

'The Beloved Green and White' – (White) Rhodesia's search for a unique symbol of identity

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Abstract

From the founding of the Colony until its Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI), white Rhodesians considered themselves quintessentially British. Despite such epithets as '... more British than the British', in declaring UDI on Armistice Day in 1965 under a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II, white Rhodesians became the first people of largely British origin to rebel against the Crown since the American Revolution. Although the UDI proclamation concluded 'God Save the Queen', Britain's response was to declare Rhodesia to be in a state of rebellion. Thus the need to forge a distinctive national identity became more acute, together with symbols to reflect this change. This paper explores the process leading to the adoption of a distinctive Rhodesian flag to symbolise the country's assumed independence, and the evolution of that flag into a potent emotional symbol, particularly after the country became Zimbabwe and adopted a new flag.

Introduction

On 11 November 1965, at 11am (the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month), under Annigoni's famous portrait of a youthful Elizabeth II in Garter robes, Prime Minister Ian Smith and his Cabinet signed a Proclamation of Independence from the British Parliament, whilst retaining loyalty to the person of the monarch as the Queen of Rhodesia. Thus white Rhodesians became, however reluctantly, the first people of largely British origin to throw off the Crown since the American Revolution.¹ The immediate response of the British Government to this Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) was to proclaim Rhodesia to be in a state of rebellion and the Government in Salisbury illegal, and to request the United Nations to apply sanctions against the 'rebel regime'.

The events leading up to the constitutional stalemate which resulted in this drastic action had begun more than half a century earlier, on 29 October 1889, when Queen Victoria approved a Royal Charter establishing the British South Africa Company (BSAC). The BSAC was the brainchild of the British imperialist and financier Cecil John Rhodes, who was living in the Cape Colony at the time and whose ambition was to exploit the mineral wealth of Mashonaland as part of a broader quest to expand the sphere of British commercial and political

1 A. Skeen, *Prelude to Independence: Skeen's 115 Days* (Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1966); J.R.T. Wood, *So Far and No Further! Rhodesia's Bid for Independence during the Retreat from Empire 1959-1965* (Johannesburg: 30° South Publishers, 2005); D. Lowry, 'Rhodesia 1890-1980: "The Lost Dominion"', in R. Bickers (ed.), *Settlers and Expatriates: Britons over the Seas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 112-49.

influence from 'Cape to Cairo'. The Company was more than just a business enterprise. Its Charter gave it the power, inter alia, to make treaties, promulgate laws, prescribe the peace, maintain a police force, acquire (new) mining concessions and provide the infrastructure for a new colony at its own expense. With these formidable powers and its wide range of interests, the Company established the foundations of the colony that was to become Southern Rhodesia and later the state of Zimbabwe.²



Signing the Unilateral Declaration of Independence, 11 November 1965

From 1890, when the first white settlers entered the territory, until 1923 when self-government was granted, there were several forces at work moving the settlers towards independence, while conflicting pressures aimed the territory in other directions. Nascent white nationalism and a growing sense of identity and purpose became evident in 1922, when the settlers – increasingly distrustful of the BSAC following the death of Rhodes in 1902, and fearful of an amalgamation with Northern Rhodesia that would further diminish their ratio to the African majority – voted in favour of Responsible Government in preference to becoming a fifth province of the Union of South Africa. To many commentators the outcome of this crucial referendum was to determine the course that the country would follow in the ensuing years, and it can also be regarded as a precursor to UDI in 1965.³

Responsible Government was granted on 13 September 1923, and on 1 October 1923 Southern Rhodesia was annexed to the British Crown as a self-governing colony. The letters patent awarding the colony the right to self-government made no change to the pre-existing franchise, which granted the right to vote on the basis of an elementary standard of education, property ownership and financial means. Despite being non-racial, in reality the qualifications were beyond the reach of most (black) Africans and thus the electorate at the time was, and remained, predominantly white.

What Southern Rhodesia had gained was close to Dominion status, as she acquired wide powers including defence but not external affairs.⁴ The British

2 B.B. Berry, 'The Flags of the British South Africa Company, 1890-1923', in *Fahnen, Flags, Drapeaux: Proceedings of the 15th International Congress of Vexillology* (Zollikofen: Swiss Society of Vexillology, 1999), pp. 70-3.

3 An in-depth analysis of the 1922 referendum can be found in A.P. Di Perna, *A Right to Be Proud: The Struggle for Self-Government and the Roots of White Nationalism in Rhodesia, 1890-1922* (Bulawayo: Books of Rhodesia, 1978). See also Lowry, 'Rhodesia 1890-1980'; Wood, *So Far and No Further!*.

4 The Dominions were semi-independent polities under the British Crown, constituting the British Empire and starting with the Canadian

Government had full power to legislate for Southern Rhodesia but would not do so without the consent of the Southern Rhodesian Legislative Assembly. Britain retained reserve powers of veto to protect African rights and land in particular, but these were never invoked even when racial segregation legislation was introduced. Able to govern and defend themselves, the white electorate understood that in due course Southern Rhodesia would become a Dominion. This belief was reinforced by the British, who placed Southern Rhodesia under the aegis of the Dominions Office (with Australia, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand etc.), and from 1931 invited the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia to all conferences of Dominion (later Commonwealth) Prime Ministers. Southern Rhodesia was also the only colony with a High Commission in London, a diplomatic mission status normally afforded only to independent members of the Commonwealth.

These unique constitutional arrangements were perpetuated after 1953 when Southern Rhodesia joined with the Protectorates of Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland in the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The system of government for the new federation was among the most complicated ever established, with five different governments granted overlapping and interlocking responsibilities for its affairs. There was the British Government in London, theoretically united but for practical purposes operating through two often competing departments: the Commonwealth Office, dealing with the Federal and Southern Rhodesian Governments through separate sets of High Commissioners in Salisbury and London, and the Colonial Office, dealing with the two northern Protectorates through separate Governors with very wide powers. There was also a Governor-General of the Federation and a Governor of Southern Rhodesia, each of whom, unlike their northern counterparts, was a constitutional monarch acting on the advice of their Prime Minister.⁵

The Federation lasted only a decade, the British succumbing to twin political pressures: from African nationalists demanding self-determination in the two Protectorates, and from the politically dominant whites of Southern Rhodesia demanding independence based on its qualified franchise. Nyasaland was granted self-government in 1962, achieving independence as Malawi on 6 July 1964, and Northern Rhodesia soon followed. Its secession resulted in the formal dissolution of the Federation on 31 December 1963, before the country attained its independence as the Republic of Zambia on 24 October 1964.

