



National Sojourners



Heroes of '76

Our National Anthem – “The Star-Spangled Banner”

Script

Compiled December, 2014 by: Paul A. DeMerath
(January 21st, 2019 Revision)



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Our National Anthem - "The Star-Spangled Banner" **A Brief History**

**Compiled and edited by:
Paul A. DeMerath**

Needed Props/Support Equipment:

Narrator (dressed in Heroes of '76 Colonial uniform)

Assistants (preferably dressed in Colonial attire)

Printed Script

Speaker's Podium

Portable speaker system (CD or Bluetooth)

Music (suggest starting with somber/reflective song from the Soundtrack of the movie "Gods and Generals," however other songs may fit, as long as soundtrack is instrumental (void of lyrical vocals))

Laptop w/Powerpoint/Projector/Screen

Our National Anthem - "The Star-Spangled Banner"

A Brief History

Compiled and edited by:
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(slide 1 – Display before presentation)

Narrator:

The National Sojourners is an organization made up of current and former members of the uniformed forces of the United States, as well as Honorary Members, who are all Master Masons. We are organized into local Chapters for the promotion of all patriotic aims and activities in Masonry. As Masons, we are proud of our American heritage and have been counted among the leaders of our country for well over two hundred years.

Within the National Sojourners organization, we conduct an auxiliary degree, initiating members into the "Heroes of '76," and we wear these uniforms as a tribute to our nation's forefathers.

(omit this section if introduced)

Good **morning/afternoon/evening**. My name is _____ ,
and I will be the narrator for this program. *(narrator salutes audience)*

(Optional): Assisting me this **morning/afternoon/evening** are **(is):**

_____, _____ ,
_____, and _____ .

(assistant(s) step forward when introduced, salute and step back)

(slide 2)

(start music soundtrack)

Did you know that the "*The Star-Spangled Banner*" has been our National Anthem for less than 100 years? "*The Star-Spangled Banner*" was designated as our country's National Anthem by congressional resolution on March 3rd, 1931, and was signed into law on the same day by President Herbert Hoover. Before 1931 (slide 3), other songs served as hymns of American officialdom. "*Hail, Columbia*" served this purpose at official functions for much of the 19th century. "*My Country, 'Tis of Thee*," whose melody is identical to "*God Save the Queen*," the British National Anthem, also served as a *de facto* anthem. Following the War of 1812 and subsequent American wars, other songs emerged to compete for popularity at public events, among them, "*The Star-Spangled Banner*."

The lyrics of "*The Star-Spangled Banner*" come from "*Defence of Fort M'Henry*," (slide 4) a poem written in 1814 by the 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 the Chesapeake Bay, just outside of Baltimore, Maryland, during the War of 1812 (slide 5).

The United States went to war with Great Britain in 1812, primarily over freedom of the seas. For two years, we held off the British, even though we were still a rather weak country. At the same time, Great Britain was in a life and death struggle with Napoleon. In fact, just as the United States declared war, Napoleon marched off to invade Russia. If he won, as everyone expected, he would control Europe, and Great Britain would be isolated. It was no time for Britain to be involved in an American war.

At first, our seamen proved better than the British (slide 6). After we won a battle on Lake Erie in 1813, the American commander, Oliver Hazard Perry, sent the message, "We have met the enemy - and they are ours."

However, the weight of the British Navy eventually beat down our fleet. Many of our New England states, hard-hit by a tightening blockade, threatened secession from the Union.

Meanwhile, Napoleon was beaten in Russia and in 1814 was forced to abdicate. Great Britain now turned its full attention to the United States, launching a three-pronged attack (slide 7). The northern prong was to come down Lake Champlain toward New York and seize parts of New England. The southern prong was to go up the Mississippi, take New Orleans and paralyze the west. The central prong was to head for the Mid-Atlantic States and then attack Baltimore, the greatest port south of New York. If Baltimore was taken, the nation, which at that time was mostly concentrated on the Atlantic coast, could be split in two. Our nation's fate, then, rested largely on the success or failure of the central prong.

The British reached the American coast, and on August 24th, 1814, occupied, sacked, and burned Washington, D.C. (slide 8) Then their fleet moved up the Chesapeake Bay toward Baltimore. On September 12th, they arrived and found an American force of over 1,000 men in Fort McHenry, whose guns controlled the harbor (slide 9). If the British wished to conquer Baltimore, they would have to take the fort.

On September 3rd, 1814, Francis Scott Key and John Stuart Skinner (slide 10), the United States Agent for Exchange of Prisoners, had set sail from Baltimore aboard the ship *HMS Minden*, flying a flag of truce on a mission approved by President James Madison. Their objective was to negotiate the exchange of prisoners (slide 11), one of which being Dr. William Beanes, the elderly and popular town physician of Upper Marlboro and a friend of Key's. Dr. Beanes was accused of aiding in the arrest of British soldiers. Key and Skinner boarded the British flagship *HMS Tonnant* on September 7th and spoke with Major General Robert Ross and Vice Admiral Alexander Cochrane over dinner while the two officers discussed war plans.

