

Why are there so many flags on June 14? Flag Day (<http://eflsuccess.com/flag/> 2021)

Vocabulary: [sb = somebody; sth = something]

~commemorate: to honor or remember an event or contribution. Note: English-learners sometimes confuse the terms commemorate/memorialize/memorial/memorize. You remember or honor people, and they can be *memorialized* (a passive verb) for their contribution or example. We can also remember our loved ones at a *memorial* service after they have passed away. People sometimes build a *memorial* or monument to pay tribute to or honor (or *memorialize/commemorate*) a person or event. *Memorize* means to put something into your memory (e.g., to learn a poem by heart).

~to adopt (adoption): to formally accept sth in a permanent way (e.g., adopting a child, or celebrating a foreign holiday)

~fuzzy: (adj) unclear, confused; literally describes the hairy way a kitten feels, but figuratively can describe an unclear picture, memory, etc.

~technically: according to specific rules (such as grammar rules or legal codes); in a strict sense

~constellation: a group of stars that forms a pattern and has been given a name (e.g., "the big dipper")

~valor: great courage, esp. in war

~vigilance: careful attention to details in order to avoid problems or to notice them as soon as they appear (a soldier on guard duty must have *vigilance* at all times)

~seamstress: someone who sews or repairs clothing or similar things (curtains, flags...); a tailor



Many Americans proudly display the US flag in front of their home or business every day, and you'll also find the flag outside or atop government buildings, but if you were to visit the US on June 14, you might wonder why so many people are flying the nation's flag.

June 14 is called "Flag Day," commemorating the adoption of the official flag on June 14, 1777. (The American colonies declared their independence from Great Britain on July 4, 1776, so that date is celebrated as the nation's birthday.) Flag Day is not a

"holiday" in which people get a day off from work; it's just a day of commemoration. The origins of the holiday are fuzzy, perhaps dating back to the 1860s (during the American Civil War). **President Woodrow Wilson** first proclaimed June 14 as national Flag Day in 1916. Pennsylvania was the first state to make Flag Day a legal holiday (1937). Congress established National Flag Day in 1949 (the act was signed by **President Harry Truman**), though technically it is at the current president's discretion to officially proclaim the observance. Incidentally, about a year after his Flag Day proclamation, Pres. Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany (World War I). He was also President during the 1918 "**Spanish flu**," which devastated the world like **COVID-19**; many believe Pres. Wilson himself even contracted the flu, while in Paris to negotiate the end of WWI (in 2019). He was a busy guy!



Photo: Betsy Ross House in Philadelphia. A nearby historical marker says, "As a skilled artisan, Ross represents the many women who supported their families during the Revolution and early Republic."

The design of the familiar "stars and stripes" has been credited to a New Jersey Continental Congressman named Francis Hopkinson, but people more often connect the name "Betsy Ross" with the flag—which I'll explain below. The original design featured 13 stripes, and a "new constellation" of 13 stars, representing the 13 colonies. According to American historian Dr. Peter Lillback, **red** stood for hardiness and valor; Americans were to be strong and brave. **White** stood for moral purity and legal innocence. "We don't break the law and we're pure before God." Lillback says **blue** stood for perseverance, vigilance, and justice.

Who was Betsy Ross?

Betsy Ross, one of America's most famous "founding mothers," was a seamstress who lived and died not far from Philadelphia's Independence Hall, where the 1776 "Fourth of July" Declaration of Independence was signed by the Continental Congress. Ross was a single mom, having been widowed twice by age 30. General **George Washington** (later the first US

President) knew Mrs. Ross from Christ Church, which both sometimes attended. He and other Founders asked Betsy to make the first flag, adding that they would need many copies soon. According to Dr. Lillback, Washington asked for six-pointed stars, but Betsy convinced the Founders that a five-pointed star would be easier to cut and sew, and thus save them a lot of time and money. According to tradition, Ross sewed the first American flag, and then kept making them for more than 50 years.