The break-up of the Federation and the granting of independence to the two northern territories intensified demands for independence in Southern Rhodesia (Rhodesia after Zambian independence).⁶ These demands were premised

Confederation in 1867. They included Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Newfoundland, South Africa, and the Irish Free State; and from the late 1940s India, Pakistan, and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). The Balfour Declaration (1926) recognised the Dominions as 'autonomous Communities within the British Empire', and the 1931 Statute of Westminster granted them full legislative independence; see <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dominion>

5 R. Blake, 'Foreword', in J.R.T. Wood, *The Welensky Papers: A History of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland*. (Durban: Graham Publishing, 1983).

6 According to the constitution adopted concurrently with the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965, the official name of the country was Rhodesia. However, British law considered the territory's legal name to be Southern Rhodesia, the name given to the country in 1898 during the BSAC administration of the Rhodesias and retained by the self-governing

essentially on the virtual political autonomy enjoyed by the colony since it was granted self-government in 1923. The British Government was prepared to concede, but adopted a policy of no independence before majority rule; independence would only be granted to Rhodesia when sufficient guarantees for the political advancement of the African majority were in place. Despite ongoing negotiations, including visits by the Rhodesian Prime Minister to London and the British Prime Minister to Salisbury, an impasse ensued resulting in the declaration of UDI by the Rhodesian Government in November 1965.

Rhodesian colonial flags

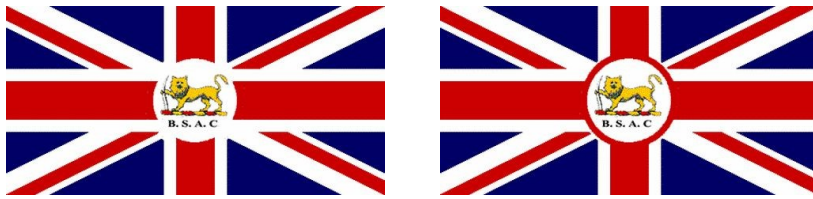
At the time of UDI, Rhodesia followed the traditional British colonial practice and flew an 'ensign-based' flag, with the Union Jack in the canton, and the shield from the Rhodesian coat of arms in the fly. From 8 April 1964, however, the flag had a light (plumbago) blue background rather than the traditional dark blue, and was unique as the only non-armed-service colonial flag in this colour at the time.⁷ This decision had been taken to highlight the political changes occasioned by the dissolution of the Federation.⁸ Following the dissolution, Southern Rhodesia had briefly reverted to its pre-Federal colonial flag, which followed the same pattern but with the traditional dark blue background. The flag of the Federation had also followed this pattern, but with the shield from the Federal Coat of Arms in the fly.

The adoption of a colonial flag for Southern Rhodesia had not been without confusion. To symbolise the change in administration, the flag of the BSAC, a Union Jack charged with the Company badge in the centre, was lowered on 29 September 1923 and replaced on 1 October 1923 by the Union Flag. At this date there were no colonial arms and no colonial flag. The Southern Rhodesia coat of arms was granted by royal warrant on 11 August 1924. Thus began a 13-year period of confusion and misunderstanding over the colony's flag.⁹

colony of Southern Rhodesia after BSAC rule ended in 1923. This naming dispute dates back to October 1964, when Northern Rhodesia became independent from Britain and concurrently changed its name to Zambia. The Southern Rhodesian colonial government in Salisbury felt that in the absence of a 'Northern' Rhodesia, the continued use of 'Southern' was superfluous. It passed legislation to become simply Rhodesia, but the British government refused to approve the change, arguing that the country's name was defined by British legislation and so could not be altered by the colonial government. Nonetheless Salisbury went on using the shortened name in an official manner, while the British government continued to refer to the country as Southern Rhodesia. This situation continued throughout the UDI period. The shortened name was used by many people, including the British government in the House of Commons. The British government maintained this stance regarding the June-December 1979 successor state of Zimbabwe Rhodesia, and when Zimbabwe Rhodesia returned to colonial status from December 1979 to April 1980, it was as 'Southern Rhodesia'. Southern Rhodesia subsequently gained international recognition of its independence in April 1980, when it became the Republic of Zimbabwe, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rhodesia>

7 Fiji (1970) and Tuvalu (1978) also adopted British ensign-based flags with light blue backgrounds.

8 R. Allport, 'Flags and Symbols of Rhodesia 1890–1980', *SAVA Journal*, 5 (1996); B.B. Berry, 'Flying in the Winds of Change: Flags from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe', *Flag Bulletin*, XXXIV/2 no. 163 (1995), pp. 46-64.



*Colonial flags of Southern Rhodesia (1890-1968):
left, BSAC (1890 - 30 September 1923); right, BSAC (alternate version)*

Correspondence between the Rhodesian High Commission and the Colonial Office considered the question of the flag to be used on occasions such as the British Empire Exhibition etc. The Colonial Office replied: '... following the course adopted by other colonies last year, it is thought that the Blue Ensign with the Arms (or Flag Badge) of Southern Rhodesia in the fly might be used for this purpose'.¹⁰ What was clear, however, and was later confirmed in a letter of March 1928 from the Colonial Secretary in Salisbury to the Rhodesian High Commission in London regarding the official flag of the colony, was that 'the Union Jack is the flag of Southern Rhodesia'.¹¹

While the general public seemed content to fly the Union Jack, the need for a separate flag to distinguish the colony abroad remained a matter of official concern. In November 1934 the Rhodesian High Commission purchased a number of Union Jacks for use as car flags at the wedding of Prince George, Duke of Kent, to Princess Marina of Greece and Denmark. Each had below a green pennant emblazoned 'SOUTHERN RHODESIA' in white letters. Later the Union Jack and pennant, alongside other colonial flags, featured on a handkerchief commemorating the impending coronation of King Edward VIII.



