoons and presidential campaign memorabilia, jewelry, puzzles and games, book and magazine covers, and mass-produced souvenirs. Unless otherwise noted, the materials displayed here have been loaned by John Fondersmith from his personal collection of what he calls *UShapia*.





Introduction

1. John Sperry. *This Land is Your Land* (ca. 2001). Tin and acrylic paint, 32 x 58 cm.
2. Eagle and Stars and Stripes Beach Towel. 75 x 151 cm.
3. Michael Bierut. *American Smile*. Illustration for *The Atlantic*, 2007. Facsimile.
4. Nam June Paik. *Electronic Superhighway: Continental USA* (1995). Smithsonian American Art Museum. 51 x 92 cm. Facsimile.

Creating the Iconic Map

1. Benjamin Franklin. *Join, or Die*. From: *The Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia, 1754). 32 x 25 cm. Facsimile. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.
2. Sayer & Bennett. *The Theatre of War in North America* (London, 1776). Engraving, 73 x 53 cm. Osher Collection.
3. John Wallis. *The United States of America Laid down from the Best Authorities* (London, 1783). Engraving, 49 x 58 cm. Osher Collection.
4. Mathew Carey. *Map of the United States of America* (Philadelphia, 1814). Engraving, 38 x 46 cm. Osher Collection.
5. Isaac Moore. *The Eagle Map of the United States* (Philadelphia: E. L. Carey & A. Hart, 1833). Engraving, 38 x 48 cm. Facsimile. Courtesy of Boston Public Library.
6. John Melish. *United States of America* (Philadelphia, 1821). Engraving, 44 x 54 cm. Osher Collection.
7. George Cram. *Map Showing the Territorial Growth of the United States, 1776-1887*. From: *Cram's Universal Atlas of the World* (Philadelphia, ca. 1888). Lithograph, 26 x 33 cm. OML Collections.
8. Jean Alexandre C. Buchon. *Carte de l'adjonction progressive des divers états au territoire et a l'union constitutionnelle des Etats-Unis de l'Amerique du Nord* (Paris, 1828). 39 x 64 cm. Osher Collection.

9. J. H. Young. *A New Map of the United States of America* (Philadelphia: Cowperthwait, DeSilver & Butler, 1850). Lithograph, 42 x 65 cm. Osher Collection.
10. Civil War Political Cartoons (in facsimile): *The Hercules of the Union Slaying the Great Dragon of Secession* (71 x 51 cm); *The True Issue or That's What's the Matter* (27 x 36 cm); *The Dis-United States or the Southern Confederacy* (24 x 33 cm). Courtesy of Boston Public Library.

Folk Art Maps



1. Rand McNally & Company. *Political & Commercial Map of the United States* (Chicago, 1921). With buttons attached ca. 1950. 41 x 60 cm.
2. *Map of the United States* (ca. 1850). Embroidered on linen, 33 x 44 cm. Osher Collection.
3. Map Quilt (1886). 198 x 208 cm. Facsmile. Courtesy of the Collection American Folk Art Museum, New York.
4. Jasper Johns. *Map of the United States* (1963). 198 x 314 cm. Facsimile poster of the original at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
5. Gregory Beauchamp. *States United* (2011). Silk screen, 63 x 50 cm.

Political Campaign Memorabilia

1. *Reagan Country* (ca. 1980). Poster. 57 x 72 cm.
2. Richard Nixon. Autographed photograph (November, 1972). 29 x 36 cm.





3. *America Needs McGovern: He can put it together* (ca. 1972). Collage, 75 x 58 cm.
4. The Art Press, Inc. *LBJ for the USA* (Chicago: 1964). Poster, 52 x 33 cm.
5. *Convention Time U.S.A.: Crossroads at the Stockyards*. Cover of *Time* 60, no. 32 (14 July 1932). 34 x 26 cm.
6. *Wear A Button: Help Keep U.S. out of War, Stay Neutral* (1939). 28 x 22 cm.
7. Assorted Political Buttons (1952-2008)
6. *World Impressions. Pro-Basketball* (nd). 20 x 26 cm.
7. *First State Quarters of the United States Collector Map* (1999-2008). 45 x 70 cm. Courtesy of Pat Picton.

