

# The Origin and the History of Father's Day in USA

Historically, Father's Day was inaugurated in the United States in the early 20th century to complement Mother's Day in celebrating fathers, fathering, and fatherhood. Father's Day was founded in Spokane, Washington, at the YMCA in 1910 by Sonora Smart Dodd, who was born in Arkansas.

The nation's first Father's Day was celebrated on June 19, 1910, in the state of Washington. However, it was not until 1972—58 years after President Woodrow Wilson made Mother's Day official—that the day honoring fathers became a nation-wide holiday in the United States. Father's Day, 2023, will occur on Sunday, June 18.

## **Mother's Day: Inspiration for Father's Day**

The "Mother's Day" we celebrate today has its origins in the peace-and-reconciliation campaigns of the post-Civil War era. During the 1860s, at the urging of the activist, Ann Reeves Jarvis, one divided West Virginia town celebrated "Mother's Work Days" that brought together the mothers of Confederate and Union soldiers.

Did you know? There are more than 70 million fathers in the United States.

However, Mother's Day did not become a commercial holiday until 1908, when, inspired by Jarvis's daughter, Anna Jarvis, who wanted to honor her own mother by making Mother's Day a national holiday, the John Wanamaker department store in Philadelphia sponsored a service dedicated to mothers in its auditorium.

Thanks in large part to this association with retailers, who saw great potential for profit in the holiday, Mother's Day caught on right away. In 1909, 45 states observed the day, and in 1914, President Woodrow Wilson approved a resolution that made the second Sunday in May a holiday in honor of "that tender, gentle army, the mothers of America."

## **Why the Founder of Mother's Day Turned Against It**

Anna Jarvis, who founded Mother's Day in 1908, passionately opposed its growing commercialization and eventually campaigned against the holiday.

## **Origins of Father's Day**

The campaign to celebrate the nation's fathers did not meet with the same enthusiasm, perhaps, because, as one florist explained, "fathers haven't the same sentimental appeal that mothers have."

On July 5, 1908, a West Virginia church sponsored the nation's first event explicitly in honor of fathers, a Sunday sermon in memory of the 362 men who had died in the previous December's explosions at the Fairmont Coal Company mines in Monongah, but, it was a one-time commemoration and not an annual holiday.

The next year, a Spokane, Washington, woman, named, Sonora Smart Dodd, one of six children raised by a widower, tried to establish an official equivalent to Mother's Day for male parents. She went to local churches, the YMCA, shop-keepers and government officials to drum up support for her idea, and she was successful: Washington State celebrated the nation's first state-wide Father's Day on June 19, 1910.

Slowly, the holiday spread. In 1916, President Wilson honored the day by using telegraph signals to unfurl a flag in Spokane when he pressed a button in Washington, D.C. In 1924, President Calvin Coolidge urged state governments to observe Father's Day.

Today, the day honoring fathers is celebrated in the United States on the third Sunday of June: Father's Day 2021 occurs on June 20.

In other countries, especially, in Europe and Latin America, fathers are honored on St. Joseph's Day, a traditional Catholic holiday that falls on March 19.

### **Father's Day: Controversy and Commercialism**

Many men, however, continued to disdain the day. As one historian writes, they "scoffed at the holiday's sentimental attempts to domesticate manliness with flowers and gift-giving, or they derided the proliferation of such holidays as a commercial gimmick to sell more products, often, paid for by the father himself."

During the 1920s and the 1930s, a movement arose to scrap Mother's Day and Father's Day altogether in favor of a single holiday, Parents' Day. Every year on Mother's Day, pro-Parents' Day groups rallied in New York City's Central Park, a public reminder, said Parents' Day activist and radio performer, Robert Spere, "that both parents should be loved and respected together."

Paradoxically, however, the Great Depression derailed this effort to combine and de-commercialize the holidays. Struggling retailers and advertisers redoubled their efforts to make Father's Day a "second Christmas" for men, promoting goods, such as, neckties, hats, socks, pipes and tobacco, golf clubs, and other sporting goods, and greeting cards.

When World War II began, advertisers began to argue that celebrating Father's Day was a way to honor American troops and support the war effort. By the end of the war, Father's Day may not have been a federal holiday, but, it was a national institution.

In 1972, in the middle of a hard-fought presidential re-election campaign, Richard Nixon signed a proclamation making Father's Day a federal holiday at last. Today, economists estimate that Americans spend more than \$1 billion each year on Father's Day gifts.

We wish all the fathers in our parishes A Very Happy Father's Day Week-end and Celebrations.  
Fr. Eze V. Umunakwe, C.S.Sp.