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America's National Symbols

Symbols play a vital role in identifying a nation and its people to the
15 world. Songs, slogans, representations of human figures and emblems set
a country apart from all others, portray its character and values and act
as rallying points in times of national crisis.

The United States has a number of signs which typify the nation, each
special to Americans, each readily recognizable by most people everywhere.
20 And behind each one lies a rich and colorful history.

Here is a look at the symbols that embody America's strength, its inde-
pendence and its ideals.

The Flag

25 Most revered by its citizens is the flag. The red and white stripes and the
white stars framed in a blue background tell the story of the country, its
indomitable spirit and love of freedom.

The flag is as old as the nation itself. On June 14, 1777, now celebrated
nationally as Flag Day, the Founding Fathers adopted a resolution calling
30 for a standard for the new country. It should, they said, have 13 alternat-
ing red and white stripes, representing the 13 newly created States, and
13 stars on one field, standing for the melding of all into one union.

While there is no official historical record of who actually made the first
flag, a much-loved legend accords the honor to Betsy Griscom Ross, a
35 young seamstress who lived on Arch Street in Philadelphia, Pennsyl-
vania. One day in June 1776, the story goes, Betsy was visited by a three-
man committee of the Continental Congress, the federal legislature of the
colonies, headed by George Washington, then commander in-chief of the
colonial army. The other members were Robert Morris, one of the signers
40 of the Declaration of Independence, who managed the finances during the
Revolutionary War, and General George Ross, another signer and the
uncle of Betsy's husband, John.

The three showed Betsy a sketch and asked her to sew the flag. Betsy

126 America's National Symbols

represent nation fremstilling
emblem symbol
rallying point samlingsmærke
recognizable genkendelig
embody udtrykke, legemliggøre
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celebrate fejre
the Founding Fathers nationens
grundlæggere
adopt a resolution vedtage en
beslutning
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meld forene
legend populær historie, myte
a word tildele
seamstress syerske
federal legislature fælles lovgiven-
de forsamling
the Revolutionary War uafhængig-
hedskrigen 1775-83
sketch skitse, udkast

suggested a change. Instead of a six-pointed star, she said, a five-pointed one would be more attractive. The men demurred, arguing that a five-pointed star would be too difficult to make. The clever young woman, using a simple twist of her scissors, proved it could be done easily. The committee of eminent patriots was convinced. The banner was created and now Betsy Ross's tiny brick house is a major tourist attraction in Philadelphia.

George Washington himself once interpreted the flag's meaning in these words: "We take the stars from heaven, the red from our mother country, separating it by white stripes, thus showing that we have separated from her, and the white stripes shall go down to posterity representing liberty."

The new standard first flew from a staff at Fort Stanwix, site of the present city of Rome, New York, on August 3, 1777. Three days later, it had its baptism of fire in the Battle of Oriskany, New York, where the colonials forced the British to retreat.

As the United States grew, a star was added each time a new state entered the Union. Today, the flag bears 50 stars.

The National Anthem

"The Star-Spangled Banner," America's national anthem, is universally recognized. It was born during the early morning hours of September 14, 1814, after a 25-hour bombardment of Fort McHenry, an army post at the entrance to Baltimore Harbor on the eastern coast.

Britain and the United States were at war. Flying a white flag of truce, a young attorney named Francis Scott Key had boarded the British warship *Tonnant* several days earlier to arrange the release of an elderly American doctor. During negotiations, Key learned of the planned assault on Baltimore. He was returned to his sloop and guarded by British marines so that he could not warn the Americans of the impending attack.

Early on the morning of September 13, the shelling began. Sixteen warships pounded the fort all that day and into the next. Key paced the deck of his vessel, peering through the moonless night to see if the American flag still flew. The firing continued until past midnight but it was daylight before the mists of gun smoke blew away and he could see the red, white and blue flag still waving over the fort.

Key, a poet as well as a lawyer, dug into his jacket pocket and found an old letter. He began to compose a poem which he called "In Defense of Fort McHenry," referring four times to the "star-spangled banner." A few days after the battle, the poem was printed on handbills and handed out in the streets of Baltimore.

At the time Key wrote his poem, an old English drinking song, "To Anacreon in Heaven," was popular in America. Key composed his words to the melody and meter of the song. It was first sung in public on October

127 **de mur** gøre indsigelse

eminent højtstående

po sterity eftertiden

baptism of fire ilddåb

re treat trække sig tilbage

national anthem nationalsang

spangle besætte med

flag of truce parlamentærflag

board gå ombord

negoti ation forhandling

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sloop slup, lille krigsskib

im pending forestående

shell ing bombardement

pound skyde løs på

pace gå frem og tilbage

handbill løbeseddel

A nacreon græsk digter, ca. 500 f.