*Colonial flags of Southern Rhodesia
(1890-1968): car flag used in London,
1934*

The forthcoming coronation brought affairs to a head. The adoption of a flag was an Act related to foreign affairs – given the colony's unique constitutional status, a matter controlled from London. After further correspondence with the Rhodesian High Commission and the Dominions Office, in January 1937 the Prime Minister indicated his preference for a flag based on the blue ensign with shield in the fly for use outside the colony: 'it would not necessarily be used here [i.e. within Southern Rhodesia] at all, except as bunting or in combination

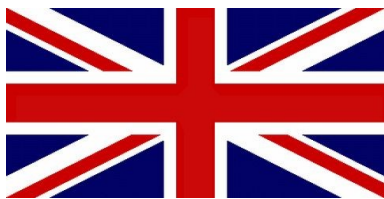
9 See M. Faul, 'Just What Is the Rhodesian Flag?', *Rhodesians Worldwide*, 11, no. 4, (1996), pp. 25-6; M. Faul, 'The Genesis of a Colonial Flag: Southern Rhodesia 1890-1937', in *Fahnen, Flags, Drapeaux: Proceedings of the 15th International Congress of Vexillology* (Zollikofen: Swiss Society of Vexillology, 1999), pp. 105-8.

10 Faul, 'The Genesis of a Colonial Flag', p. 105.

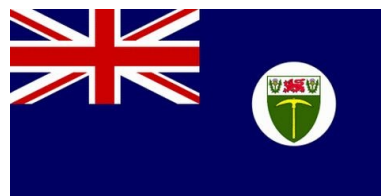
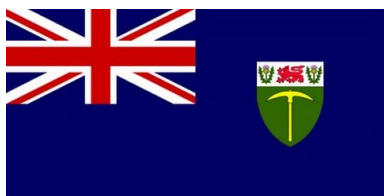
11 *Ibid.*, p. 106.

with the Union Jack'. This arrangement was confirmed in June 1937, when the Rhodesian High Commissioner, Mr B.F. Wright, wrote to Colonel Methuen (former co-ordinator of the Southern Rhodesia Defence Force) to inform him that a flag for Southern Rhodesia was now available from a London manufacturer.

He added, 'I should mention that the Official Flag of Southern Rhodesia is still the Union Jack, and that the new flag has only been adopted for use outside the Colony ... the Union Jack gave us no distinction from the Mother Country or the Colonial Empire, but the new Flag ... the Blue Ensign with the badge of the Colony's Coat-of-Arms emblazoned on the fly, does give us our own identity, which is valuable for publicity purposes on this side [Britain], but I feel it right to point out that the new Flag ... shall not come into general use in the Colony.'¹²

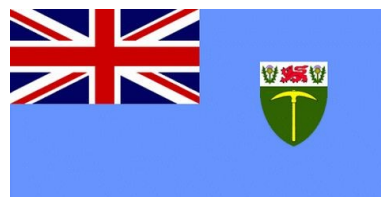


Colonial flags of Southern Rhodesia (1890-1968): the Union Flag flown inside the Colony beside the Federal and Southern Rhodesia light blue ensigns, October 1923 - November 1968



Colonial flags of Southern Rhodesia (1890-1968): left, Southern Rhodesia flag for flying outside the colony, c.1934 - September 1953; right, variant depicting the arms on a white disc

Nevertheless, the flag came into general use and flew alongside the Union Jack within the colony. This dual flag arrangement continued during the Federal period and, using the light blue ensign, until 10 November 1968.¹³



Colonial flags of Southern Rhodesia (1890-1968): left, Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, September 1953 - December 1963; right, Southern Rhodesia, April 1964 - November 1968

¹² Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 107.

¹³ Government of Rhodesia, *Flags of Rhodesia* (Salisbury: Government Printer, n.d.); Allport, 'Flags and Symbols of Rhodesia'; Berry, 'Flying in the Winds of Change'; M. Faul, 'The Vexillology of UDI', *Rhodesians Worldwide*, 11, no. 2 (1995), pp. 22-3

Evolution of a 'Rhodesian' identity

The lack of a distinctive flag, and the somewhat informal resolution of the issue without legislative prescription, is indicative of the emerging settler identity in the colony. To many observers, the most striking aspect of Rhodesia remained its Britishness, and until the late 1950s most whites appear to have identified themselves primarily as British rather than Rhodesian. Indeed, Rudyard Kipling foretold with peculiar prescience that Rhodesia would be the 'last loyal white colony'.¹⁴ 'A little bit of England', remarked Lord Buxton, British High Commissioner in South Africa, following a visit to the territory in 1916, adding that the settlers were 'proud of being purely British, and that they form part of the Empire; and they crave public recognition of this fact.'¹⁵ Ethel Tawse Jollie, the first female member of the colony's Parliament and the first woman to sit in an Empire Parliament, declared that 'the average British-born Rhodesian feels that this is essentially a British country, pioneered, bought and developed by British people, and he wants to keep it so.' She later reflected in 1930 that '... Rhodesians conveyed a sort of super-British Imperialism ... a loyalty to the Flag and Empire which appears to be old fashioned in Great Britain today.'¹⁶

This affiliation was reinforced by the Second World War. White Rhodesians demonstrated their loyalty as the first member of the British Empire to declare war in 1939, while proportionately more Southern Rhodesians fought in that conflict than any of their Commonwealth counterparts.¹⁷ The colony boasted that it was 'second to none in its loyalty to the Crown', a 'Bastion of Empire' with 'a proud record of British-style Government'.¹⁸ Indeed, Ian Smith frequently stated his belief that, had Churchill lived, he would have settled in Rhodesia in order to feel at home.

The colony remained dependent on immigration for its chief source of population growth amongst the white community. After 1923 control of immigration was a local issue and a fundamental source of tension in policy. The 'right sort' of settlers, i.e. those with capital and skills, were preferred. After the Second World War, some voices advocated the mass-immigration of non-British Europeans, but their ideas foundered on ethnic concerns about maintaining the 'British character' of the community. At the same time, continuing regional and educational links placed the colony within a South African orbit, where in sporting terms, central to white identity, Southern Rhodesia constituted a provincial side. The colony was described as a kind of self-governing, English-speaking South African frontier, whose autonomy and unchallenged Britishness was envied by many English-speaking South Africans, particularly those in Natal.¹⁹

Thus, it is not surprising that many white Rhodesians felt betrayed by their British 'kith and kin' following the dissolution of the Federation and during events before and after UDI. The Rhodesian Prime Minister was unequivocal in denouncing 'perfidious Albion' in the attitude of successive British Governments towards Rhodesian independence,²⁰ and it has been argued that the refusal of

14 Quoted in Lowry, 'Rhodesia 1890-1980', p. 128.

15 Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 128-9.

