



FREEDOM FACT SHEET:

PRESIDENTS DAY

“A hundred years hence, other disciples of Washington will celebrate his birth, with no less of sincere admiration than we now commemorate it.” - Daniel Webster on Washington’s Centennial Birthday.

WHAT IS IT? Presidents Day honors all who have served as President of the United States of America. It is officially titled Washington’s Birthday. Presidents Day is celebrated on the third Monday of February each year, taking place on February 22, George Washington’s birthday. On the national level, it is meant to honor our first president; however, the holiday takes on a larger meaning of recognizing all presidents on the state level. Due to Abraham Lincoln’s birthday being on February 12 and so close to Washington’s, the holiday is often seen as a time to memorialize these two presidents specifically.

HOW THE HOLIDAY CAME ABOUT: While it was not until January 31, 1879, that Congress declared Washington’s Birthday a federal holiday, Americans celebrated the birth of their first president long before that. Some of the earliest celebrations included an old English tradition known as the Birthnight Ball, commemorating the king’s birthday. Americans still wanted to keep this tradition despite a present king, so in Williamsburg in 1779, Washington became their figure.

BACKGROUND ON GEORGE WASHINGTON: George Washington was born to Augustine and Mary Ball Washington on February 22, 1732, on his family’s plantation in Virginia. With his father’s death at a young age, Washington became a provider for his family, helping his mother run the plantation. He served as the first commander in chief and general of the Continental Army and led America to victory over Great Britain in the Revolutionary War. In 1789, Washington became the first president of the United States, serving two terms, which ended in 1797. He is the only president ever to receive every vote from the Electoral College.

BACKGROUND ON ABRAHAM LINCOLN: Abraham Lincoln was born to Thomas and Nancy Clark Lincoln on February 12, 1809, on a farm near Hodgenville, Kentucky. As a young boy in Indiana, Lincoln had a great fervor for learning and reading, doing so in nearly every spare moment he had. Before his presidency, Lincoln served in various jobs, working on his father’s farm, co-owning a general store, serving in the Illinois militia, and serving as a Whig in the Illinois State Legislature and United States Congress. Lincoln became president in 1860, just before the American Civil War. Lincoln was a great orator and is best remembered for leading the Union to victory in the Civil War and freeing African Americans from the bonds of slavery.

SENATE TRADITION: Each year on Presidents Day, the United States Senate convenes, and one senator reads George Washington’s Farewell Address. The role alternates between parties, and the senator with the honor writes their name in a black book kept with the Secretary of the Senate. This tradition began in 1862, during the [darkest days of the Civil War](#), as a morale boost. In that year, members of the president’s cabinet, military officers, and the Supreme Court Justices attended.