Kr.

meter versmål

127

19, 1814, and thereafter has been played and sung at parades, official functions, in schools and even before the start of sports events.

It was not until March, 3, 1931, that an act of Congress, signed by President Herbert Hoover, designated it as the national anthem. Over the 5 years the anthem has been criticized because it is difficult to sing. Other songs have been suggested in its place, but although it may be hard to reach the high notes, it remains the anthem that thrills Americans.

10 **The Statue of Liberty**

Three figures in human form are among the best-known symbols of America and its ideals: the Statue of Liberty, Uncle Sam and Columbia.

The Statue of Liberty, paradoxically, was not created in the United States at all, but in the studio of a French sculptor Frederic Auguste 15 Bartholdi.

A copper figure in a long, flowing robe, she stands majestically on a tiny island in New York Harbor, welcoming arriving ships and their passengers. With her right hand she holds a torch high in the air; in her left is a tablet inscribed "July 4, 1776," the date on which the Declaration of 20 Independence was proclaimed.

The statue whose full name is Liberty Enlightening the World was a gift from France to the United States symbolizing a love of democracy in both countries. A smaller, bronze version 36 feet (11 m) tall, is on one of the bridges crossing the River Seine in Paris.

25 America's Liberty is the largest statue ever made, standing 151 feet (46 m) high on a 150-foot (45.7 m) pedestal, and weighing 450,000 pounds (204,000 kg). She wears a crown with seven spikes, representing the seven continents. An elevator whisks visitors up the pedestal to the base of the statue, and from there 168 steps lead to the crown on either of two 30 winding staircases.

The spirit of the statue is embodied in the famous poem by Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus," which is inscribed on a tablet inside the pedestal. It concludes:

35 "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

40 The sculptor Bartholdi achieved fame in his native France at an early age. At 22, he completed a statue of one of Napoleon's leading generals and not long after won the medal of the prestigious Legion of Honor. In 1865, he

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128 act lov, forordning
designate udpege
torch fakkelt
tablet lille tavle
pro claim kundgørelse
pedestal sokkel
spike pig
whisk føre i en fart
huddle klumpe sig sammen
yearn længes inderligt
wretched ulykkelig
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tempest-tost kastet hid og did af
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attended a dinner party near Versailles at the home of Edouard de Laboulaye, a French historian and teacher, where the guests talked about the strong friendship that existed between France and America since the Marquis de Lafayette fought bravely in the American Revolution.

That evening, the idea for a gigantic statue as a memorial to United States independence was broached by Laboulaye. Bartholdi was commissioned to explore the possibility, but 10 years passed before it became a reality.

During this time, the sculptor visited the United States and decided that the statue should stand in New York Harbor.

At last, funds were raised and in 1875 Bartholdi started work on the colossus. The uplifted arm, 42 feet (12.8 m) long, had an eight-foot (2.4 m) index finger. The head measured 17 feet (5 m) from the chin to crown and the mouth was three feet (1 m) wide.

On July 4, 1884, Liberty was officially presented to the United States in Paris by Ferdinand de Lesseps, builder of the Suez Canal and head of the Franco-American Union. It was accepted by Levi P. Morton, the American Ambassador to France.

In May 1885, the statue was dismantled and packed into 214 huge crates for its voyage aboard a French Navy ship to the United States. In April 1886, the pedestal was completed and the job of reassembling Liberty began.

On October 28 of that year, it was unveiled before French and American dignitaries. One hundred years later, President Ronald Reagan led the festivities celebrating its centennial.

Uncle Sam

Uncle Sam, older by nearly 75 years than the Lady in the Harbor, is that long-legged figure in chin whiskers, dressed in star-spangled clothes topped by a tall hat. As headlines the world over demonstrate continually, Sam *is* America. There is no mistaking the meaning of: "Uncle Sam Sends Aid to Disaster Victims."

Over the decades, political cartoonists in the United States and, of course, everywhere else, have found a treasure trove in the old gentleman. They have portrayed him in any guise, mood or attitude that suited their points of view.



129 **broach** bringe på bane

be commissioned få til opgave

funds økonomiske midler

dismantle demontere

crate pakkasse

dignitaries honoratiores, fremtrædende personer

chin whiskers bakkenbarter

there is no mistaking det er ikke til at tage fejl af

cartoonist vittighedstegner

treasure trove skatkiste

guise skikkelse

129

During World War II, he was often depicted in rolled-up sleeves, bending to work in a plant or factory; when the Republican Party won an election he was shown happily riding an elephant, and a donkey when the Democrats were the victors; in bad economic times his striped trousers were threadbare and his old-fashioned frockcoat wore patches.

