

**MAY  
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## Memorial Day

### More Than a 3-Day Weekend: How Memorial Day Began

A common misconception about Memorial Day is it was begun by freed slaves to honor those who died defending the Union in the Civil War. In May 1865, free African-Americans in Charleston, SC, reburied former Union prisoners of war and held a ceremony dedicating the cemetery to them, according to [Snopes](#). While the day was meant to honor the men who gave their lives on the battlefield, it was not the origin of the Memorial Day holiday we observe today.

In the spring of 1865, the Civil War finally ended after claiming more lives than any other conflict in U.S. history. To commemorate the lives lost in battle, Americans began holding tributes each spring during the late 1860s. They would decorate the graves of those who had died with flowers, leading to the day being referred to as Decoration Day.

General John A. Logan, leader of an organization of Northern Civil War veterans, designated May 30, 1868, as the first official Decoration Day with a strong speech on the importance of remembering those who had died defending the Union.

"The 30th of May, 1868, is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers, or otherwise decorating, the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country during the late rebellion, and whose bodies now lie in almost every city, village, and hamlet churchyard in the land," he proclaimed.

