

# STARS AND STRIPES, LITERALLY, FOREVER

A SPECIMEN GUIDE TO 40 YEARS OF STANDARDS & PRACTICES IN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN DESIGN



VISUAL PUNDITRY BY SAM POTTS (Dem., MA)

## COLOR

### A. BLUE



### B. RED



### C. BLUE & RED



### D. OTHER



Why do we see the red and blue of the American flag in so many designs? Are these designers more patriotic? Is it laziness, a settling for the obvious? Or perhaps it's the case that the only realistic choices, indeed the only *smart* choices, come down to A or B. Is a system that reduces everything to one of only two options essentially flawed in some way? And if this is true of design, is it also true of the election process itself?

Combining red and blue transcends partisanship and adds extra patriotism to a design—or that's the idea. The problem is that everyone has the same idea year after year.

Digressions from the standard blue and red palettes are ill advised. Orange, brown, purple—these are not colors to set a candidate apart from the field. Especially not purple.

## TYPOGRAPHY

### A. ALL CAPITALS

All caps is the choice of candidates who must confront powerful adversaries, both real and imagined.



### B. UPPER & LOWERCASE

Mixed case says the candidate is taking the high road, and is probably a liberal.



### C. TOTAL MESS



This was Al Gore before he was Al Gore: Nobel Prize Winner. Too many things going on here—he would eventually learn to stick to a single issue.

An awkward combination of typefaces and vibrating colors, as if to downplay Quayle's presence on the ticket.

## TYPE CHOICE

### A. SANS SERIF

The confident, assertive choice.



### B. SERIF

The choice of wonks in both parties.



### C. NOVELTY TYPE

Take note: no winners here.



## STYLE APPROPRIATION

### A. MODERNISM



An extremely disciplined and lovely piece of typography... and yet McGovern lost to Nixon in a landslide.



More quality Modernism from the Democrats, although the baby blue might be a little *too* nice.

### B. THE MILITARY



Beyond the Vietnam War Memorial connection (both use Optima), it's the star bursting through the sound barrier that makes this so scary.

### C. DISCO



## STARS & STRIPES

Patriotic, iconic, and highly visible, stars and stripes are an excellent choice for any campaign. May be bent, twisted, or bloated as necessary.



These are really just lines. If you're going to use stripes, use stripes!



A really quite creative use of stars from Dan Quayle. The tail of the "Q" is very well handled, and as an added bonus, everything is spelled correctly.

## SYMBOLISM

### A. EAGLES



This explains why a lot of people voted for Wallace for Postmaster General.

### B. RAINBOWS



Assuming that is, in fact, supposed to be a rainbow.

### C. HUH?



Gold water. Awesome!

## SLOGANS



The relevance of this slogan has faded. Today it sounds only slightly better than "Vote apathetic."



Who's going to recognize the U.S. Constitution on a bumper sticker in a mall parking lot? Is that really any place for the Constitution? (Actually, maybe it is.)



A slogan in Comic Sans. Someone had to do it.



Sloppy handwriting? Why not just scream into an open microphone?

## PUNCTUATION

### A. EXCLAMATION POINT

Used to convey excitement and a positive attitude. Or possibly late-in-the-game desperation.



### B. PERIOD

There's nothing like a simple declarative period to project confidence and assurance. Recommended only for front-runners.



It's like a done deal (with the devil, in this case).



Considerably less compelling if you aren't actually president.

## UNACCEPTABLE USAGES



"Re-Elect" is so apologetically small it has to be intentional. The message is unassertive and perhaps a bit reluctant. Points for sticking with the green.



This is not the logo of a man running for the highest office in the land. This is the logo of a strip club out by the airport—the kind that serves breakfast.



Is there any excuse? This is 1988, people! Legibility, relevance, audience appeal—these things are well established at this point.



This would not be all that bad a logo if your name were Kerry Edwards.

## FIRST NAMES



No thanks!



Probably a better nickname than "Mr. Mayor" when running for president.



In this case, Hillary's first name is necessary to distinguish her from her husband, George Clinton.

## BEST PRACTICES



Yes, it looks like the sign for an auto dealership, but this design is spot-on, with lovely symmetry and spacing. The colors are bold and balanced, with no need for any additional elements whatsoever. It's as elegant and direct as can be, and as likable as Ford himself.



This design is as single-minded as the administration it brought into office. Everything is in place to be read clearly, and the visual hierarchy is correct. Note the slight correction to the flag alignment and the italicization—admirable restraint shown by the Bush campaign.



Some strange type mixing here, but the '76 is just so nicely a bit off, and more satisfying for it.



The challenge is the candidate's unusual name. The solution is really clever: the "T," by running in with "Democrat for President," becomes a framing element that sets off "songas." Thus the logo actually leads you to pronounce his name correctly.



Has anyone noticed this one? It's not half bad!

## PUNS

The sad fact is that there's not much place for humor in campaign graphics, no matter how corny your demographic.



Brown for Jerry Brown, duh.



Get it?



Can you imagine keys being given to visiting diplomats? Lame!