Political Cartoons

Political cartoonists have successfully adopted the map as a visual metaphor. Because they effectively convey a message in visual shorthand, cartoons often accompany editorials in newspapers. Two in particular, Herb Block and Christophe Vorlet, have examined this motif throughout their careers.



Games and Puzzles

1. *Dissected Map of the United States* (Springfield, Mass.: Milton Bradley, Inc., ca. 1917-1918). 30 x 26 cm. Osher Collection.
2. *Game of Airmail* (Springfield, Mass.: Milton Bradley Co., 1930). 17 x 32 cm. Osher Collection.
3. *Streamlined Train Game* (Rexall, 1936). 37 x 53 cm. Osher Collection.
4. *The United States Puzzle* (Atlanta, Ga.: A Broader View, Inc., nd). 22 x 32 cm. Naden Collection.
5. White Mountain Puzzles. *United States Presidents: 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle* (2007). 61 x 76 cm. Osher Collection.



Acknowledgments

This exhibition was designed by guest curator John Fondersmith to showcase his personal collection, with assistance from Yolanda Theunissen and Matthew Edney. The staff of OML's imaging center, Ron Levere, David Neikirk, and Adinah Barnett, digitized selected items from the Fondersmith Collection; Roberta Ranley cataloged the materials on display; Katherine Otterson designed and executed the exhibition checklist; Renee Keul created the K-12 outreach activities; USM students Matthew O. Carter and Krista Jamison assisted with research and photography; Stuart Hunter installed the collection.

Special thanks to the following individuals, listed alphabetically, for permission to reproduce select images:

- Georgia Barnhill and Lauren Hewes, American Antiquarian Society, for Ben Franklin's 1754 snake image;
- Michael Beirut for his "American Smile" logo, an illustration originally commissioned by *The Atlantic* for its 150th anniversary issue in November 2007;
- Phil Foster for his artwork originally commissioned by *The Washington Post* in 1993;





- Ron Grim, of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, Boston Public Library, for the 1833 “Eagle Map” and selection of Civil War era cartoons;
- The Herblock Foundation for permission to reproduce two political cartoons;
- Stacy Hollander, American Folk Art Museum, for the 1886 *Map Quilt*;
- Carrie Hoppenjans, Wabash National, for the truck mudflap and coffee mug;
- Robert Ouelette for his Music Box, created in 2002 to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of Thomas Moser;
- Patty Rhule, Newsseum, for the *Time* magazine cover of July 14, 1952;
- Christophe Vorlet for his selection of political cartoons.
- Jonathan Blumberg for his 2012 composite map, titled *United States of Ushapia*, of images of over 100 items from the Fondersmith Collection.



John’s interest in maps was first stimulated by his father. Later, in his professional career, he worked with maps in some manner almost every day: after receiving his MS in urban planning from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1963, he spent thirty-five years in Washington, D.C.’s Office of Planning, where his work focused on the revitalization of the downtown. This work led him also to collect architectural and urban guidebooks and to prepare a newsletter, *American Urban Guidenotes: The Newsletter of Guidebooks* (1979 to 1987).

John is a charter member and former president of the Washington Map Society. The public debut of his collection was in a 1992 presentation to the society, which was printed in the Fall 1992 issue of the society’s newsletter, *The Portolan*, shown here. In 1990 he coined *UShapia* to describe the motif of the U.S. outline map by combining *US* and *shape*.

It is his sincere hope that *Iconic America* will spur further interest, discussion, and research on the symbolic use of the US map as logo. The “shape of the nation” is truly an important part of the American experience and the formation of a common American identity — once you start noticing them, you too will quickly realize just how ubiquitous and unremarked are these powerful symbols of “America.”

The Fondersmith Collection

The materials displayed in this exhibition represent only a small portion of the collection of cartographic ephemera — specifically images and objects that depict the continental shape of the United States of America — assembled by John Fondersmith over more than thirty years. John has always been fascinated by the ways in which the USA’s distinctive outline has been used as a logo for “Americanness” in a wide variety of contexts and forms. The collection continues to grow as John and his wife, Mary, acquire further items that they encounter on their travels, in their reading, and in their life generally.

