

# UNCLE SAM



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I am your national Uncle, I am your state Uncle, I am your local community Uncle, and I am your patriotic Uncle who represents the ideals and concepts which this country's foundations rest upon both at home and abroad. I am like your favorite family uncle, warm, generous, giving and full of goodwill; but I can also be stern and resolved in the face of national adversity. There are times when I am forward-thinking about this country's future, but at times I can be stubborn and wrong in the implementation of national policy. I am the embodiment of Everyman--man, woman and child, all races, creeds, and religious affiliations. I am all things to all people in the United States of America. I am your Uncle Sam, the national representative symbol and icon of our country.

I have been around since the earliest beginnings of the United States of America. My image first appeared in 1789, but I was brought to life by a real flesh and blood person in the guise of Samuel Wilson. A meat packer from Troy, New York, Samuel Wilson stamped his barrels of contract meat for the Army during the War of 1812 with the initials "US." When asked what the "US" stood for, one of Wilson's employees is said to have replied "Uncle Sam." This was intended to separate his government contract meat from his civilian contract meat. Little did Samuel Wilson know he would be the basis for a symbol of our fledgling nation. During his lifetime, Wilson did not look at all like the image Americans have come to have of me.

Leading up to the conclusion of the Civil War, the images of me were various. I was short and plump, I was tall and lanky; I had a beard, I had white hair and chin whiskers with no mustache, I was clean shaven; I wore tall boots, I wore Congressman gaiter shoes; I sported a white top hat. Whatever the style, I have always been fashionably attired in patriotic clothes suggesting the red, white and blue of our nation's flag.

Many people have drawn and painted me over the course of our country's history. The two people that have had the greatest influence on my image were Thomas Nast and James Montgomery Flagg. Known as the Father of Political Cartoonists, Thomas Nast drew many of the patriotic symbols of this country during the last half of the nineteenth century. Two of his most popular and enduring creations would be Santa Claus and me. Nast said he based his lanky, long-limbed and chin-whiskered image of me on our sixteenth president, Abraham Lincoln.

It was during World War I that I was colorfully portrayed in a U.S. Army recruiting poster and forever linked to the phrase, "I want you" by artist James Montgomery in 1917. Through many wars and times of national turmoil, I am the image that cartoonists across the nation continue to use in editorial cartoons and advertisements for patriotic, national conscience, and even parody issues. For the good, for the controversial, and even for the bad, I am all things for all people of our nation. I am Uncle Sam, national symbol and icon of the United States of America.