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ZOOM

in on america

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The Star-Spangled Banner



(AP Photo/Joe Rosenthal)

One of the most famous photos from World War II shows the U.S. Marines from the 5th Division of the 28th Regiment as they raise the American flag atop Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima, Japan, on February 23, 1945.

Flags have always been important for humans. Putting up a flag denoted victory or taking possession of new lands. The flag was also present at the time of national mourning following some disaster or death of an important individual. Each country has a special code of behavior connected with holding, displaying and disposing of a worn out flag. Everyone knows what their national flag looks like and on various occasions they identify with the flag, sometimes indeed very emotionally. Sporting events, international ceremonies, as well as state funerals would not be the same without the flag.

The national flag of the United States of America is composed of thirteen equal horizontal stripes of red (top and bottom) alternating with white and a Union (a blue rectangle in the canton) with fifty small, white, five-pointed stars arranged in nine horizontal rows of six stars (top and bottom) alternating with rows of five stars. The 13 stripes represent the original thirteen colonies that rebelled against British rule and became the first states of the Union. The fifty stars on the flag stand for the present 50 states.

The flag has a few nicknames: the "Stars and Stripes," "Old Glory" and "The Star-Spangled Banner," which is also the name of the American anthem.

In this issue: The American Flag

Zoom in on America

From Queen Ann to the Stars and Stripes: The History of the American Flag

Before the first Thirteen Colonies came under the control of Britain and adopted an English flag, known as the **Queen Ann Flag**, European settlers had flown the flags of their native country. With tensions growing between the Thirteen Colonies and Britain, a need was felt to design a flag for the colonies. The first unofficial flag, known as the **Continental Colors**, (or "the Grand Union Flag") had thirteen red and white stripes with a Union composed of the crosses of St. George and St. Andrew. It was first unfurled on January 1, 1776. The Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776 meant that a new flag was necessary. A year later, on June 14, 1777, Congress passed a resolution recognizing a new design known as **Stars and Stripes** as the Flag of the United States of America. To commemorate this event, June



14 is observed as Flag Day. The blue Union of this first official flag contained 13 stars, but the designer, Francis Hopkinson, did not define the layout and several patterns are known today. The "constellation" type, with stars arranged in a circle, is called the "Betsy Ross flag," attributed to Betsy Ross who allegedly made it. As new states joined the Union, more stars and stripes were added, and instead of the circular design for the stars, they were arranged in rows. Adding more stripes as the new states joined the Union turned out to be impractical in terms of the design. In 1818 a law passed by Congress restored the thirteen stripes representing the thirteen original colonies, and stipulated the number of stars as one star for each state. In this way - after 25 changes to the number of stars - the U.S. flag has 50 stars today.



Three different versions of the American Flag are shown in 1777, 1795 and 1818. The 13-star "Betsy Ross" flag, left. The "Star-Spangled Banner" flag, center, had 15 stars and 15 stripes. The last flag had 20 stars. (photos © AP Images)

Oath of Loyalty to the Flag: The Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance of the United States is an oath of loyalty to the national flag and the Republic of the United States of America. Originally composed by **Francis Bellamy** in 1892, it was authorized by Congress in 1942. The original text was modified a few times, but since 1954 has remained unchanged. It reads:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

According to the Flag Code the Pledge:

should be rendered by standing at attention facing the flag with the right hand over the heart. Members of the Armed Forces and veterans who are present and not in uniform may render the military salute. Persons in uniform should

remain silent, face the flag, and render the military salute.

Congressional sessions open with the swearing of the Pledge, as do government meetings at local levels, meetings held by the Knights of Columbus, Royal Rangers, Girl Scouts of the United States, Boy Scouts of America, Fraternal Order of Eagles, Lions Club, Rotary Club, Freemasons, Toastmasters International, as well as other organizations. Each year at naturalization ceremonies the pledge is sworn by thousands of new American citizens who come from all over the world.

The inclusion of the words "under God" has caused controversy. Other groups, such as the Jehovah's Witness, have objected to the Pledge's compulsory use in school.