Questions:

Content questions:

- a. In the US, which day is normally Flag Day?
 - b. Why was that date chosen?
 - c. Which US President first proclaimed Flag Day (in 1916)?
 - d. In what year did Congress establish National Flag Day?
 - e. Where was Pres Wilson when he caught "the Spanish flu" during the 1918 pandemic?
 - f. What job did Betsy Ross have? (Why is she famous?)
1. According to the article, what do the three colors in America's flag stand for? Please tell your classmates about your country's flag (what picture is on it? what do the colors stand for? etc).
 2. Look at the photo of the large flag outside Betsy Ross' house. How is it different from a modern US flag? Can you explain the difference?
 3. In your country, where do people see the nation's flag? Do individuals display a flag outside their home? Inside a church? At schools? Do you think there are too many flags in public, too few flags, or "just enough"? Explain.
 4. Betsy Ross is one of America's "Founding Mothers". Tell us about a famous woman in your country's early history.

5. Look at the definition for “commemorate” again, and create a sentence with each of these words: commemorate, memorialize, memorial, memorize.
6. In America, sometimes the US flag is only half-way up the flag pole. This normally marks someone’s death or a national tragedy. Do you have a similar practice in your country? Are flags used or flown in other ways?
7. Why do you think every country has a national flag? What are the good things about having a national symbol like this? Are there any negative aspects to such symbols?
8. If you still have time, talk about other popular “national symbols” in the US or in your country. (Examples might include a famous bridge or building, “the Statue of Liberty” in New York, etc.)

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Information sources include <http://eflsuccess.com/flag/>,
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_Day_\(United_States\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flag_Day_(United_States)) & <https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/us/2020/june/on-flag-day-remembering-the-woman-who-sewed-old-glory-into-existence>

=====lower English level=====

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~seamstress: someone who sews or repairs clothing or similar things (curtains, flags...); a tailor



In America, you often see the US flag in front of government buildings, businesses, and homes. But if you visit the US on June 14, you might wonder why so many people are flying the nation’s flag.

June 14 is called “Flag Day,” commemorating the adoption of the official flag on June 14, 1777. (You may remember that America’s “birthday” was July 4, 1776.)

The origins of the holiday are fuzzy, perhaps dating back to the 1860s (during the American Civil



War). **President Wilson** first proclaimed June 14 as national Flag Day in 1916. Congress established National Flag Day in 1949.

Photo: Betsy Ross House in Philadelphia.

An early Congressman designed the familiar “stars and stripes,” but people more often connect the name “Betsy Ross” with the flag. The original design featured 13 stripes, and a “new constellation” of 13 stars, representing the 13 colonies. According to historian Dr. Peter Lillback, **red** stood for hardiness and bravery. **White** stood for moral purity and legal innocence. Lillback says **blue** stood for perseverance, vigilance, and justice.

Who was Betsy Ross? **Betsy Ross**, one of America’s most famous “founding mothers,” was a seamstress who lived in Philadelphia. Ross was a single mom, having been widowed twice by age 30. General **George Washington** (later the first US President) attended the same church as Mrs. Ross. He asked Betsy to make the first flag during America’s revolution. At first, Washington asked for stars with six points, but Betsy convinced the Founders that a five-pointed star would save them time and money. According to tradition, Ross sewed the first American flag, and then kept making flags for more than 50 years.

Questions:

Content questions: *(let a student ask each question to another student)*

- a. In the US, which day is normally Flag Day?
 - b. Why was that date chosen?
 - c. Which US President first proclaimed Flag Day (in 1916)?
 - d. In what year did Congress establish National Flag Day?
 - e. What does the “constellation” of stars represent?
 - f. What job did Betsy Ross have? (Why is she famous?)
1. According to the article, what do the three colors in America’s flag stand for? Please tell your classmates about your country’s flag (what picture is on it? what do the colors stand for? etc).
 2. Look at the photo of the large flag outside Betsy Ross’ house. How is it different from a modern US flag? Can you explain the difference?
 3. In your country, where do people see the nation’s flag? Do individuals display a flag outside their home? Inside a church? At schools? Do you think there are too many flags in public, too few flags, or “just enough”? Explain.
 4. Betsy Ross is one of America’s “Founding Mothers”. Tell us the name and a simple fact about a famous woman in your country.
 5. In America, sometimes the US flag is only half-way up the flag pole. This normally marks someone’s death or a national tragedy. Do you have a similar practice in your country? Are flags used or flown in other ways?
 6. If you still have time, talk about other popular “national symbols” in the US or in your country. (Examples might include a famous bridge or building, “the Statue of Liberty” in New York, etc.)

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