16 E.C.T. Jollie, *The Real Rhodesia* (London: Hutchinson and Company, 1924), pp. 7, 102.

17 Wood, *So Far and No Further!*.

18 Quoted in Lowry, 'Rhodesia 1890-1980', pp. 129-30.

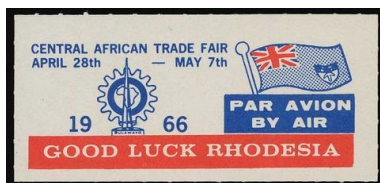
19 Lowry, 'Rhodesia 1890-1980'.

20 I. Smith, *The Great Betrayal* (London: Blake Publishing, 1997).

British Prime Minister Harold Wilson to support military intervention to suppress the rebellion was partly due to a perceived lack of support from his military officers for such action.²¹

After UDI – the search for a symbolic identity

The Proclamation of Independence recalled the country's loyalty to the Crown, to 'kith and kin' in Britain, and to the Commonwealth. It concluded with the conventional salutation 'God Save the Queen', to whom allegiance was pledged as 'Queen of Rhodesia'. 'What the declaration was intended to convey was that UDI did not extricate Rhodesia from the British Empire,' states Brownell, 'but instead unilaterally declared itself to be a Dominion within the British Empire.'²² Following UDI, however, Britain came under increasing pressure from the United Nations and the so-called new 'Afro-Asian bloc' in the Commonwealth to do more to resolve the crisis. This led to the imposition of mandatory economic sanctions against Rhodesia and a further deterioration in relations between the two countries as the stalemate persisted despite repeated attempts at negotiation.



Patriotic stickers featuring the Southern Rhodesia light blue ensign

At the same time there was no change in the flag, nor in the existing rule that it be flown side-by-side with the Union Jack. Indeed, in a radio broadcast by Prime Minister Ian Smith immediately after signing UDI, he reassured Rhodesians that '... we in this country stand second to none in our loyalty to the Queen, and whatever else other countries may have done or may yet do, it is our intention

²¹ Ibid. p. 109.

²² J. Brownell, 'A Sordid Tussle on the Strand': Rhodesia House during the UDI Rebellion (1965-1980), *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 38, no. 3 (2010), p. 11.

that the Union Jack will continue to fly in Rhodesia and the National Anthem continue to be sung.²³ In an outburst of patriotic fervour, the Southern Rhodesia light blue ensign adopted in 1964 was displayed on cars, on 'Good Luck Rhodesia' airmail stickers, and on leaflets thanking South Africans for ensuring fuel supplies were maintained despite the oil embargo. According to Faul, 'it was the only time when the display of flags in Rhodesia rivalled that of the USA'.²⁴

But with vitriolic anti-British propaganda, and increasing resentment of sanctions, in some cases the Union Jack on the flag was cut out, in others black lines were marked across it to 'cancel' it out, and in a very few instances a sticker of the South African flag was placed over it.²⁵ The presence of the Union Jack on the Rhodesian flag was becoming increasingly pointless, and in January 1967 the Cabinet established a Committee on Honours and Awards, comprising several government ministers, to investigate the possibility of creating new civil and military honours for Rhodesia, and to devise a new flag and national anthem. Reporting back to Cabinet in May 1968, the Committee explained that it had held a public competition to design a new flag, with over fifty entries received. The report laid out the guiding principles used to select a successful design, which included:

- the design should be as simple as possible;
- the colours should be harmonious, with the national colour of dark green;
- the design should preserve a reminder of the former administration of the country; and
- the design should indicate Rhodesia's independence.²⁶

The details and design of the proposed new flag of Rhodesia were outlined in the Flag of Rhodesia Bill, published in the Government Gazette of 9 August 1968. The general public got their first sight of the proposed design the following day, when an illustration and description of the flag featured on the front page of the main daily newspaper, the *Rhodesia Herald*, under the headline 'No Union Jack on proposed new flag'.²⁷ At the Second Reading of the Flag of Rhodesia Bill on 3 September 1968, the Minister of Justice and of Law and Order, Mr Desmond Lardner-Burke, explained the need for a new flag as follows: although Rhodesia '... has, until now, been quite willing to keep the Union Flag²⁸ ... Things have changed and we must accept that change, just as others must accept it, Rhodesia is a nation justly proud of her essentially British heritage but independent nonetheless.'²⁹ He continued that green and white were the country's sporting colours, used at least since 1924 by the Rhodesian

23 Skeen, *Prelude to Independence*, p. 153; also quoted in D. Kenrick, 'These Colours Don't Run: Changing the Rhodesian Flag, 1968', paper presented at the Southern African Historical Society Biennial Conference (Stellenbosch, 2 July 2015), p. 5.

24 Faul, 'The Vexillology of UDI', p. 23.

25 Ibid.

26 Quoted in Kenrick, 'These Colours Don't Run', p. 6.

27 *Rhodesia Herald*, 11 August 1968.

28 The terms Union Jack and Union Flag are both historically correct for describing the national flag of the United Kingdom, although a 'jack' traditionally refers to a flag on a ship. Both terms are used interchangeably in this paper.

29 Government of Rhodesia, *Parliamentary Debates, Fourth Session, Eleventh Parliament*, vol. 72 (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1968), p. 933.

Rugby Football Union and formally adopted by them on 30 May 1927. Green also predominates in the country's coat of arms, while on a more practical basis the Committee had noted that the proposed green and white flag was less susceptible to fading in the sun than the existing Southern Rhodesia ensign and would also be cheaper to produce.



The new flag design announced, Rhodesia Herald

The guideline to 'preserve a reminder of the former administration of the country' reflected the need for some continuity. The most logical way of achieving this would have been to retain the Union Jack in some form, perhaps not as prominently, but more in the manner displayed by the South African national flag at the time. However, the Committee explicitly ruled this out. 'Whether or not Rhodesia retains a connection with the Crown, the independence of this country must be seen as a fact,' it argued. 'Since the confrontation with Britain the Committee believes that sentiment will be against the continued use of the Union Flag. For these two reasons the Committee recommend that the Union Flag should not be incorporated into the new Rhodesian flag.'³⁰

Two designs were recommended by the Committee, one of which was eventually chosen by Cabinet as the new Rhodesian flag. The whole process had taken just seven months, but the Cabinet documents do not reveal who submitted the winning design.

