

## The True Meaning of Memorial Day

Throughout my childhood, Memorial Day has been an important holiday for my family and me. Having multiple veterans on both the maternal and paternal sides of my family, I have gained a reverent appreciation for this often overshadowed holiday. To me, Memorial Day brings memories of visiting the graves of my grandfathers, both veterans of the Korean War, and both of whom I unfortunately never got the opportunity to meet. In addition, I fondly recall Memorial Day weekends by the White River: exchanging stories of those who came before and spending quality time with family, reprising long-held traditions and honoring the heroes who have kept our proud country the land of the free and the home of the brave. This year, as this time of remembrance approaches, I have been inspired to explore the roots of the holiday, and delve into the deeper meanings of Memorial Day that might often be overlooked by the general populace.

Memorial Day as we know it originated in ceremonies constructed after the end of the Civil War. These ceremonies were held in late spring, and were developed to honor the lives of fallen soldiers. The aforementioned ceremonies were largely independent, without official recognition. General John A. Logan, however, sought to unite the country in a day of remembrance, named Decoration Day, on May 30 each year. Although his request for this national day of remembrance was made in 1868, Memorial Day wasn't legally made into a federal holiday until 1971. The predecessors of Memorial Day were born into being as a way to honor those who had fallen in the Civil War. Today, however, the purpose of Memorial Day has evolved while still retaining the noble meaning of this sacred holiday.

At its heart, Memorial Day is a day of remembrance. Remembrance, not only of the soldiers who have died in defense of our freedom in wars past, but remembrance of the fact that every day there are brave soldiers, law enforcement officers, medical personnel, wartime media correspondents, and many others who continue to risk their lives on a daily basis to protect the ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that our forefathers fought to protect when under the shackles of imperialism. Remembrance, in addition, of our family, friends, neighbors, and fellow citizens, and how lucky we are to be able to cherish the fellowship and love they provide. And remembrance, lastly, of how we must not take these things for granted, for many have given their lives to protect all that we hold dear. I believe the late President Ronald Reagan said it best in his 1986 Memorial Day speech at Arlington National Cemetery: "Today is the day we put aside to remember fallen heroes and to pray that no heroes will ever have to die for us again. It's a day of thanks for the valor of others, a day to remember the splendor of America and those of her children who rest in this cemetery and others. It's a day to be with the family and remember."

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