

American Flags



The American flag can be considered the ultimate icon of the American landscape, the logo that has branded the world above any other. This simple design represents the values of a whole society: freedom, equality, progress, and even modernity. As any good logo, the "emptiness" of its composition is what allows it to be a container of meaning, any meaning. It can even be stated that its graphic emptiness is the cause of all the current confusion about what it means to be "American." Corporate culture has integrated itself so deeply into the American imagery that it has become difficult to distinguish between American and Corporate Culture: If American Culture is defined by logos, products, and advertisement, if its meaning relies on the social dynamics that companies have imposed as lifestyles, then what is the real America? Last November, this confusion led the Republican Party to lose the presidential election to a Democratic candidate that presented a much more open and broader version of what being American is today. The choice that John McCain made with Sarah Palin as vice

presidential candidate and the discourse that she sported divided the GOP in a way that would make Ronald Reagan chill. While Palin toured the heartland, painted in red, white, and blue, blasting country music, and claiming that "real America" was only present in small towns; the other fraction of the Republican Party, its intellectual core, the Washington-elite strategists were running away from this speech. They felt it was too "trashy," too "redneck," too "white." Even David Frum, George Bush's speechwriter and creator of the "Axis of Evil" discourse, admitted that this polarizing, restricted view of America was going to be the downfall of the Republican campaign, and he didn't want to have anything to do with it. Frum wasn't talking politics, he was talking marketing. By admitting that America needs to be redefined, the Democratic campaign gained a place in a political market that felt confused, but that was also comfortable in its confusion. "America," as a word, is as empty as its graphic representation: The stars and the bars that once represented "one Nation under God, indivisible, With Liberty and Justice for all," today looks as meaningless as a McDonalds arch or a Nike swoosh crumbling into the economic abyss.