



# Flag Day

Flag Day, June 14th, is a day for all Americans to celebrate "old glory" and all it stands for. Like the country it symbolizes, Flag Day's history is rich and varied. Flag Day's origins begin on Saturday, June 14, 1777. On this day, the Second Continental Congress passed a resolution stating "the flag of the United States be thirteen stripes, alternate red and white: that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation." With these words, the most visible symbol of the nation was born.

Legend has it that George Washington hired Betsy Ross, a Philadelphia seamstress, to create the first flag. While Betsy Ross no doubt sewed some of the first flags, scholars agree the flag's design is the work of Francis Hopkinson. Judge Hopkinson was a signer of the Declaration of

Independence and a member of the Second Continental Congress. He was also the designer of continental currency and the Great Seal of the United States, so it makes sense that his congressional colleagues would entrust the flag's design to him and not Betsy Ross.



Since that first flag, the "STARS and STRIPES" has evolved 27 times. From 1795 -1818, the flag had fifteen stripes and fifteen stars. In fact, it was this flag that flew boldly during the bombardment of Fort McHenry by the British during the War of 1812 and inspired Francis Scott Key to pen "The Star Spangled Banner."

As new states were added, Congress quickly realized the impracticality of adding stripes to the flag, so in 1818, they passed the Flag Act, which restored the flag to its original 13 stripe configuration. Since then, only the number of stars on the flag changes when states are added.

Honoring this national symbol has always been a part of its history. Before national-level recognition emerged, Bernard J. Cigrand, a Wisconsin teacher, celebrated what is widely believed to be the first "Flag Day" with his students. On June 14, 1885, Cigrand and his students celebrated the flag's "birthday" by writing essays about the flag and its significance. Even after he left teaching to become a dentist, Cigrand continued his "Flag Day" celebrations. He publicly advocated for a national "Flag Day" in speeches and newspaper editorials. Cigrand is often considered to be the "Father of Flag Day" because of his tireless efforts.

Formal recognition began in 1916 when President Woodrow Wilson issued a proclamation observing June 14 as a national Flag Day. President Calvin Coolidge did the same in 1927. However, it was not until August 3, 1949 that June 14 was legally recognized as Flag Day when President Harry Truman signed the Flag Day legislation into law. Interestingly, President Eisenhower would sign legislation that added 'under God' to the Pledge of Allegiance as part of his recognition of Flag Day in 1954.

**To Think and To Do:** Brainstorm ideas about the role a flag plays in a nation's identity. Does it help unite people? Does it provide a sense of symbolism to an entire nation? How does having a specific flag or symbol affect a nation?

**LEARN MORE.** Free registration may be required.

- [A Speech on Flag Day](#), from The Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation
- [Respect for the flag](#), from Legal Information Institute
- [Texas v. Johnson](#), from United States Courts
- [The Surprising History of the Pledge of Allegiance](#), from NBC10 Philadelphia

