

"The Star-Spangled Banner" is the national anthem of the United States. The lyrics come from "Defence of Fort M'Henry",^[1] 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 Chesapeake Bay during the Battle of Fort McHenry in the War of 1812.

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?

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.

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.

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!^[12]

Additional Civil War period lyric

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

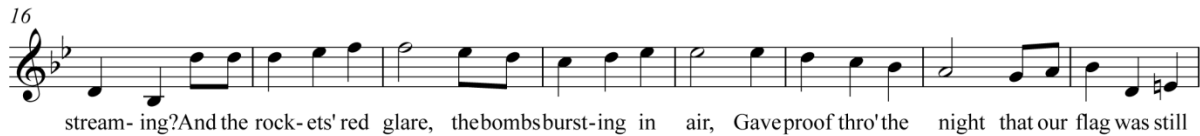
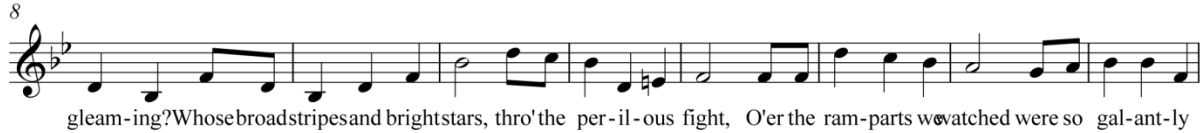
When our land is illumined with liberty's smile,
If a foe from within strikes a blow at her glory,
Down, down with the traitor that tries to defile
The flag of the stars, and the page of her story!
By the millions unchained,
Who their birthright have gained
We will keep her bright blazon forever unstained;
And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave,
While the land of the free is the home of the brave.

The Star-Spangled Banner

The words of "The Star Spangled Banner" were written by Mr. Key in 1814 under stirring circumstances. He was detained on board one of the British ships which attacked Fort McHenry. All night the bombardment continued, indicating that the fort had not surrendered. Toward the morning the firing ceased, and Mr. Key awaited dawn in great suspense. When light came, he saw that "our flag was still there," and in the fervor of the moment he wrote the lines of our national song. The tune is ascribed by the weight of authority to John Stafford Smith, an English composer who set it about 1780.

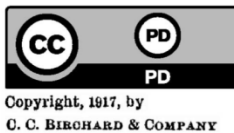
Francis Scott Key

John Stafford Smith



2. On the shore, dimly seen thro' 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 on the stream:
'Tis the star-spangled banner: oh, long may it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!

3. Oh, thus be it e'er when free-men 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 Pow'r that has 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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Source: Dykema, Peter, Will Earhart, Osbourne McConathy, and Hollis Dam. *I Hear America Singing*: 55
Songs and Choruses for Community Singing. Boston, : C. C. Birchard & Company, 1917.