

## The Story Behind the Song: *America the Beautiful*

During the summer of 1893, a teacher named Katherine Lee Bates encountered a sight she would never forget. As she told it:

“One day some of the other teachers and I decided to go on a trip to 14,000-foot Pikes Peak. We hired a prairie wagon. Near the top we had to leave the wagon and go the rest of the way on mules. I was very tired. But when I saw the view, I felt great joy. All the wonder of America seemed displayed there, with the sea-like expanse.”

Americans have been singing about that view ever since.

*O beautiful for spacious skies,  
For amber waves of grain,  
For purple mountain majesties  
Above the fruited plain!  
America! America! God shed his grace on thee  
And crown thy good with brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea!*

Pikes Peak is located in central Colorado. Rising, as it does, along the spine of the Rocky Mountains, the view from the mountain’s summit inspired Bates to write a poem in tribute, which she promptly did upon returning to her hotel. But it wasn’t a mountain alone that motivated Bates. Her experience on Pikes Peak was actually the pinnacle of a long journey through the heartland of America.

A journey that took her from the World’s Fair in Chicago—

*Thine alabaster cities gleam*

and through the wheat fields of Kansas—

*For amber waves of grain*

to the top of Pikes Peak.

*For purple mountain majesties*

It was a journey that prompted one of the most beloved songs ever penned: ***America the Beautiful***.

When you think about it, the United States of America is a unique country in many ways. For one thing, our nation is vast, extending from the Atlantic in the east to the Pacific in the west. Or, as Bates put it:

*From sea to shining sea*

As a result, there are few countries on Earth that contain as much *diverse* beauty as ours does. From the purple mountains of the Rockies to the amber waves of grain on the Great Plains. From the magnificent desert canyons of the southwest to the tall, broad forests of the northeast. From the warm, wet Everglades in the deepest south to the lush rainforests of the Pacific Northwest. You could travel for hundreds and hundreds of miles, exploring hundreds and hundreds of different regions with all their different climates and cultures—and still find yourself under the same spacious sky.

Perhaps that’s why we love *America the Beautiful* so much—because it captures something we love about America itself. Whoever you are, wherever you go, there’s always something beautiful to see.

There’s always something to love.

Two years after writing *America the Beautiful*, Bates published it in *The Congregationalist*, calling it: “America: A Poem for July 4.” It didn’t take long for the words to catch on. By the time Bates released a new version in 1911, it had been set to music (Samuel Ward’s familiar tune, “Materna”) and become, if not the national anthem, an anthem for Independence Day.

We think many Americans like the song because it expresses what they themselves feel every Fourth of July. Because it describes many of the things we as Americans have to be thankful for. Our freedom and liberty, for example.

*O beautiful for pilgrim feet,  
Whose stern, impassioned stress  
A thoroughfare for freedom beat  
Across the wilderness!  
America! America! God mend thy every flaw,  
Confirm thy soul in self-control,  
Thy liberty in law!*

Or the sacrifice so many men and women have shown while defending our country:

*O beautiful for heroes proved  
In liberating strife,  
Who more than self their country loved  
And mercy more than life!  
America! America! May God thy gold refine,  
Till all success be nobleness,  
And every gain divine!*

Fortunately for Bates, she lived to see her poem become a national treasure. Fortunately for the rest of us, she never sought to profit off people’s patriotism. While she did hold the copyright, she never charged royalties from any publication or performance of the piece. As Bates saw it:

“The hold it has upon our people is clearly due to the fact that Americans are at heart idealists, with a fundamental faith in human brotherhood.”

This Independence Day, you will probably hear *America the Beautiful* played at some point. Perhaps it will be while listening to fireworks, or while watching a parade. But wherever you hear it, we encourage you to sing along. And we encourage you to reflect on what *you* find most beautiful about America. It’s easy, sometimes, to get caught up in all the things that *divide* Americans. But the more we focus on the things that unite us; the more we focus on the things we all love and cherish; the more we focus on the same spacious sky that covers all our heads, the more we can fulfill the song’s ultimate promise:

*And crown thy good with brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea!*

We are so happy to live in this nation of ours. For all its problems, for all its challenges, it’s still America, home of the free and the brave. It’s still America, sweet land of liberty.

It’s still America, the beautiful.

On behalf of all of us here at Hudock Capital Group, we wish you a safe and happy Independence Day.