

Mississippi flag: Magnolia could replace old rebel symbol



The magnolia centered banner chosen Wednesday, Sept. 2, 2020 by the Mississippi State Flag Commission flies outside the Old State Capitol Museum in downtown Jackson, Miss. The nine member committee voted to recommend a design with the state flower. That design will go on the November ballot for voters consideration and if approved, it will become the new state flag. (AP Photo/Rogelio V. Solis)

Associated Press
Mississippi voters will decide whether to accept a new state flag with a magnolia to replace an old one legislators retired under pressure because it included the Confederate battle emblem that's widely seen as racist.

A commission voted 8-1 Wednesday, September 2, to recommend the magnolia over one other final design that featured a shield with wavy lines representing water.

"We'll send a message that we live in the future and not in the past," former Mississippi Supreme Court Justice Reuben Anderson, the flag commission chairman, said after the vote.

The single design will go on the November ballot. If voters accept the design, it will become the new state flag. If they reject it, the design process will start anew — and Mississippi will remain a state without a flag for a while longer.

The commission decided Wednesday that leading to the November election, it will promote the magnolia flag by calling it the "In God We Trust" flag.

"More than any other time in our country, we need the mercy and grace of God," said commission member TJ Taylor, who is an attorney and policy director for the state House speaker.

After the meeting Wednesday, the magnolia flag was raised on a pole outside the Old Capitol Museum in Jackson, where it fluttered in a brisk breeze.

Later in the day, Republican Gov. Tate Reeves praised the magnolia design.

"I think they did a good job," Reeves said. "It's, I think, a well-done flag."

Legislators shelved the Confederate-themed flag two months ago against the backdrop of widespread protests over racial injustice.

The flag had been divisive for decades in a state with a 38% Black population. The final push for change came from business, education, religious and sports groups — including, notably, the Mississippi Baptist Convention and the Southeastern Conference.

By law, the new flag cannot include the Confederate battle flag, and it must have the phrase, "In God We Trust." Requiring the religious phrase on the new flag helped persuade some conservative legislators to retire the old one.

The public submitted nearly 3,000 designs. The commission — with members appointed by the governor, lieutenant governor and House speaker — narrowed the choices to the final two last week.

Creators of the final designs said their work reflects a love for Mississippi and a desire for a banner that a wide range of people can fly with pride.

The magnolia flag has the state flower on a dark blue background with red bars on either end. The flower is encircled by stars representing Mississippi as the 20th state. It also has a single star made of diamond shapes representing the Native American people who lived on the land before others arrived.

The magnolia flag is a combination of elements submitted by six people. Four live in Mississippi, and the others live in San Francisco and Massachusetts.

Graphic designer Rocky Vaughan of Ackerman, Mississippi, created the overall design of the magnolia flag, which was altered with work from others. He said Tuesday that he started working on designs years ago, when Mississippi residents were bickering about the flag with the Confederate image.

"What I wanted to do was

show every Mississippian that there's a compromise out there, and we are the magnolia state," said Vaughan, 43. "If it's appealing to the eyes, it will be accepted."

The magnolia on that flag came from Sue Anna Joe, a Greenwood native living in San Francisco. Her parents were born in China, and they moved to the United States in the 1960s. Joe, 44, said Tuesday that as a person of Chinese background growing up in Mississippi, she felt "disassociated" with the flag the state had used since 1894. She heard white peo-

ple say the Confederate symbol represented their ancestors and African Americans say it represented slavery.

"I felt like I was part of a broken family," she said.

Joe said she watched online as Mississippi legislators voted to retire the old flag. Because she has worked in design, she felt it was her civic duty to submit a proposal. She chose a magnolia because she believes the

flower is an easily recognizable symbol of Mississippi.

"I still very much love my home state," Joe said.

Kara Giles of Oxford also worked on the magnolia flag. She's a graphic designer and executive assistant to Oxford Mayor Robyn Tannehill, who is one of the nine flag commissioners. Giles tweaked the design to strengthen some elements of it.

The other flag with the

red-and-white shield on a dark blue background also had the single star made of diamond shapes. The banner, nicknamed the "Great River Flag," is by graphic designer Micah Whitson, who grew up in Alabama, graduated from the University of Mississippi and now lives in Boston. The commission Wednesday also gave Whitson, 39, credit for helping design the magnolia flag.

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