The process of imbuing the flag with meaning began when the Flag of Rhodesia Bill was presented to Parliament in August 1968. The general history of flags was outlined with specific reference to the flags of Rhodesia, highlighting how the newly independent countries '... have all adopted distinctive flags ... in which the national flags of Britain bear no part.'³¹ The Minister presented the change as a choice forced upon Rhodesia by the British Government as a result of the changed relationship between the two countries, arguing '... It is because of this clearly identifiable character which we have acquired which makes it desirable and necessary to have our own separate and clearly identifiable flag ...'³² However, the Minister failed to explain what he considered so 'Rhodesian' about the flag, beyond its demonstration that the country was no longer British. This led to confusion amongst some Members of Parliament, and the ensuing debate revealed the ambivalent relationship of the Rhodesian Government to

30 Quoted in Kenrick, 'These Colours Don't Run', p. 6.

31 Government of Rhodesia. Parliamentary Debates. Fourth Session, Eleventh Parliament, vol. 72, p. 933.

32 Ibid., pp. 935-6; also quoted in Kenrick, 'These Colours Don't Run', p. 7.

the former colonial power, as well as a series of competing interpretations of what Rhodesia was and how it should be represented symbolically.

The debate also produced some harsh criticism of the proposed design. There was no consensus as to what exactly was 'Rhodesian' about the new flag! A complaint from one Member decried the inclusion of the 'whole achievements of Her Majesty's Coat of Arms of Rhodesia If the Union Jack is objectionable, (then) why not the (colonial) Arms equally so?'³³ One backbencher felt the need to include a symbol of Rhodesia's Christianity, while others complained that green and white were associated with Islamic states, citing Pakistan, Nigeria and Saudi Arabia as examples, and were thus unsuitable to be used in the flag of a Christian country.

Further debate centred on the similarity of the new design to the Nigerian flag and the 'great confusion' potentially caused by this lack of distinctiveness. The design was criticised as being amateurish and ugly, neither symbolic nor representative enough. Opposition Member of Parliament, Dr Ahrn Palley, argued strongly for the retention of the Union Jack and was strident in his criticism, believing the changing of the flag was a party political, rather than national, act, and a precursor to the declaration of a republic. He argued that there had been insufficient consultation and that the design had been presented to the public as a *fait accompli*. He also made an impassioned speech about the value of national symbols:

If a flag is to have any meaning whatsoever to a nation or a people, that flag must grow out of the history of the people, that flag must grow out of the loyalties and the sentiments and the honour of a nation. One cannot thrust aside a national flag and replace it by the equivalent piece of bunting and say now it represents the sentiments and emotions of a people; that [it] now is your new emblem of honour, loyalty and affection and esteem which a national flag represents.³⁴

On the other side of the parliamentary chamber, other Members rose to the defence of the new design. One Member believed it stood for '... sunny skies, the people in it ... the living conditions ... everything appertaining to Rhodesia'.³⁵ Another stressed the importance of demonstrating independence from Britain while at the same time presenting a vision of the 'Rhodesian way of life' – that elusive and highly subjective concept which Godwin and Hancock contend was so appealing to many white Rhodesians precisely because of its vagueness.³⁶ Another Member invoked the spirit of the United States, arguing that Rhodesia should follow its example as a rugged, individualistic nation of frontiersmen.

The Parliamentary debates ended on 1 October 1968 after solicitations for more designs met with a lukewarm public response. The Minister brought matters to a close, with an unambiguous statement of the government view: '... the position of the Union Jack is obvious, subservience to the British Government'.³⁷

33 *Ibid.*, p. 938.

34 *Ibid.*, pp. 943-4; also quoted in Kenrick, 'These Colours Don't Run', p. 9.

35 Quoted in Kenrick, 'These Colours Don't Run', p. 10.

36 Kenrick, 'These Colours Don't Run'; P. Godwin and I. Hancock, *Rhodesians Never Die: The Impact of War and Political Change on White Rhodesia c.1970-1980* (Northlands: Pan Macmillan, 1993).

37 Government of Rhodesia, *Parliamentary Debates, Fourth Session, Eleventh Parliament*, vol. 73 (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1968), pp. 21-2; also

The Flag of Rhodesia Act was duly passed, with the new flag officially described as: '... consisting of three vertical stripes of equal width, green, white and green, on which there appears in the centre of the white stripe the coat of arms of Rhodesia, with –

- a) the length of the flag equal to twice the width of the flag; and
- b) the coat of arms of Rhodesia equal in height to three-fifths of the height of the flag'.³⁸

The Act also laid down penalties of a fine not exceeding five hundred pounds or imprisonment for a period not exceeding two years for anyone who burns, mutilates or otherwise insults the flag or a reproduction thereof which is calculated to show disrespect or bring the Flag of Rhodesia into disrepute.³⁹



The Rhodesian flag, official illustration

The Act makes no mention of any specifications relating to the colours of the flag.

The new flag was raised for the first time at 9am on Monday, 11 November 1968 - the third anniversary of UDI. Though the debates had suggested public apathy towards the whole process, large crowds turned out to see the flag raised at ceremonies held across the country. In a speech at the official flag-raising in Salisbury, the Officer Administering the Government, the head of state Mr Clifford Dupont outlined the symbolism of the design and concluded:

Throughout history, men had realized that they could best express their feelings, their love, their loyalty and their patriotism for their country by showing respect to an emblem such as a national flag. May our new flag not only inspire such feelings but also become a symbol of the unity of Rhodesians of all races.⁴⁰

The new flag was raised at ceremonies at all Government schools the following day.

A pamphlet with an illustration and description of the new flag was later published by the Government and widely distributed. The symbolism was

quoted in Kenrick, 'These Colours Don't Run', p. 10.

38 Government of Rhodesia, *The Flag of Rhodesia Act* (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1968), pp. 1-2.

39 Government of Rhodesia, *The Flag of Rhodesia Act*.

40 Government of Rhodesia, 'Flag of Independence Is Raised', *Rhodesian Commentary*, 2, no. 24 (1968), pp. 1-3, 6.

explained as follows:

The Flag of Rhodesia consists of three vertical panels, green, white and green. Superimposed centrally on the white panel is the Coat of Arms of Rhodesia. Green is the predominant colour of the Coat of Arms. It is a bold colour and has the advantage of comparative lightfastness in Rhodesia's sunny climate.

