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## Memorial Day loses meaning: Mix sacrifice, freedom; put it on July 3

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**Abstract (Abstract):** This is the trend for all American holidays that have lost their historical roots: Presidents Day has lost its connection to the contributions of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, Thanksgiving is hardly connected to the sacrifices of the Pilgrims, Columbus Day has all but disappeared from celebration, and Labor Day has lost all importance. Our holidays have lost their importance to teach us lessons for public life. That can not bode well for us as a nation. Our past, both when we celebrate it and commemorate it, allows us to understand our present and chart our future --- a task of vital importance for our nation.

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**Full text:** Today is Memorial Day, and yet another day of commemoration will go by without any real reflection on the role of military sacrifice in our democracy.

Instead, Memorial Day begins the summer with all of its festivities and celebration --- and a parade is the best form of celebration. This is true even though our country is at war in two foreign nations, and we see no real end to that war in the near future.

Why? The answer is, I am sure, a complex collection of social reasons, but I want to suggest one of them and a solution to it. Memorial Day does not seem connected in any historical or logical way to its location in the calendar, and it does not evoke any moral message in its location. Instead, its position inspires no activity beyond beach openings, and the most pretentious of war memorials.

This is the trend for all American holidays that have lost their historical roots: Presidents Day has lost its connection to the contributions of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, Thanksgiving is hardly connected to the sacrifices of the Pilgrims, Columbus Day has all but disappeared from celebration, and Labor Day has lost all importance. Our holidays have lost their importance to teach us lessons for public life. That can not bode well for us as a nation. Our past, both when we celebrate it and commemorate it, allows us to understand our present and chart our future --- a task of vital importance for our nation.

The solution is to move Memorial Day, and I want to suggest that the best place to move it to is July 3. The nexus between our freedom and the sacrifices of our soldiers would be clear, the connection between war and freedom would be juxtaposed for all to see and this could inspire the kind of reflective holiday that our community needs. This would allow celebrations of July 3-4 to move from the low of sacrifice to the high of freedom and inspire moving analysis of our past, present and future. That kind of thoughtful holiday could only do our nation good.

Michael J. Broyde is a law professor at Emory University and a rabbi in Atlanta.

CAPTION: Michael J. Broyde

CAPTION: ANDY SHARP / Staff A Cub Scout from Cobb County pays tribute to a soldier at Marietta National Cemetery in 2005. American flags are placed at each of the almost 18,000 graves at the cemetery, where Memorial Day observances are planned.

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