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**Jodi R. R. Smith, Contributor**

Etiquette Expert

The Star-Spangled Banner, our National Anthem

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The first time I heard a large crowd sing our national anthem was at a Major League ballpark when I was 8 years old. It was electrifying. Knowing all the words to The Star-Spangled Banner and singing along with thousands of strangers filled me with such patriotism. Last month, at a middle school event, I was saddened to see students mulling around, checking their phones, seemingly bewildered as a single student sang our national anthem.

What happened? Why aren't Americans singing The Star-Spangled Banner? As the Fourth of July holiday approaches, we should remember the sacrifices of so many that allow us to enjoy the freedoms we have today.

The Roper Center at Cornell University follows these types of trends and has confirmed that the percentage of national anthem singers is declining. In a survey asking "How likely are you to sing the national anthem?" just shy of 70% stated they would. (PRRI/RNS June 2013) Maryland-based consultant and soloist Eva Doyle believes that our American tendency to play with the traditional tune has contributed to this trend. "Many soloists these days change the tune a bit as they go along or include a large variety of vocal riffs, and the average citizen is too intimidated to try to follow." Doyle notes that citizens in other countries where she has lived, including the United Kingdom, Australia and Germany, all sing their national anthems, "but the ease of their tune certainly helps."

Roger Austin, a political consultant from Florida, respectfully disagrees. “At any event I have ever attended where the National Anthem was played, everyone stood and many sang along.” Austin finds power in the music and the words. He explains “it is one of my personal favorite songs because of the amazing story it tells and the symbolic story it still tells, I love it every time I hear it.” For many immigrants, the national anthem holds great meaning. Anna Danes, a jazz singer states “I’ve immigrated three times in my life and I find Americans more patriotic than any other nationality I’ve come in contact with. People do sing along when I sing.”

Yet the trend to not sing the national anthem is present. Dr. Carole Lieberman has “long noticed, and been disturbed by, the lack of patriotism, respect and solemnity shown towards singing of the national anthem these days.” It is not just that people are not singing along. Patriotic gestures are not taught and consistently modeled in today’s schools. Lieberman explains “it used to be the way that, every morning, school would begin with the Pledge of Allegiance and the national anthem. And your teacher would lead these in a very patriotic, respectful and solemn way, modeling for kids how proud they should feel about our great country.” Without these lessons, our youngest citizens simply do not know the words to the Star-Spangled Banner or how to behave when it is played. Professor Rick Burton teaches sports management at Syracuse University and believes it goes beyond what is or is not taught in schools. Burton notes with “the advent of the mobile phone [it] also means that the national anthem ‘window’ is the last chance to check Facebook or Instagram before play starts.”

A promotional banner for HuffPost's 'The Morning Email' newsletter. The background is a purple-tinted collage of images: on the left, Donald Trump is shown signing a document; on the right, there are portraits of a woman in a hijab and another woman, with a 'WE THE PEOPLE' banner below them. The HuffPost logo is centered at the top in white. Below it, the text 'The Morning Email' is written in a large, bold, white font. Underneath that, the tagline 'Wake up to the day's most important news.' is displayed in a smaller white font. At the bottom, there is a white input field containing the placeholder text 'address@email.com' and a green rounded rectangular button with the word 'SUBSCRIBE' in white capital letters.

For those in need of a refresher, our national anthem etiquette should include:

- At a minimum, when the national anthem begins, everyone who can stand, should.

- Military personnel in uniform salute throughout the entire song.
- All men and women should remove casual hats. (Women wearing formal hats matching their ensemble are exempt.)
- If an American flag is present, citizens should put their hand over their heart.
- And most importantly, as Ambassador Mary Mel French states in her book United States Protocol “The national anthem is to be sung in traditional form and in a respectful manner.”

All of us at Mannersmith warmly wish you a happy and peaceful Independence Day.



THE STAR SPANGLED BANNER

FRANCIS SCOTT KEY

Oh, 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, thro' 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 thro' the night that our flag was still there.

Chorus:

Oh, 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 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:

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.

Oh, thus be it ever when freemen shall stand
Between their loved homes and the war's desolation;
Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the Heaven-rescued land
Praise the Pow'r 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!"

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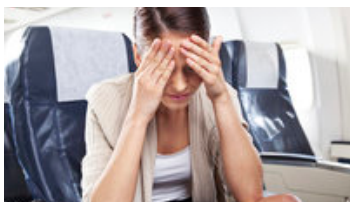
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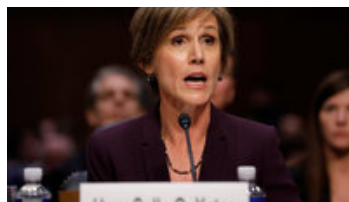
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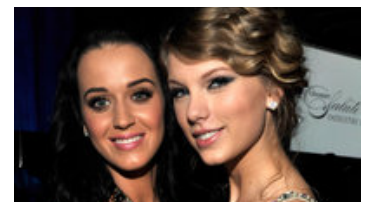
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