'The Arms were granted by Royal Warrant of King George V in August, 1924. The gold pick symbolises the importance of the mining industry and, in particular (at the time of its adoption), the mining of gold. The pick is set on a green field, representing the agricultural background of the country. The bird which surmounts the Arms is a representation of the soapstone bird found at the Great Zimbabwe Ruins, and serves as a reminder of the country's past, including its prehistory. The lion and thistles are from the Arms of Cecil John Rhodes, the Founder, to whom allusion is also made in the motto: *Sit Nomine Digna* – 'May she (Rhodesia) be worthy of the name.'⁴¹



Raising the Rhodesian flag for the first time, Salisbury, 11 November 1968

Acceptance and rejection

The constitutional crisis persisted and Rhodesians found themselves increasingly isolated. The country failed to secure international recognition, even from its sympathetic, sanctions-busting neighbour South Africa. As in other countries following the adoption of a new national flag, the initial response to the new flag was in general lukewarm. However, with the continuing constitutional stalemate, the virtual encirclement of Rhodesia by hostile neighbours following the independence of Mozambique, and the outbreak of civil war towards the end of the 1970s, the flag became increasingly symbolic to white Rhodesians.

In March 1970 the country proclaimed itself a republic, finally severing its vestigial links with the Crown. As a consequence, the 'Royal' prefix was dropped for some units in the military such as the Rhodesian Air Force, which also adopted a new ensign, and later a new Colour, containing the national flag in the canton.⁴² New President's Colours to reflect Rhodesia's republican status

41 Government of Rhodesia, *The Flag of Rhodesia* (Salisbury: Government Printer, 1968), p. 5.

42 Allport, 'Flags and Symbols of Rhodesia'; Faul, 'The Vexillology of UDI'; Government of Rhodesia, 'New Ensign of the Air Force', *Rhodesian Commentary*, 4, no. 8 (1970), p. 1.

(i.e. without the Crown or the Union Flag) were also designed for the Rhodesian Light Infantry and the Rhodesian African Rifles. These colours followed the British tradition in that their basic design was that of the national flag but containing a badge of the coat of arms in a white disc surrounded by a red ring bearing the regimental name. Neither colour was formally consecrated.⁴³



Left, Rhodesian Air Force ensign (1970-90) with canton containing the Rhodesian flag; right, Rhodesian Light Infantry, President's Colour

As in the case of the light blue ensign immediately after UDI, the new flag became the most obvious expression of patriotism and was displayed on all kinds of consumer items, including bumper stickers, caps, clothes, swimming towels, beer mugs and various curios. The flag appeared on a postage stamp, illustrated book covers and was mentioned in several songs by popular Rhodesian folk singer John Edmond. One song, 'Green and White', concerned the flag itself and has a chorus evoking emotional attachment to the flag:

Green and white you're flying in the blue Rhodesian sky
Green and white ... you know that we all love you 'til we die.⁴⁴

Patriotism and the feeling of loyalty towards the flag is further highlighted by Edmond in 'Rhodesians of the World':

We stood against the world
For what we believed was right
A symbol of truth ...
Our beloved Green and White.⁴⁵

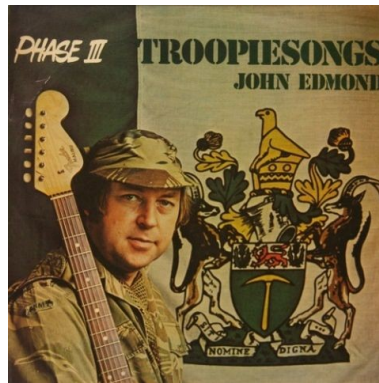
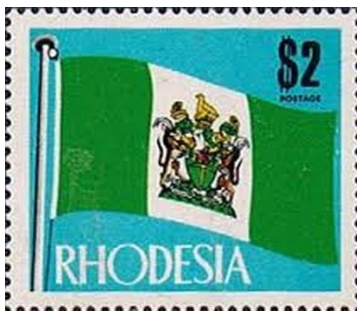
As the country succumbed to the pressures of civil war and sanctions, combined with political pressure from, and the intervention of, South Africa and the United States, the Rhodesian Government met with some of the internally based moderate African nationalist leaders to reach an agreement on the country's political future. The Internal Settlement was signed on 3 March 1978, leading to the establishment of a transitional government and the country's first universal suffrage elections in March of the following year. On 1 June 1979 Bishop Abel Muzorewa became the first black African Prime Minister and the

⁴³ Allport, 'Flags and Symbols of Rhodesia'.

⁴⁴ J. Edmond, *Green and White*, sound recording, (Salisbury: Map, 1970).

⁴⁵ J. Edmond, *Rhodesians of the World*, sound recording (RAM, 1992), <https://store.cdbaby.com/cd/johnedmond3> [accessed 13 May 2017].

country was renamed Zimbabwe Rhodesia.⁴⁶ The realisation of impending majority rule, and with it a change of flag, brought an explosion of Rhodesian flag paraphernalia. Sets comprising all of the country's flags became widely available as people wanted to purchase a reminder of this period in the country's history.



Paraphernalia featuring the Rhodesian flag

Such developments reflected the reality of the situation. The Rhodesian flag was essentially a white man's flag, and public displays of opposition amongst whites were rare. One case, however, had been reported soon after its adoption, when twelve whites tried to take down the new flag flying on top of the kopje in the capital and were arrested by the police.⁴⁷ It is not clear whether any black or non-white groups were consulted during the design process, but this is unlikely, and most of the debates at the time of the flag's adoption were

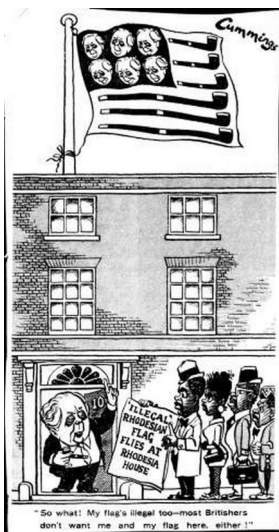
⁴⁶ Berry, 'Flying in the Winds of Change'.

⁴⁷ Brownell, 'A Sordid Tussle on the Strand'.

confined to the white population. The new flag thus had little resonance with the African population and was considered a symbol of oppression. This was highlighted shortly after its adoption, when the headmaster of a school for Coloured (mixed-race) children reportedly remarked that after raising the new flag he had washed his hands with carbolic soap and left it up to rot!⁴⁸

While the Rhodesian flag had gained acceptance within the country, especially amongst the white population, this was not the case internationally. The first major incident around its flying took place in London on 31 December 1968, when the new flag was raised over Rhodesia House, the offices of the Rhodesian High Commission, on the Strand.

