Q126 – Name three national U.S. holidays. *

DOUGLAS GINSBURG, Federal Judge, U.S. Court of Appeals, D.C. Circuit:
The original meaning of the word holiday is holy day. Many nations honor saints on holy days, but in America we have no national religion.

The closest we come to a religious holiday is Christmas Day, when Christians celebrate the birth of Christ. But we also celebrate Christmas as a secular holiday, as it has long been a time for families of all faiths, or none, to get together.
A week later we ring in the New Year. Other holidays are patriotic. We celebrate George Washington and Abraham Lincoln on Presidents Day. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day honors our greatest civil rights leader. On July the Fourth we celebrate Independence Day.
And we honor members of the armed forces – past and present – on Veterans Day. And those who died for our country on Memorial Day. We celebrate American workers on the first Monday in September, Labor Day … just when summer vacation ends and we return to school and work.
In 2021, June nineteenth, known as Juneteenth, was declared a federal holiday. That's when we celebrate the final enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation and the end of slavery in America.
Some people object to Thanksgiving – which commemorates the Pilgrims first harvest – and to Columbus Day, which honors the sailor who made the Americas known to Europeans. Critics say these holidays celebrate European settlement at the expense of the indigenous people, who had no immunity against European diseases, nor defense against European weapons.
We can debate whether the eleven national holidays we observe are too many or too few. But on most of those days, we come together with family and friends to celebrate the things we care about – including what it is that makes us Americans.