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How to Display the Flag:

The Code

The Federal Flag Code contains guidelines for the display of and respect shown to the flag. A general rule has it that "No disrespect should be shown to the flag of the United States of America." The flag should never be displayed with union down. It should not be dipped to any person or thing and it should never touch anything beneath it, such as the ground or the floor. The flag is customarily displayed from sunrise to sunset on buildings and open-air flagstaffs. Nevertheless, for patriotic reasons it may also be displayed 24 hours a day, provided it is properly illuminated at night. The flag is to be displayed on or near the main administration building of every public institution, at polling spots during elections, and in or near every schoolhouse on school days. When the flag is displayed on a car, the staff should be fixed to the chassis or clamped to the right fender. Upon the death of a principal figure of the government, as a mark of respect to their memory the flag is flown at half-staff. The code explains how the flag

should be first hoisted to the peak and only then lowered to the half-staff position. The flag should again be raised to the peak before it is lowered for the day. The flag is also used to cover a coffin. In that case it should be so placed that the union is at the head and over the left shoulder. The flag is not to be lowered into the grave or allowed to touch the ground. There should never be anything attached to the flag such as any mark, insignia, letter, word, figure, design, picture, or drawing. It should never be used for advertising purposes in any manner. No part of the flag should be used as a costume or athletic uniform, but a flag patch may be affixed to the uniform of military personnel, firemen, policemen and members of patriotic organizations. The President of the United States is entitled to change, repeal or introduce additional rules regarding the flag through a proclamation.

The Flag Code is a guide to be followed on a voluntary basis.

Miscellaneous Facts about the American Flag

Inspiration for the Anthem:

An American, **Francis Scott Key**, was on a British warship near Baltimore during the War of 1812. After a night of heavy bombardment, he woke up fearing that the American Fort McHenry near Baltimore had fallen, but "by the dawn's early light" on September 14, 1814 he saw the fifteen-stripe flag still floating in air. This sight inspired him into writing the words of the National Anthem, known also as the "Star-Spangled Banner." In the photo below, the flag from Fort McHenry is shown at Smithsonian Museum of American History in Washington in 1997. In 1999 the flag underwent a thorough restoration.

The National Anthem Project

The National Anthem Project ran through 2004-2007. It was a national education initiative of the National Associa-

tion for Music Education aimed at re-teaching Americans the words to "The Star-Spangled Banner." It was designed after a Harris Poll survey had shown that two out of three Americans did not know the words of the anthem. The top middle photo below shows jeep owners positioning 140 vehicles to form an American flag on August 11, 2005 in Mount Pocono, Pennsylvania to celebrate the first year of the initiative and to promote the project.

Destruction of Worn Flags

The Flag Code specifies that "the flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning." The photo on the right shows a Boy Scout who clutches a fragment of the American Flag as he prepares to drop it into a fire pit during a flag retirement ceremony.



All photos © AP Images

Activity Page

Win a Prize!
June 2011 CONTEST

What inspired Francis Scott Key to write a poem that later became the national anthem?

Send the answer (with your home address) to: zoom@usinfo.pl

Deadline: July 5

Win a Prize!

The answer to the May contest was:

The James Madison Building

Thank you for participating

The winners are:

Stanislaw from Krakow, Dorota from Legionowo and Grazyna from Nowa Sarzyna

CONGRATULATIONS
The prizes will be sent to you by mail.

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Exercise 1 There are eight sights in the United States where the flag is flown day and night under specific legal authority. They are listed below. On the right, there are their descriptions, but in a different order. Match places 1-8 with their descriptions a-h.

These are not the only places where the flag is displayed at night. As a matter of custom, and without specific statutory or official authorization, it is flown, for example, at the U.S. Capitol.

1. Fort Mc Henry National Monument, Baltimore, Maryland
 2. The Star-Spangled Banner Flag House
 3. The United States Marine Corps Iwo Jima Memorial, Arlington, Virginia
 4. Lexington, Massachusetts
 5. The White House
 6. The Washington Monument
 7. United States Port of Entry
 8. Valley Forge National Historical Park, Pennsylvania
- a. A statue outside the walls of the Arlington National Cemetery dedicated to all personnel of the United States Marine Corps who have died in the defense of their country since 1775.
 - b. The official residence of the President of the United States.
 - c. The site where the Continental Army spent the winter of 1777–1778 during the American Revolutionary War.
 - d. A place where one may lawfully enter a country.
 - e. The fort which played a vital role in the War of 1812 when it successfully defended Baltimore Harbor from an attack by the British navy.
 - f. The world's tallest obelisk near the west end of the National Mall in Washington, D.C., commemorating the first U.S. president.
 - g. A museum which once was the home of Mary Pickersgill where she sewed the "Star Spangled Banner," the garrison flag that flew over Fort McHenry in the summer of 1814 during the Battle of Baltimore.
 - h. The town famous for being the site of the first shot of the American Revolution on April 19, 1775.

Exercise 2 Read the words of the U.S. national anthem:

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?

Without referring back to the article on p. 3, do you remember the name of the author and on what occasion and when he wrote them?

Exercise 3 Speaking

Work in pairs. Choose one of the pictures on the right. Describe the picture to the other student and listen to his/her description. Then discuss similarities and differences between the two photos.



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