The Rhodesia House incident, January 1969, in British press cartoons.
British Cartoon Archive, <https://www.cartoons.ac.uk> [accessed 14 May 2017]



Cummings, Sunday Express, 4 January 1969



Giles, Daily Express, 14 January 1969



Cummings, Daily Express, 5 January 1969



Papas, Guardian, 13 January 1969

48 Personal recollection.



Left, Musgrave Wood, Daily Mail,
14 January 1969

Below, Waite, The Sun,
28 January 1969



Although not easily seen from street level, the flag caused an immediate ruckus in the popular press and within the British Government in Whitehall. Two days later, the British Cabinet met to discuss the issue. It was agreed that the hoisting of the flag was timed to correspond with the eve of the meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers, from which Rhodesia was excluded, and was intended to be 'highly provocative'.⁴⁹ Three options were discussed: do nothing; remove it by force if necessary; or arrange a compromise whereby the British Residual Mission in Salisbury would lower the Union Jack simultaneously with Rhodesia House lowering the Rhodesian flag. The second option was discounted: flying the flag contravened no law, Rhodesia House was protected by certain diplomatic privileges, and removal by force might invite reprisals against the British Mission in Rhodesia. Everyone disliked the compromise solution, commented Prime Minister Harold Wilson, so no official response was made.⁵⁰ However, the 'insignificant piece of bunting', as the flag was described, continued to court controversy. Various 'flag raiders' began periodically to climb the flagpole of Rhodesia House and remove it. On two occasions students replaced it with a Union Jack, one of which flew above Rhodesia House for seventeen hours. Throughout January 1969, British newspaper cartoonists had a field day with the entire episode, lampooning the apparent powerlessness of the British Government while spotlighting the high-flying antics of the flagpole raiders.⁵¹

The Rhodesian flag flying over Rhodesia House and the subsequent protests were a great embarrassment to Britain internationally. 'Everybody in London it

49 Brownell, 'A Sordid Tussle on the Strand', p. 21.

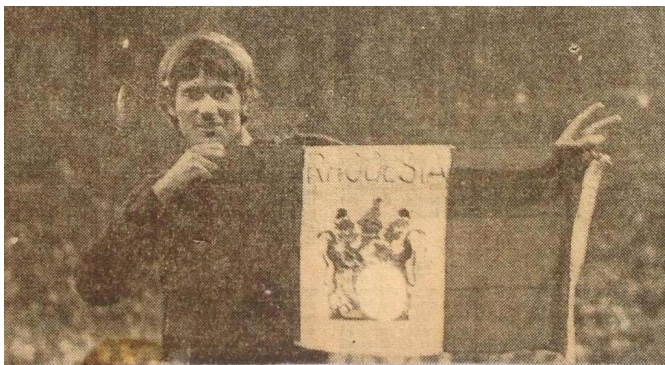
50 Ibid., p. 22.

51 Ibid., p.22

appears has seen [the UDI flag above Rhodesia House] except [the] British Government,' reported the American Embassy in London to Washington.⁵² The flag finally came down following the referendum of June 1969, whose outcome in favour of a republican constitution resulted in Rhodesia House closing its doors on 14 July 1969.

The flag also flew in its official capacity, without any notoriety, at the Rhodesian diplomatic missions in Lisbon (until 1974) and Pretoria (until 1979).

Further controversies regarding the flag revolved around Rhodesia's participation at the few international sports events to which the country was invited. Rhodesia was barred from participating in the 1968 Olympic Games, but in 1971 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) offered the country the opportunity to compete in the upcoming 1972 summer Olympics under the same conditions as 1964, as the 'Colony of Southern Rhodesia', with a British identity, using the old flag and 'God Save the Queen' as its anthem. The matter was discussed by the Cabinet and, despite the influence of sport in its design, approval was given.⁵³ A racially mixed team of 44 athletes arrived in Munich in August 1972, and interestingly it was the pre-1964 Southern Rhodesia dark blue ensign that was raised at the Olympic Village.⁵⁴ However, following objections and threats from 42 nations to boycott the Games, the IOC voted 36 to 31 (with three abstentions) to exclude Rhodesia. The athletes were allowed to remain in the Olympic village and attend their events but they were forbidden from participating. However, during the closing ceremony hockey player Reg Bennett carried a Rhodesian flag aloft, much to the delight of the 80,000 strong crowd.⁵⁵



*Closing ceremony, Olympic Games, Munich, 1972:
Reg Bennett holds aloft a Rhodesian flag*

Use of the flag was also forbidden at the Maccabi Games in Tel Aviv in July 1973, when the Rhodesian team was asked to participate under the Union Jack. Instead, the team marched under the Rhodesian Maccabi banner at the opening ceremony and did not participate in those parts of the ceremony which

52 Telegram from the American Embassy (London) to the State Department, 7 January 1969; quoted in *ibid.* p. 23.

53 Kenrick, 'These Colours Don't Run'.

54 *Rhodesian Olympic Flag Raising at Munich Olympic Village*, film (AP Archive, 1972), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pP_agDlx7aM [accessed 13 May 2017].

55 *Aquatic Sports History of South Africa*, <http://swimhistory.org/pools/item/380-rhodesian-swimming-articles> [accessed 1 June 2017].

required the presentation of a national flag.⁵⁶

Down, but not out – after the demise of Rhodesia

No formal public ceremony marked the lowering of the Rhodesian flag for the last time on 1 September 1979. The country had been renamed Zimbabwe Rhodesia, with Bishop Abel Muzorewa its first black African Prime Minister, on 1 June 1979. A new flag to reflect the political changes in the country, and specifically its multiracial character, was raised for the first time at ceremonies across the country on 2 September 1979. Despite the black-African majority in parliament, the continued exclusion of externally based African nationalists and the over-representation of whites denied Zimbabwe Rhodesia international recognition and the lifting of sanctions. The guerilla war continued, white attrition increased and in late 1979 the faltering economy finally led to British-sponsored talks at Lancaster House, which were attended by all parties, including the externally-based Patriotic Front.⁵⁷ These negotiations brought about the lifting of sanctions, and a return to the country's former status as a British colony when Lord Christopher Soames arrived as the new Governor on 12 December 1979 to oversee the transition process. A ceasefire followed on 28 December 1979 and the holding of internationally supervised elections early in 1980.



