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Ali von Paris

*Powerhouse Entrepreneur Who
Turned Maryland Pride Into a
Multimillion-Dollar Business*

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From Coats of
Arms to Bow
Ties and Bikinis:



Maryland's

State Flag Shows Its Colors

BY CARYN R. SAGAL

WHAT'S BLACK, YELLOW, RED AND WHITE — and a beloved symbol that continues to delight?

It's none other than the Maryland state flag, which consistently ranks at or among the top in polls of "The Best," "Most Memorable," or "Coolest" state flags.

In addition to being one of four state flags with no shade of blue, "Maryland's is the only state flag based on royal heraldry," says Katie Caljean, president and CEO of the Maryland Center for History and Culture (MCHC) — formerly the Maryland Historical Society.

The heraldry goes back to Maryland's origins as a proprietary colony of the Calverts, who held the royal title "Lord Baltimore."

"Families had long used coats of arms or other marks to symbolize their legacy," Caljean explains. "But, in the 1600s, when George Calvert was officially granted his lordship and proprietary rights to establish the Maryland colony, noble heraldry was highly regulated by British kings and queens.

"In our library at MCHC, we care for the official 'confirmation of arms' granted by King James I to George Calvert in 1622, which features the yellow and black colors that Marylanders recognize today," she adds. "These colors were used in official seals and documents throughout the

colony's history, but even in the early days, we see an affinity for the arms entering popular culture."

Since 1632, the Seal of Maryland has depicted the gold-and-black crest of the Calverts, as well as the red-and-white

Katie Caljean



Confirmation of Arms to George Calvert
Circa 1622

crest of the Crosslands (George Calvert's maternal family).

Following the American Revolution, many former colonies abandoned symbols affiliated with the British monarchy. "But we continued to see the Calvert coat of arms on seals, documents and ephemera," Caljean says.

During the Civil War, Maryland's Union soldiers and supporters adopted the Calvert colors, while its Confederate soldiers and sympathizers adopted the Crossland colors.

Symbolizing reconciliation and unity during Reconstruction, a banner emerged with four alternating quadrants — the first and fourth featuring the Calvert colors and stripe pattern, and the second and third featuring the Crossland colors and cross-bottony design.

It debuted at an 1880 parade marking the 150th anniversary of the founding of Baltimore, and reappeared in 1889

at the Maryland National Guard's Fifth Regiment.

That design became the official state flag in 1904, and Marylanders have celebrated it ever since.

"The fact that Marylanders held on to the imagery from its colonial days is a testament to the ways the bold colors and design appeal to so many people and why the flag continues to be so popular today," Caljean says — noting that MCHC stewards one of the nation's most significant collections of flags, and dedicates much time and energy to preserving it for the future.

"Our state boasts one of the most recognizable flags and it is certainly a point of pride for Marylanders," Caljean adds.

Ali von Paris, founder and chief visionary officer of Route One Apparel concurs, calling the Maryland flag "a symbol of pride, unity and heritage."



Maryland Flag
Circa 1917

"So unique with the colors, the patterns and the history behind it, it's instantly recognizable and visually striking — like streetwear before streetwear was a thing," adds von Paris, who built a multimillion-dollar company based around the Maryland flag.

While attending the University of Maryland, von Paris noticed how much state pride students and locals had — especially around the flag. Wanting to create something "that celebrated that pride in a fun, stylish way," she launched an e-commerce platform in 2010.

Route One debuted with sunglasses featuring the Maryland flag on the sides. Next came custom apparel with the Maryland flag, starting with 1,000 bikinis which presold before they came in stock. Von Paris continued to add merchandise, with each new



Ali von Paris

product serving as a “mini celebration of Maryland.”

“When someone wears the Maryland flag, it’s a conversation starter, it’s nostalgic and it’s bold,” she says. “People want to show off where they’re from and the Maryland flag gives them an artistic way to do that.”

Touted as the “#1 Shop for All Things Maryland & More,” Route One counts among its customers Maryland sports elite, news anchors, musicians, politicians and influencers, among others.

Merchandise is sold in hundreds of retailers across the state and beyond, in part due to licensing deals with the University of Maryland, Towson University, the U.S. Naval Academy, McCormick, Pabst, Hershey, Utz and Domino Sugar.

Its 3,000-plus unique products across 70-plus categories comprise clothing, accessories, home decor, pet gear and seasonal collections. Best sellers include Maryland flag shorts, crab-themed apparel, the Old Bay collection, and Orioles- and Ravens-inspired lines.

Von Paris says her personal favorite is the Maryland Flag sequin jacket, “which is rocked by all ages and people, and a staple at sports games and any big events

around the state.”

Route One’s January 2025 acquisition by Maryland Brand Management Inc. brought the company to 60 employees — from design and marketing to fulfillment and customer service. Von Paris says she will stay on “to ensure a smooth handoff and help steer future opportunities.”

This includes adding home goods and limited-edition collaborations, and introducing “elevated lifestyle pieces that blend fashion with flag.” Von Paris also has plans for retail expansion, additional partnerships with Maryland brands and sports teams, and more cause-driven campaigns.

“Our brand is only growing, and our vision is bigger than just apparel — we want to be the go-to destination for all things Maryland.” □

For more information about the Maryland Center for History and Culture, visit mdhistory.org.

For more information about Route One Apparel, visit routeoneapparel.com.

Caryn R. Sagal is a Baltimore-based freelance writer.