The best-known portrait of Sam was an Army recruiting poster painted in 1917 by the renowned illustrator James Montgomery Flagg. It shows him unsmiling, with lips compressed, the index finger of his right hand pointed at the viewer. In large letters are the words: "I want you for the Army." The poster proved so effective in enlisting recruits that it was recalled to duty in World War II.

He has grinned and grimaced, smiled affably, glared sternly, shaken his fist, wept at tragedies, gloried in victories. In short, he illustrates the ups and downs, the ebb and flow, of American life.

Uncle Sam was not a fictional character, as many suppose, but began life as a real person. The original Uncle Sam, according to historians, was a meat merchant named Samuel Wilson who was born in 1766 and fought in the American Revolution while still in his teens.

When the War of 1812 began, Sam Wilson, by then a prosperous businessman, was appointed inspector of U.S. Army food supplies in New York and its neighboring State of New Jersey. One day, when New York Governor Daniel D. Tompkins visited Wilson's plant, he noticed that meat barrels ready to be shipped out were stamped "EA - US" in large letters.

"What do the initials stand for?" the Governor asked. One of Wilson's assistants replied that a contractor to whom Wilson was sending supplies was named Elbert Anderson. As for the US - which, of course, meant that the meat was destined for the American Army - the aide quipped: "It stands for Uncle Sam Wilson."

The story, which was widely repeated, was especially appreciated by Wilson's fellow townspeople who held him in high esteem because of his patriotism, rigid code of honor and self-reliance. By the time the war ended two years later, Sam Wilson was known all over the country as Uncle Sam, the man who typified the average American.

It took almost a century and a half before Sam Wilson was officially recognized by the United States Government as the prototype of Uncle Sam. In 1961, Congress passed a resolution declaring him the progenitor of America's national symbol.

Columbia

Columbia is Uncle Sam's female counterpart, almost as tall as he but much more regal in appearance, as solemn and dignified as he is folksy and unpretentious. She is generally portrayed as a statuesque woman draped in floor-length white robes, wearing a crescent-shaped hat deco-

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130 plant fabrik
threadbare luvslidt
frockcoat diplomatfrakke
renowned berømt
enlist hverve
affably venligt
glory være stolt af

ebb and flow modgang og medgang
 (egl. lavvande og højvande)
merchant handlende
prosperous velhavende
barrel (her) krop
contractor leverandør
quip sige sarkastisk
appreciate værdsætte
hold in high esteem sætte stor pris på
rigid streng
average gennemsnits-
progenitor stamfader
counterpart modstykke
regal kongelig
solemn højtidelig
dignified værdig
unpretentious uhøjtidelig
crescent halvmåneformet

rated with stars and sometimes carrying a United States flag.

As a symbol for America, Columbia is several decades older than Sam. Unlike him, she was not originally a real person but a creation of artists who, over the years, have depicted her as the embodiment of the American character – firm, resolute, steadfast and, above all, patriotic.

Historian Alton Ketchum wrote that “most of these paintings and statues took the form of Greek goddesses,” but Columbia’s roots were not planted in Greek mythology at all. Rather, she was named for a man who was born in Italy and made history under Spanish patronage – the explorer Christopher Columbus who discovered the New World on October 12, 1492.

Among the first to apply the name Columbia to an independent America was New York-born Philip Morin Freneau, who has been called the poet of the American Revolution.” “Columbia shall never be ruled by an isle,” he wrote in a poem called “The Political Balance,” one of several times he used the word as a synonym for the emerging country.

Since then, the name has been given to scores of cities, towns and counties in the United States, hundreds of private businesses, including a major television network, and to one of the country’s oldest universities. King’s College, opened in 1754 in New York City, later changed its name to Columbia University, now one of the best known institutions of higher education in the world.

Yankee (Doodle)

The origins of Yankee and Yankee Doodle as national symbols are lost in the mists of history. Some authorities believe that the word “Yankee” may have come from the Dutch word “Yanke,” or Little John, while others say that the American Indians mispronounced Anglais, the French word for English. It came out as Yankee.

Before the Revolutionary War, British soldiers, began referring derisively to the colonials, whom they regarded as country bumpkins, as Yankees. But the Americans, far from taking offense, liked the nickname and soon adopted it to describe themselves.

During World Wars I and II, U.S. troops were known all over the globe as Yanks or Yankees. “Over There,” a popular American song written in 1917 by playwright and composer George M. Cohan, contains the stirring line: “The Yanks are coming! The Yanks are coming!”

The song “Yankee Doodle,” now so closely identified with Americans, was sung in England as far back as the reign of the first Queen Elizabeth in the 1500s. In the mid-1600s, government troops under Charles I sang the air with contemptuous words directed at Oliver Cromwell, who led the Puritan Revolution which eventually overthrew the monarchy.

