

The National Anthem

History

The *Star Spangled Banner* was written by Francis Scott Key in 1814. During the War of 1812 the British attacked Fort McHenry in Baltimore, Maryland on September 12. The steady bombardment continued thorough out the night. In the early morning of September 13th the bombing paused suddenly. As Key watched from a distance they could not tell if the fort had been defeated. As the smoke began to clear, they caught a glimpse of the massive 42 foot long flag with its eight red stripes, seven white stripes and fifteen stars. The flag had survived the night. Key was so moved by this image in the distance that he pulled out an envelope from his pocket and began to describe this miraculous vision. He called his poem *Defense of Fort McHenry*.

Two days later Key returned to his room at the Indian Queen Hotel and finished all four versus of his poem. The following morning he brought it to his brother-in-law and they arranged to have it printed and distributed to everyone at the Fort. When it was printed, it included the name of a popular tune, *To Anacreon in Heaven*, to which the poem should be sung.

More than 100 years later, in 1916, President Woodrow Wilson ordered that it should become the National Anthem played by the military and naval services, but it wasn't until March 3rd, 1931 that it was officially designated as the National Anthem by act of Congress:

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the composition known as The Star-spangled Banner is designated as the National Anthem of the United States of America.

Changes

Key expressed his particular bitterness towards the British in the third verse of his poem:

Their blood has washed out their foul footsteps' pollution
No refuge could save the hireling & slave
From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave

This was an understandable feeling at the time he wrote, but the two nations had become closer and such sentiments weren't considered appropriate. As a result the third verse is typically omitted. Alternative verses have been written in later years.

In an attempt to remedy the balance of the anti-British sentiment in Key's third verse, the following stanza was written by George Spowers around 1824. Unfortunately it was also considered to drag the National Anthem into unnecessary politics and is rarely sung.

But hush'd be that strain! They our Foes are no longer;
Lo Britain the right hand of Friendship extends,
And Albion's fair Isle we behold with affection
The land of our Fathers - the land of our Friends!
Long, long may we flourish,
Columbia and Britain,
In amity still may your children be found,
And the Star-Spangled Banner and Red Cross together
Wave free and triumphant the wide world around!

Oliver-Wendell Holmes wrote probably the best known additional stanza during the Civil War. It was intended to condemn treasonable acts against the US flag.

When our land is illumined with liberty's smile,
If a foe from within strikes a blow at her glory,
Down, down with the traitor that tries to defile
The flag of the stars, and the page of her story!
By the millions unchained,
Who their birthright have gained
We will keep her bright blazon forever unstained;
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave,
While the land of the free is the home of the brave.

The Star Spangled Banner

by Francis Scott Key (1814)

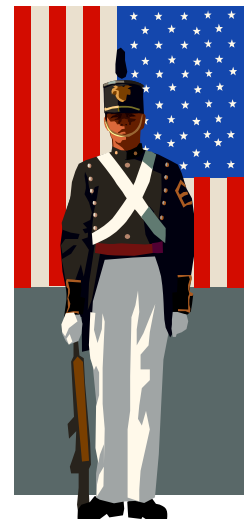
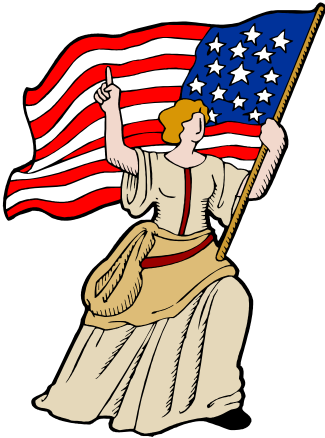
*O say can you see by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming;
Whose broad stripes and bright stars, through the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming?*

*And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,
O say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?*

*On the shore dimly seen through the mists of the deep,
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,
As it fitfully blows, now conceals, now discloses?
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,
In full glory reflected now shines on the stream,
'Tis the star-spangled banner - O long may it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!*

*And where is that band who so vauntingly swore,
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion
A home and a country should leave us no more?
Their blood has washed out their foul footsteps' pollution.
No refuge could save the hireling and slave
From the terror of flight, or the gloom of the grave,
And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!*

*Oh! thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand
Between their loved homes and the war's desolation!
Blest with victory and peace, may the heaven-rescued land
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation.
Then conquer we must, for our cause it is just,
And this be our motto: "In God is our trust,"
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!*



Quiz

- 1) What Fort was attacked by the British the night the *Star Spangled Banner* was written?
 - a) Fort McHenry
 - b) Fort Howard
 - c) Fort McDonald

- 2) How many verses are in the original poem?
 - a) 2
 - b) 3
 - c) 4

- 3) Which president declared the *Star Spangled Banner* as the National Anthem?
 - a) James Madison
 - b) Woodrow Wilson
 - c) Warren Harding

- 4) What tune was the poem adapted to?
 - a) *Nearer my God to thee*
 - b) *America the Beautiful*
 - c) *To Anacreon in Heaven*

- 5) Why is there more than one version of the third verse?
 - a) The British didn't like the verse
 - b) To warn the British not to harm the flag or our country.
 - c) Britain and America's relationship had grown stronger since it was first written.