

# The star spangled banner of the usa history essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The long history of an infamous song began in 1781 with the conquering of the British in the Battle of Yorktown. Following this defeat, the Treaty of Paris was signed by the British. This treaty dictated that the British formally acknowledged the United States as a country. The strife between the British and the people of the United States continued when Britain meddled with international trade, restricting profits of the American economy. Another battle began in 1812 when the United States declared war against Britain. This battle was supposed to help the standing of the US as a new nation. The war began as a successful campaign for the US due to Britain being at war with France. In 1814, the armies of France were defeated and Britain used its full force against the United States. On August 24th, 1814, the Capitol building and White House were set on fire. Much to the shame and distress of the US peoples, their capital had been taken. Their anguish continued as Britain set its sights on a vital seaport called Baltimore. All seemed lost, but the US held their own. Fort McHenry, which protected the mouth of the port, battled over 25 hours of fire by the English. On September 14th 1814, a flag was raised at the fort. This flag represented freedom and celebration over a pending victory over the British. The sight of the flag inspired Francis Scott Key to compose a poem dubbed the Defence of Fort McHenry, a keystone document in US history. Key's song and the flag shaped what the US was to be in the form of patriotism, symbolism, and culture. The US was a new nation and the war with the British was a first test to see if they could withstand an attack from their old colonial oppressors. The song was central to a burst of nationalism, which united the states and shaped a unified country. As previously stated, the Star Spangled Banner is a foundational document in US history and is responsible for some of the current

mannerisms and traditions instilled in the American people. The song has become the United States national anthem and was written in a momentous time in the country's history. Thus, close analysis of the song, composed by Francis Scott Key, demonstrates its cultural and moral influences on the citizenry over time.

A series of the events in Francis Scott Key's leading are key to the creation of the song. Key was born in Maryland, the east coast of the United States. 3 He graduated at the young age of 17 and established his own law practice in Washington, the Capitol. 3 After the British attack on the US capital, Dr. William Beanes, a friend of Francis Scott Key, was captured. Upon hearing this news, Key went to Baltimore intending to free his friend. He then obtained the services of the government's prisoner of war exchange agent, the approval of the president, and sailed down the bay to the British fleet on a truce ship. 3 Thanks to his oratory skills, Key managed to

Balfour 3

obtain the release of his friend. They were not released from the custody of the British due to the fact that Key had overheard plans of attack by the British. The three US citizens watched the battle on board the British ship, knowing that as long as the sounds of battle continued, Fort McHenry was still fighting. Eventually, the British decided the siege was too costly and retreated. 3 It was then " by the dawn's early light" 4 that Key saw the flag raised over the fort and this inspired him to write the poem. He wrote numerous drafts before sending his final copy to a local newspaper where it was first published and originally titled the Defence of Fort Henry. Following

this, more and more newspapers published the song as it grew in popularity. The song gained so much fame that a public performance was done on October 19th, 1814, a month after the song was published at the Holliday Street Theatre in Baltimore. 1 Over time, it was named after its keepsake, the flag above the fort dubbed the star spangled banner. The tune in the song comes from a popular English melody known as “ To Anacreon in Heaven.” 2 The popularity of the song soared during the Civil War as it embodied the thing that the people believed in and fought for: freedom, peace, and bravery. In the late 1800’s, the military began using the song for ceremonial purposes. 2 The reputation of the song increased further as it increasingly was used for non-military events like Baseball games. Then, in 1931, The Star Spangled Banner officially became the national Anthem of the United States by order of Herbert Hoover, the president of the country at the time. 1

The creation of the flag was a key inspiration in the creation of the song. The flag was created by a flag maker named Mary Pickersgill in 1813 and took several weeks to make. It was commissioned by Major George Armistead, commander of Fort McHenry. 1 The flag itself was a massive thirty by forty two feet with fifteen stripes and fifteen stars. 1 The flag was larger than the modern military flags of twenty by thirty eight feet used by the military today. The stripes and stars represented the different states that had joined the union. The flag was raised as the battle turned in favour to the US people in celebration of their freedom. The flag was a huge symbol of perseverance and valour. The people of Baltimore knew Fort McHenry was still fighting as long as the flag was waving. When Francis Scott Key declared that “ the flag

was still there,” 4 he instilled widespread feelings of persistence, bravery, and devotion as a country in his song and towards the flag. Due to Key’s song, the flag received a leading role in one of the key victories in the war of 1812. 1 This meant that the flag was perceived with feelings of respect, awe, and national identity.

