

# Star-Spangled Banner Lyrics and History

## The Star-Spangled Banner: Full Lyrics and Historical Context

“The Star-Spangled Banner” is the national anthem of the United States of America. The lyrics come from “Defence of Fort M’Henry”, a poem written on September 14, 1814, by 35-year-old lawyer and amateur poet Francis Scott Key after witnessing the bombardment of Fort McHenry by British ships of the Royal Navy in Baltimore Harbor during the Battle of Baltimore in the War of 1812. Key was inspired by the large U.S. flag, with 15 stars and 15 stripes, known as the Star-Spangled Banner, flying triumphantly above the fort during the U.S. victory.

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### Full Lyrics of “The Star-Spangled Banner”

**\*\*Verse 1\*\***

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?

**\*\*Verse 2\*\***

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, half conceals, half discloses?  
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,  
In full glory reflected now shines in 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.

**\*\*Verse 3\*\***

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.

**\*\*Verse 4\*\***

O thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand  
Between their loved homes and the war's desolation.  
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the Heav'n rescued land  
Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation!  
Then conquer we must, when 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!

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## Historical Significance

Francis Scott Key's poem "Defence of Fort M'Henry" was set to the tune of a popular British song written by John Stafford Smith for the Anacreontic Society, a men's social club in London, called "To Anacreon in Heaven". Set to Key's poem and renamed "The Star-Spangled Banner", it soon became a well-known U.S. patriotic song. With a range of nineteen semitones, it is known for being difficult to sing. Although the poem has four stanzas, only the first is commonly sung today. "The Star-Spangled Banner" was recognized for official use by the United States Navy in 1889, and by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson in 1916, and was made the official national anthem by a congressional resolution on March 3, 1931 (46 Stat. 1508, codified at 36 U.S.C. § 301), which was signed by President Herbert Hoover.

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## Why "The Star-Spangled Banner" Matters

"The Star-Spangled Banner" resonates deeply as a symbol of American identity, resilience, and freedom. Born from a pivotal moment in the nation's history – the survival against British forces in the War of 1812 – the lyrics encapsulate a sense of endurance and hope against adversity. Its declaration of the land as "the land of the free and the home of the brave" serves as both a historical marker and an ongoing aspiration. Performed at countless civic events, sporting contests, and

solemn occasions, the anthem unifies Americans in moments of celebration and commemoration, reminding listeners of the nation's past struggles and enduring ideals. Its continued presence highlights its cultural significance as more than just a song, but a cherished emblem of American patriotism.

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