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Second Inaugurations

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Second Inaugurations

Later this week George W. Bush will be inaugurated for the second time. How many presidents have had the opportunity to be inaugurated twice? What about second Inaugurations when our nation has been at war?

Socially the second inauguration of George W. Bush starts today, January 18. Constitutionally his second term begins at midday Thursday, **January 20th**. This, in accordance with the **20th Amendment**: "The terms of the President and Vice President shall end at noon on the 20th day of January...." (It's easy to remember that the 20th Amendment puts Inauguration Day on the 20th of January.)



The week's festivities include nine balls, three candle-light dinners, two church services, a concert, and a parade, not to mention the inauguration itself on the west front of the Capitol. The events are not just the last hurrah of a successful campaign for re-election; they're not just about who is on the "A" lists to attend the balls. While there is celebration aplenty in presidential inaugurations, they are more than victory parties. They are among the key events in America's civil religion, anticipated like a coronation or a feast day in the liturgical calendar. These quadrennial benchmarks of the American experience give citizens the opportunity to unify by reaffirming their faith in our nation's promise, as well as their faith in the wisdom of the founders who created our constitutional republic.

That is why it is important for the president to be gracious during his Inaugural Address, whether his first or second. It is why the Democratic-Republican Thomas Jefferson, after the bitter campaign of 1800 against the Federalist John Adams, tried to bury the hatchet on Inauguration Day, saying, "We are all Republicans; we are all Federalists."

The theme for this week's inauguration of President George W. Bush is "Celebrating Freedom and Honoring Service." While January 20 is the constitutionally mandated day for swearing in the president, various inaugural events will stretch from Tuesday, January 18, till Friday, January 21. Because of 9/11, security will be tighter for this inauguration than for any previous one. It is also estimated that all the music, parades, balls, and services will cost more than any previous inauguration in U.S. history, between \$30 million to \$40 million. The money to pay for the extravaganza is being raised through private donations and ticket sales by a specially appointed inaugural committee.

THE SWEET 16

Forty-two men have served as president of the United States. Only 37 of them gave one or more inaugural addresses. George W. Bush's inauguration on January 20th will be the 55th inauguration in U.S. history. Bush will be the sixteenth president who will have been inaugurated twice. The pattern at this moment in history is symmetrical. The initial second inauguration was in the eighteenth century:

- George Washington.

Seven second inaugurals occurred in the nineteenth century:

- Jefferson
- Madison
- Monroe
- Jackson
- Lincoln
- Grant
- Cleveland (the only president whose second term was not continuous with the first).

Seven second inaugurals took place in the twentieth century:

- McKinley
- Wilson
- Franklin Roosevelt (who would have two additional inaugurations)
- Eisenhower
- Nixon
- Reagan
- Clinton

One second inaugural occurred in the twenty-first century:

- George W. Bush.

Reinforcing the symmetry is the fact that presidents with the first name "George" form bookends to the 16 second inaugurations that have taken place.

SIX SECOND INAUGURATIONS DURING WARTIME

To the question of war, six presidents who were kept for another term went through their Inauguration when the nation was in a significant struggle:

- Jefferson's second Inauguration was in March of 1805, when the U.S. naval blockade in the Mediterranean Sea was winding down the Tripolitan War against the Barbary pirates. (The peace treaty would be signed on June 4, 1805.)
- Madison's second Inaugural Address was devoted to the topic of war. This was a first. No previous inaugural address was so dominated by war talk. Because his second inauguration took place in March of 1813, several months after the outbreak of the War of 1812, he was preoccupied with a conflict that was going badly for the Americans. If fact, his language almost grew strident as he listed the depredations of the British and their Indian allies in the conduct of the war.
- Lincoln's second Inauguration took place in March of 1865, five weeks before the end of the Civil War. His speech is arguably the greatest Inaugural Address, first or second, ever given.
- Franklin Roosevelt's fourth Inauguration was in January of 1945, when the Allies could see light at the end of a totalitarian tunnel.
- Nixon's second Inauguration took place in January of 1973, as the Vietnam War was wrapping up for U.S. sailors, flyers, and troops.
- George W. Bush's second Inauguration is happening as the U.S. is desperate to quell the relentless pounding of terrorist attacks before upcoming elections in Iraq.

Two other inaugurations are worth noting. Dwight Eisenhower's first inauguration took place during the Korean War. And while John Adams did not deliver his Inaugural Address during wartime (March 4, 1797), his oration has thoughtful passages about the meaning of George Washington and the Revolutionary War to American history.

Some people critical of fancy inaugurations assert (especially if their side lost) that wartime inaugurations should be relatively subdued affairs. They cite Franklin D. Roosevelt's example in 1945. It is true that FDR's fourth inauguration limited celebration to a cold luncheon at the White House. In part this was due to all the sacrifices that were required of the American people after four years of total war -- the rationing, the limited consumer items, the limited hotel space; in part, it was because FDR was in no shape for an extravaganza; at death's doorstep, he would pass from this earth within five weeks.

FDR's austerity on that occasion has hardly been the rule historically. For instance, James Madison was a wartime president, and his wife Dolley a social maven. They began the custom of holding balls at the president's inauguration; their first -- the nation's first, too -- was held in peacetime in March of 1809. It was such a hit that he and the first lady were not about to let the War of 1812 stop future celebration. For Madison's second inauguration the lead couple put on a lively ball.

(Question from Charles M. of Grand Blanc, MI)