By 1775, when the battles of Lexington and Concord signalled the start of the Revolutionary War in America, colonial troops were singing the

131	resolute	beslutsom
	steadfast	urokkelig
	name for	opkalde efter
	patronage	beskyttelse, støtte
	score	snes
	Dutch	hollandsk
	derisive	spottende
	bumpkin	bondeknold
	take offense	blive fornærmet
	reign	regeringstid
	air	melodi
	contemptuous	hånlig
	eventually	til sidst

tune with words which had been written by a British surgeon to mock them. It became the war song of George Washington's army, sung as the men marched, camped and fought. Each verse was followed by the chorus. It began:

Father and I went down to camp,
 Along with Captain Gooding,
 There we see the men and boys,
 As thick as hasty pudding.

10 *Chorus:*

Yankee Doodle, keep it up,
 Yankee Doodle, dandy,
 Mind the music and the step,
 And with the girls be handy.

The Great Seal

Look now at yet another key symbol, The Great Seal of the United States. On the obverse, or side bearing the central design, a bald eagle is grasping an olive branch, symbolizing peace, in one claw and a sheaf of 13 arrows, one for each of the original states, in the other.



On the breast of the eagle is a shield of red and white stripes, and in his beak is a ribbon with the Latin words, *E Pluribus Unum* – out of many, one. Above his head is a constellation of 13 stars. On the reverse side is an unfinished pyramid standing for enduring strength.

30 The Secretary of State, the highest ranking member of the Cabinet, has custody of the Seal which, by law, must appear on all important documents. A replica of the Seal appears above the door of all American embassies and consulates. The depiction of both sides can be found only on the back of the one-dollar bill.

35 Soon after the Declaration of Independence was signed, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were chosen by the delegates to the Continental Congress to find a suitable design. Three committees worked for six years, submitting Biblical themes and versions of Old World heraldic shields, before one was finally approved by Congress on June 20, 1782. On September 15, 1789, an Act of Congress declared the 1782 version to be the Seal of the United States.

Historians have documented a footnote to the story of the Great Seal. Franklin objected vigorously to the use of the bald eagle, urging the wild turkey to be chosen. In a scathing letter to his daughter, he assailed the

eagle's "bad moral character," adding: "He does not get his living honestly; you may see him perched on some dead tree, where, too lazy to fish for himself, he watches the labor of the fishinghawk; when that diligent bird has at length taken a fish, and is bearing it to his nest for the support of his mate and young ones, the bald eagle pursues him and takes it from him." Franklin lost his battle – the eagle won out.

The Bald-headed Eagle

America's national bird is that same bald eagle, which oddly enough is not bald at all. Pure white feathers cover the adult bird and make it appear to be bald. The national motto, stamped on all coins and paper currency, is "In God We Trust." While the phrase, which appears in the fourth stanza of the "Star-Spangled Banner," has been inscribed on coins since 1861, it was not until 1956 that Congress enacted legislation designating it as the official national motto.

From flag to songs, a great statue to a bewhiskered gentleman, symbols tell its citizens and the rest of the world what the United States is all about.

132 **surgeon** militær læge

chorus omkvæd

hasty pudding grød

dandy laps

snarl virvar

seal segl

obverse forside

bald eagle hvidhovedet havørn

sheaf bundt

shield skjold

beak næb

Secretary of State udenrigsminister

have custody of have opsyn med

replica kopi

submit forelægge

he raldic våbenmærke-

vigorous energisk

turkey kalkun

scathing skarp

assail angribe

133 **diligent** flittig

stanza strofe

enact legislation vedtage lov

America's National Symbols (pp. 126-133)

The Flag

1. When was the flag designed?
2. What do the stars and stripes symbolize?

The National Anthem

3. Where and when was "The Star-Spangled Banner" written?
4. When did "The Star-Spangled Banner" become the national anthem?

The Statue of Liberty

5. Where and by whom was the statue created?
6. What was the symbolic meaning of this gift to the USA?
7. How do you interpret the poem by Emma Lazarus?
8. When was the statue unveiled?

Uncle Sam

9. How old is the Uncle Sam symbol?
10. Who was the original Uncle Sam?
11. What does Uncle Sam symbolize? Who does he typify?

Columbia

12. How old is Columbia as a symbol for America?
13. How is Columbia usually portrayed?
14. What is her symbolic value compared to that of Uncle Sam?

Yankee (Doodle)

15. How was Yankee and Yankee Doodle used by the British and by Americans during the Revolutionary War?
16. How old is the song "Yankee Doodle"?

The Great Seal

17. Explain the symbolism of the Great Seal.
18. What is the symbolic meaning of *E Pluribus Unum*?
19. When was the Seal approved by Congress?
20. Why did Benjamin Franklin object to the use of the bald eagle?

The Bald-headed Eagle

21. Is the eagle bald?
22. What is the national motto?
23. Where can the motto be found?