At first, Ross and Cochrane refused to release Dr. Beanes, but later relented after Key and Skinner showed them letters written by wounded British prisoners praising Dr. Beanes and other Americans for their kind treatment.

Because Key and Skinner had heard details of the plans for the attack on Baltimore, they were held captive until after the battle, first aboard HMS *Surprise* and later back on *HMS Minden*. During the rainy night of September 13th, Key had seen the bombardment (slide 12) and observed that the fort's smaller "storm flag" continued to fly. The British bombardment of Fort McHenry began at 7:00 a.m. in a torrential rainstorm, and continued almost uninterrupted for 25 hours. During this period, fifteen to eighteen hundred shells, each weighing up to 200 pounds, were fired – at a rate of nearly one shell per minute (slide 13). Once the shell and rocket barrage had stopped, a dread silence fell and Key would not know how the battle had turned out until dawn. On the morning of September 14th, the storm flag had been lowered and a larger American flag had been raised.

Key was deeply moved (slide 14) by the American victory and the sight of the large American flag flying triumphantly above the fort in the "dawn's early light." This flag, with fifteen stars and fifteen stripes, and incredibly large, measuring 30 by 42 feet, had been made by Mary Young Pickersgill (slide 15), together with other workers, in her home on Baltimore's Pratt Street.

The flag later came to be known as the Star-Spangled Banner Flag and is currently on display in the National Museum of American History, a treasure of the Smithsonian Institution. It was restored (slide 16) in 1914 and again in 1998 as part of an ongoing conservation program.

Aboard the ship the morning of September 14th, 1814, Key wrote a poem on the back of a letter he had kept in his pocket. At twilight on September 16th, he and Skinner were released into the City of Baltimore. He completed the poem at the Indian Queen Hotel, where he was staying, and titled it "Defence of Fort M'Henry."

Key gave the poem to his brother-in-law, Judge Joseph H. Nicholson, who had commanded a volunteer company at Fort McHenry. Nicholson was moved by the poem and took the poem to a printer in Baltimore, who anonymously made the first known broadside printing (slide 17) on September 17th. Of this printing, two known copies still survive.

The poem was set to the tune of a popular British song which was written by John Stafford Smith for the Anacreontic Society, an 18th-century gentlemen's club of amateur musicians in London. The song "*To Anacreon in Heaven*" (slide 18) with various lyrics, was already popular in the United States. Set to Key's poem and renamed "*The Star-Spangled Banner*," it would soon become a well-known American patriotic song.

Much of the idea of the poem, including the flag imagery and some of the wording, is derived from an earlier song by Key, also set to the tune of The Anacreontic Song. The song, known as "*When the Warrior Returns*," was written in honor of Stephen Decatur and Charles Stewart on their return from the First Barbary War.

On September 20th, both the *Baltimore Patriot* and *The American* printed the song, with the note "*Tune: Anacreon in Heaven.*" The song quickly became popular, having been printed by seventeen newspapers from Georgia to New Hampshire. Soon thereafter, Thomas Carr, of the Carr Music Store in Baltimore, published the words and music together under the title "*The Star-Spangled Banner.*" (slide 19) The song's popularity increased and its first public performance took place in October, when Baltimore actor Ferdinand Durang sang it at Captain McCauley's Tavern.

The song gained popularity throughout the 19th century with bands and orchestras performing it during public events, such as July 4th celebrations. On July 27th, 1889, the Secretary of the Navy, Benjamin F. Tracy, signed General Order #374, making "*The Star-Spangled Banner*" the Navy's official song to be played during the raising of the flag.

By the early 20th century, there were various versions of the song in popular use. Seeking a singular, standardized version, President Woodrow Wilson tasked the U.S. Bureau of Education with providing an official version. In response, the Bureau enlisted the help of five musicians to agree upon such an arrangement. Those musicians were Walter Damrosch, Will Earhart, Arnold Gantvoort, Oscar Sonneck and the most noteworthy of the group, John Philip Sousa (slide 20). The standardized version voted upon by these five musicians premiered at Carnegie Hall on December 5th, 1917. An official handwritten version of the final votes of these five men has recently been found and it shows all five men's votes tallied, measure by measure.

In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson ordered that "*The Star-Spangled Banner*" be played at military and other appropriate occasions. The playing of the song two years later during the seventh-inning stretch of Game One of the 1918 World Series (slide 21), and thereafter during each game of the series, is often cited as the first instance that the anthem was played at a baseball game, though evidence shows that the "*Star-Spangled Banner*" was performed as early as 1897 at opening day ceremonies in Philadelphia and then more regularly beginning in 1898 at the Polo Grounds in New York City. In any case, the tradition of performing the national anthem before every baseball game began during World War II.

On November 3rd, 1929, Robert Ripley drew a panel in his syndicated cartoon, *Ripley's Believe it or Not!* (slide 22), saying "Believe It or Not, America has no national anthem." In 1931, John Philip Sousa published his opinion in favor, stating that "it is the spirit of the music that inspires, as much as it is Key's "soul-stirring" words." Then, in 1931, "*The Star-Spangled Banner*" was adopted as the National Anthem of the United States of America.

