



# Freedom's Feast PRESIDENTS' DAY

On-line Ceremonies to get the most out of your AMERICAN holiday Celebrations.

## CELEBRATING OUR PRESIDENTS AND OUR FREEDOM (SHORT VERSION)

**Leader:** Presidents' Day celebrates the birthday of two of our greatest presidents, **George Washington** and **Abraham Lincoln**. Electing a president as our country's leader is natural for us now. But in the late 1700s when The United States of America was created, having a president was a new idea.



**Reader:** America had just won the American Revolutionary War against Great Britain, a very powerful nation. The men, women and children who fought for independence believed that King George and the British Parliament had been unfair in their dealings with the American colonies.

**Reader:** Our complaints against the British were listed in **The Declaration of Independence**. We also had new ideas about the way a people should be governed. We claimed a natural right to rule ourselves. No government should be allowed to tell its people what to think or say. We would no longer accept a king as our leader.

**Reader:** Once we won our freedom from British rule we had to govern ourselves with our new ideas.

**Reader:** For a while, our thirteen colonies lived with Articles of Confederation. But our new government soon began to fail. A **Constitutional Convention** was called to fix the problems.

**Reader:** After four months of heated debate, our founders agreed on a new structure defined by a set of articles called the **Constitution** for the United State of America. It reflected lessons they had learned from studying governments of other nations and from the injustices of British rule. At 4,440 words, it is the shortest and oldest national constitution in the world.

**Reader:** It distributed power across three branches of government: the legislative, executive, and judicial. Through checks and balances, it was designed to ensure open national debate and to keep any one branch from having too much power.

**Reader:** It guaranteed that we, the people, would live in a society ruled by laws created by our elected representatives.

### Preamble to the Constitution

**ALL:** **We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.**

**Reader:** After 9 months of debate that involved the whole country, nine colonies ratified the Constitution and it became "the law of the land" on June 21, 1788.



What does this illustration say about engagement?

Together, we sing:

### THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND

BY WOODIE GUTHRIE,  
AMERICAN FOLK SINGER  
(1912-1967)

*This land is your land,  
this land is my land  
From California to the  
New York Island From  
the Redwood Forest to  
the Gulf Stream Water  
This land was made for  
you and me.*

Great Britain: taxed the colonies without representation in parliament; forced colonists to house British soldiers; ruled with a brutal king from afar; put British interests before diverse American ones; worked on a system of inherited privilege.

One country, one constitution, one destiny.

DANIEL WEBSTER  
1782-1852  
U.S. SENATOR

We have it in our power to begin the world again.

THOMAS PAINE  
1737-1809  
REVOLUTIONARY,  
FOUNDING FATHER

**NOTE:** The preamble which states the Constitution's purpose is followed by seven Articles. The Articles (most with sections) describe a function or characteristic of government, set limits on government, and define the rights of all citizens. See "Celebrate Your Way" for a summary of the articles and questions to relate the Constitution and Bill of Rights to your life and experience.

**Reader:** George Washington, the retired commander-in-chief of the Revolutionary Army was the unanimous choice for president under the new Constitution. Some suggested he should be called His High Mightiness. Congress decided that our new leader should be addressed simply as "Mr. President."

**Reader:** The delegates who voted for the Constitution knew that it did not protect individual rights so they used Article 5 to create ten amendments called the Bill of Rights.

**Reader:** Its primary author was James Madison, often called The Father of the Constitution. He identified ten important areas of individual rights. He and others thought these were the rights that government might try to take away from us. That's why they need protection.

**Reader:** Although the Constitution was limited at first to only white male property owners, many believe that the delegates were thinking of a time when "the people" would mean other citizens too.

**Reader:** Many Americans believe that the 1st amendment is most important because it protects our freedom to disagree with our government, believe what we want and say what we believe. It guarantees freedom of religion, of conscience, of speech, and of the press. It protects our right to assemble peacefully and petition the government.

**Reader:** "The very aim and end of our institutions is just this: that we may think what we like and say what we think."

**OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES**  
SUPREME COURT JUSTICE

**Reader:** Abraham Lincoln was president during the civil war. He worried that the war might tear our country apart and destroy our Constitution. When he signed the **Emancipation Proclamation** to free all slaves in the states that seceded from the union he said, "I never, in my life, felt more certain that I was doing right, than I do signing this paper."