Balfour 4

A breakdown of the lyrics and their meanings need to be explored. He began his song by portraying his feelings and thoughts as he watched the battle from aboard the British ship. The first few verses describe his hope as he heard the continuous bombs bursting in air. To Key, this meant that Fort St Henry was still standing and fighting. He finishes his first stanza with the two subsequent verses. “ Oh say, does that star-spangled banner yet wave, O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave?” 4 He calls to question if they are free, and if they are brave enough to fight against oppression. He also questions if they are really free because they are courageous, fight, and make sacrifices. This is a modern question many US citizens ask themselves as sons, daughters, mothers, and fathers go to war fighting for something they believe in. Key answers this question in the fourth stanza with “ Oh, thus be it ever when freemen shall stand, Between their loved homes and the war’s desolation.” 4 He states with hope that people with freedom will always be brave enough to stand against tyranny, regardless of the sacrifices. Key also demonstrates a couple traits in these verses that are very prominent in US culture today; a love for home, land, and whole-hearted patriotism. Key continues his description of war being complete desolation and thoroughly describes war as being a cruel, dark, thing. This is <https://assignbuster.com/the-star-spangled-banner-of-the-usa-history-essay/>

demonstrated in his descriptions in the third stanza like the “havoc of war and the battles confusion” 4 or “the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave” 4. He also states, however, that free men must fight instead of passively allowing malevolence to exist. He claims that peace is a blessing, but that one must defend themselves against enslavement. “Blest with victory and peace, may the heav’n rescued land. Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation.” 4 Key asserts that victory in war is a blessing due to the freedom and peace that it maintains. Another important thing Francis Scott Key did was his empowerment of the flag. Key completely personifies the flag in the third stanza with his lavish definitions of the scenes he sees as the flag waves in the sunlight. He describes his rapture at being able to see the flag still over Fort McHenry. In the fourth stanza he glorifies the flag. “And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave, O’er the land of the free and the home of the brave.” 4 Again, this is a solid demonstration of Key personifying the flag.

To conclude the history of the United States was briefly explored. Its history and the ties to its national anthem demonstrate a proud, courageous, and very patriotic people who, overtime, work hard to maintain the freedoms and beliefs the United States currently has as a country.

Balfour 5

## **Endnotes:**

1. Encyclopedia Smithsonian. “Smithsonian.” Star-Spangled Banner and the War of 1812. November 1st, 2004. [http://www. si.edu/encyclopedia\\_si/nmah/starflag. htm](http://www.si.edu/encyclopedia_si/nmah/starflag.htm) (accessed November 17th, 2010).

<https://assignbuster.com/the-star-spangled-banner-of-the-usa-history-essay/>

2. National Museum of American History. “ The Star Spangled Banner.” Song. November 1, 2004. [http://americanhistory. si. edu/starspangledbanner/themelody. aspx](http://americanhistory.si.edu/starspangledbanner/themelody.aspx) (accessed November 18, 2010).

3. U. S Department of Education. “ Facts About the United States’ National Anthem.” Office Secretary. December 18, 2007. [http://www2. ed. gov/about/offices/list/os/september11/ssbfacts. html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/os/september11/ssbfacts.html) (accessed November 19, 2010).

4. Univeristy of Oklahoma. “ Colledge Of Law.” Page Specific Menu and Navigation. January 11, 2009. [http://www. law. ou. edu/ushistory/ssb. shtml](http://www.law.ou.edu/ushistory/ssb.shtml) (accessed Novemeber 1, 2010).