With a wide range of one octave and a fifth, “*The Star-Spangled Banner*” is known for being very difficult to sing. Although the poem has four stanzas, only the first is commonly sung today. Here are the four stanzas: (slide 23)

In the first stanza, presumably Dr. Beanes is speaking, and this is what he asks Key:

*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?*

“Ramparts,” in case you don't know, are the protective walls or other elevations that surround a fort. The first stanza asks a question – “Is our flag still flying?” The second stanza gives an answer: (slide 24)

*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.*

Key's answer is that he sees our flag in the rays of the morning sun. Again, “The towering steep” refers to the ramparts. The bombardment has failed, and the British can do nothing but sail away, their mission a failure.

In the third stanza (slide 25), Key allows himself to gloat over the American triumph. During World Wars I and II, when the British were our staunchest allies, this third stanza was not sung.

*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.*

According to historian, Robin Blackburn, the words "the hireling and slave" allude to the fact that the British attackers had many ex-slaves in their ranks, who had been promised liberty and demanded to be placed in the battle line "where they might expect to meet their former masters."

The fourth stanza (slide 26), a pious hope for the future, should be sung more slowly than the other three and with even deeper feeling:

*O thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand
Between their loved home 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!*

In indignation over the start of the American Civil War, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. added a fifth stanza (slide 27) to the song in 1861 which appeared in songbooks of that era.

***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.***

As a result of immigration to the United States and the incorporation of non-English speaking people into the country, the lyrics of “*The Star-Spangled Banner*” have been translated into other languages. In 1861, it was translated into German (slide 28). The Library of Congress also has record of a Spanish-language version from 1919. It has since been translated into Hebrew and Yiddish by Jewish immigrants, French by Acadians of Louisiana, Latin American Spanish, Samoan, and Irish. With regard to the indigenous languages of North America, there are versions in Navajo and Cherokee.

“*The Star-Spangled Banner*” is traditionally played at the beginning of public sporting events and at band and orchestral concerts in the United States, as well as other public gatherings. Two especially unusual performances of the song took place in the immediate aftermath of the September 11th attacks on the United States. On September 12th, 2001, the Queen of England (slide 29) broke with tradition and allowed the Band of the Coldstream Guards to perform the anthem at Buckingham Palace for the ceremonial Changing of the Guard, as a gesture of support for us as Britain's ally. The following day at a St. Paul's Cathedral memorial service, the Queen joined in the singing of the anthem, an unprecedented occurrence.

In March of 2005, a government-sponsored program, the National Anthem Project (slide 30), was launched after a Harris Interactive poll showed that many adults knew neither the lyrics nor the history of the anthem.

The 200th Anniversary of “*The Star-Spangled Banner*” occurred in 2014 with various special events occurring throughout the United States. A particularly significant celebration occurred during the week of September 10th through the 16th in and around Baltimore, Maryland. Highlights included playing of a new arrangement of the Anthem by John Williams on Defender's Day, September 12th, 2014, at Fort McHenry.

The custom of standing during the “*The Star-Spangled Banner*” has been credited to Rossell G. O’Brien (slide 31), who stood during “*The Star-Spangled Banner*” in Tacoma, Washington, on October 18th, 1893 at a regular session of the Washington Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States of America.

Current United States Code (slide 32) states that during a rendition of the National Anthem, when the flag is displayed, all present except those in uniform should stand 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 at the first note of the Anthem, maintaining that position until the last note; men not in uniform should remove their headdress with their right hand and hold the headdress at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart; and when the flag is not displayed, all present should face toward the music and act in the same manner they would if the flag were displayed.

However, these statutory suggestions do not have any penalty associated with violations of the Code. These behavioral requirements for the National Anthem are subject to the same First Amendment controversies that surround our Pledge of Allegiance.

"The Star-Spangled Banner" has become one of the most recognizable songs in the entire world. We've all witnessed the tears streaming from the eyes of American Olympic Gold Medalists (slide 33) standing on the podium during the playing of "The Star-Spangled Banner;" you can really sense their pride of being an American. But can you imagine what comfort "The Star-Spangled Banner" has given to our men and women of our Armed Forces serving in faraway lands and at sea?

(slide 34)

"The Star-Spangled Banner" poetically and musically symbolizes our conviction as a nation that we will collectively stand up to tyranny and adhere to the highest of moral values. It, together with our flag, embodies the tenets of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Pledge of Allegiance. "The Star-Spangled Banner" should evoke an acute sense of patriotism and national pride in every one of our citizens because the United States of America truly is "the land of the free and the home of the brave!"

(slide 35 - Credits)

Optional Section – (if singing the "Star-Spangled Banner")

(slide 36 – First Stanza Lyrics)

(Narrator: Please rise and join me in the singing of our National Anthem.)

Much of the preceding program is from:

Dr. Isaac Asimov's No Refuge Could Save

January 21st, 2019 Revision