*Raising the flag of
Zimbabwe Rhodesia:
Rufaro Stadium, Salisbury,
2 September 1979*

With the ending of the political impasse caused by UDI, and its return to legality as a British colony, for the first time in its history the country was ruled directly from London. The Union Jack was reinstated as the official flag, although in practice the Zimbabwe Rhodesia flag continued to be used. This is one of the few examples of a reversion to the use of the Union Jack and explains why it was the Union Jack that was lowered at the celebrations on 17/18 April 1980 to mark the country's independence as the Republic of Zimbabwe.⁵⁸

56 'No UK Flag for Us – Rhodesian Maccabi Team', *Chronicle*, 8 July 1973;

'Rhodesia Marches in Games Opening', *Chronicle*, 10 July 1973.

57 Berry, 'Flying in the Winds of Change'.

58 *Ibid.*; B.B. Berry, 'Together at Last: Rhodesia's Flags', *Rhodesians Worldwide*, 16, no. 2 (2000), pp. 11-12.



Raising the flag of Zimbabwe: Rufaro Stadium, Salisbury, 17/18 April 1980 (midnight)

The years that followed UDI had tested the fortitude and ingenuity of white Rhodesians, who never numbered more than 250,000 (out of a total population of nearly five million)⁵⁹, but who nevertheless manifested a fierce nationalism. The large majority of (white) Rhodesians believed that their 'Rhodesian-ness' supplied a common bond based on Christian values, firmly grounded in British imperial ideals and dedicated to maintaining a 'civilised' way of life. The 'Beloved Green and White', as the flag came to be fondly called, grew to represent the ideal of Rhodesia that many whites subscribed to.

With the move to majority rule, and shortly after April 1980, most whites left the country. The 'Green and White' is now the focal point of many Rhodesian 'Contact Organisations' throughout the world, featuring prominently at reunions, events to commemorate those who fell in defence of the country during UDI, and at Remembrance Day parades. It features on the cover of Rhodesians Worldwide, the main Rhodesian contact magazine, and it is a popular item for collectors of Southern African militaria.



The Beloved Green and White displayed, post-1980

59 *Encyclopaedia Rhodesia* (Salisbury: College Press, 1973), p. 70.

Yet, to outsiders, that symbol of Rhodesian-ness represents racial solidarity in defence of privilege and white rule. It should not be surprising, therefore, that Dylann Roof, the shooter of nine worshippers at a historic black church in Charleston, South Carolina (USA) on 17 June 2015, was photographed wearing a jacket emblazoned with the old flag of South Africa and that of Rhodesia.



Dylann Roof wears a jacket displaying the old South African and Rhodesian flags

Reflecting on why Roof, a 21-year-old American, would display the Rhodesian flag in particular, several commentators argued that despite its obscurity in American political discourse, Rhodesia is well known to white (American) racists, and Rhodesian flag patches are often sold at extreme right-wing events.⁶⁰

FLAGGING THE FLAGS

Around the world, countries have long struggled with questions about flags that have been deemed controversial

 <p>UNITED STATES: Last week's South Carolina shooting renewed debate over one of the most controversial Southern symbols — the Confederate flag. It has become a divisive and violent emblem of the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacist groups</p>	 <p>GERMANY: With the defeat of Adolf Hitler in 1945, the Nazi's scarlet flag with a black swastika was banned in Germany and remains so today</p>	 <p>MIDDLE EAST: In the Middle East, ISIS group has co-opted the centuries-old "Black Banner" to use as its standard</p>	 <p>BALKANS: Last October, a European Championship soccer qualifying match between Serbia and Albania was suspended in Belgrade after a drone carrying an Albanian nationalist flag flew over the pitch, igniting clashes between players and fans</p>	 <p>SOUTH AFRICA AND RHODESIA: The flags of the now-defunct white-supremacist regimes in South Africa and Rhodesia, which is today Zimbabwe</p>
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Source: AP

العربية NEWS

The Rhodesian flag appears alongside other 'controversial flags'

The Rhodesian flag is important in terms of symbolism, for Rhodesia subscribed to white supremacy,' explains a lecturer in African history at Oxford University.⁶¹ Furthermore, such flags (Rhodesian and old South African) are popular in some white supremacist circles as a way to advertise to like-minded individuals less obviously than wearing a swastika.⁶² Together with these flags, the Rhodesian

60 Todd Blodgett, quoted in N. Baumann, 'Dylann Roof Had a Rhodesian Flag on His Jacket – Here's What That Tells Us', *Huffington Post* (2015), http://www.huffingtonpost.co.za/entry/dylann-roof-rhodesian-flag_n_7616752 [accessed 12 May 2017].

61 Blessing-Miles Tendi, quoted in *ibid*.

62 D. Murphy, 'Why Would an American White Supremacist Be Fond of Rhodesia?', *Christian Science Monitor* (18 June 2015), <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Security-Watch/Backchannels/2015/0618/Why-would-an-American-white-supremacist-be-fond-of-Rhodesia-video>

flag was listed as one of the world's most controversial and divisive following the Charleston shooting in 2015.⁶³ Such sentiments are echoed by Foldy (2015), who comments that, 'Few flags represent racialised violence quite as sharply as that of white Rhodesia, a flag whose historical implications belong alongside the swastika.'⁶⁴

Conclusion

The Green and White Rhodesian flag is the symbol most closely associated with the post-UDI period, following the country's dramatic break from Britain and its desire to create a unique identity. Today it is the rallying point for white ex-Rhodesians scattered around the world but is completely ignored within the country over which it once flew, since it represents the colonial past and particularly the attempt to delay the transfer to black majority rule.

To those non-Zimbabweans who recognise the flag, it can be found alongside the flags of the Confederate States of America, the Third Reich and apartheid-era South Africa as a symbol of white supremacy.

Most white ex-Rhodesians are indignant, and indeed horrified, that 'our' flag should now come to represent the worst excesses of white supremacy. To them it represents the nostalgia of the past, the years of resistance, the comradeship of the war and the perfidy of supposed friends who helped bring Rhodesia down. Despite the loss of a way of life, for white ex-Rhodesians the loss of a country and the rootlessness that it has created, the beloved 'Green and White' is the proud symbol of all that had been achieved in 90 years, the heroic defence against terrorism and sanctions ... the symbol of Rhodesians who will 'never die'.

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- 63 D. MacGuill, 'The World's Most Divisive and Controversial Flags', [thejournal.ie](http://www.thejournal.ie/the-worlds-most-controversial-divisive-flags-2181689-Jun2015/), <http://www.thejournal.ie/the-worlds-most-controversial-divisive-flags-2181689-Jun2015/> [accessed 14 May 2017].
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