**Reader:** He said that it "was an act of justice...warranted by the Constitution."

**Reader:** We have had **45 presidents** since George Washington was first sworn in on April 30, 1789.

**Reader:** We have survived a civil war, two world wars and several others. We have come through the Great Depression and many periods of civic unrest and financial difficulty. Every presidential transition has been smooth despite **4 assassinations**.

**Reader:** Thousands of laws have been created since 1789. The Supreme Court has made hundreds of decisions.

**Reader:** We have added seventeen more constitutional amendments since 1791. Some of the ways we govern our country changed. We outlawed slavery. Alcohol was prohibited, then allowed. African Americans and women got the vote they deserved.

**Reader:** Eighteen year olds who are old enough to serve in the military are also now able to vote. America stays vibrant as long as everyone obeys the law—or chooses to properly challenge it. This is our strength.

*It was we, the people; not we, the white male citizen; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union.... Men, their rights and nothing more, women, their rights and nothing less.*

**SUSAN B. ANTHONY**  
1820-1906  
WOMEN'S RIGHTS LEADER

*If the first amendment means anything, it means that a state has no business telling a man, sitting alone in his house, what books he may read.*

**THURGOOD MARSHALL**  
1908-1993  
SUPREME COURT JUSTICE



*With congress, every time they make a joke it's a law. And every time they make a law, it's a joke.*

**WILL ROGERS**  
1879-1935  
COWBOY PHILOSOPHER,  
COLUMNIST, PERFORMER

*Freedom is an indivisible word. If we want to enjoy it, and fight for it, we must be prepared to extend it to everyone, whether they are rich or poor, whether they agree with us or not, no matter what their race or the color of their skin.*

**WENDELL WILLKIE**  
1892-1944  
ATTORNEY,  
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

*...I was not included in "We the People"...But through the process of amendment and interpretation and court decision, I have finally been included in "We the People."*

**BARBARA C. JORDAN**  
1937-1996  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Together we sing:

MY COUNTRY  
'TIS OF THEE/AMERICA  
(FIRST OF FOUR STANZAS)

My country 'Tis of thee,  
Sweet land of liberty  
Of thee I sing:  
Land where my fathers  
died,  
Land of the Pilgrims'  
pride,  
From every  
mountainside  
Let freedom ring!

Reverend Samuel Francis Smith wrote "America," (also known as My Country 'Tis of Thee) a patriotic song, at the request of his friend, Lowell Mason, to a melody Smith chose from Muzio Clementi's Symphony No 3. First performed on July 4th, 1831 in Boston, it was published in 1832. Additional stanzas have been written by abolitionists and others. What would your stanza of "My Country 'Tis of Thee" say?

MY STANZA OF MY COUNTRY 'TIS OF THEE:

Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other.

JOHN ADAMS  
1735-1826  
SECOND U.S. PRESIDENT,  
NEGOTIATED END OF  
REVOLUTIONARY WAR

Congress is functioning the way the Founding Fathers intended—not very well.

BARBER B. CONABLE, JR.  
1922-2003  
US CONGRESSMAN,  
PRESIDENT OF WORLD BANK

**Reader:** The true power in our government rests with three simple words: "we the people...." When "we the people" take responsibility for our freedom, the United States has the best chance of being the country our founders imagined.

**Reader:** I wish the Constitution which is offered had been made more perfect, but I sincerely believe it is the best that could be obtained at this time; and... a constitutional door is opened for amendment hereafter.

GEORGE WASHINGTON, 1ST PRESIDENT

**Reader:** Those who deny freedoms to others do not deserve it for themselves.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN, 16TH PRESIDENT

**Leader:** We were given a great gift over 200 years ago. On this Presidents' Day we remember that our government belongs to us.

**ALL:** Why is the Constitution of the United States so exceptional? Well, the difference is so small that it almost escapes you, but it tells you the whole story in just three words: We the people. Here in America, we the people are in charge.

RONALD REAGAN, 40TH PRESIDENT



Write your own quote about freedom or the Constitution.

What's your favorite presidential quote or other quote about government and leadership?

If you could make an amendment to the Constitution, what would it be?

Share your thoughts with us on our [Facebook page](#).

Please visit "Celebrate Your Way" for fun resources to help raise politically engaged citizens.

See "Create a Keepsake" to make a cause button.

Learn more about our presidents and the Constitution at "Explore More."

Enjoy your holiday and please visit us again at [www.freedomstfeast.us/memorial-day](http://www.freedomstfeast.us/memorial-day)

