



Memorial Day—

—Presaging summer and sweltering in ninety-degree humidity, the 2010 Memorial Day in the Nation’s capital honored all those who sacrificed their lives in military duty with a concert on the Mall featuring Gary Sinise and Joe Mantegna, the annual “Pouring of the Waters” ceremony at the Navy Memorial, a parade in which all the services participated, and the Rolling Thunder ritual. The predecessor of Memorial Day was “Decoration Day” which was observed near the end of the American Civil War to honor Union soldiers who fought in the War. After the War, many communities set aside a day to commemorate their dead. One of the first communities to do so was the town of Sharpsburg near Antietam Battlefield in Maryland. In the South, organized women’s groups were decorating graves before the end of the Civil War, as evidenced by a hymn published in 1867, “Kneel Where Our Loves Are Sleeping” by Nella L. Sweet. The community observances across the U.S. eventually coalesced around an observance which was extended after World War I to honor all those who made the highest sacrifice so that the rest of us can live in peace and abundance.



Two quotes which capture the meaning of this important observance:

“Freedom of speech and freedom of action are meaningless without freedom to think. And there is no freedom of thought without doubt. —
Bergen Evans

The purpose of all war is ultimately peace. —
Saint Augustine



National Flag Day—

Established by a proclamation issued by President Harry Truman in 1949, the National Flag Day on June 14th commemorates the authorization of the “Stars and Stripes” as the official National symbol of the United States of America by Congress on June 14, 1777.

The Star Spangled Banner—When the smoke cleared over Fort McHenry, Francis Scott Key, a lawyer from Georgetown involved in negotiating the release of prisoners held by the British, was so moved to see an American flag still waving over the Fort that he resolved to write a poem about it. “The Defence of Fort McHenry,” which he published in the *Patriot* on September 20, 1814, describes the soaring feeling of pride he felt for America and her defenders. Fit to the rhythms of composer John Stafford Smith’s “To Anacreon in Heaven,” which has better become known as “The Star Spangled Banner.” Under this name, the song was adopted as the American national anthem, first by an Executive Order from President Woodrow Wilson in 1916 and then by a Congressional resolution in 1931, signed by President Herbert Hoover.