



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on February 16, 2016

Washington's Birthday Neglected Again

Another so-called Presidents Day has passed, and with it, another year of only sporadic mention of George Washington, so rightfully known as the “father of our country.” In stark contrast, almost every major city in the United States hosts a parade, programs, and the like in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Most schools and colleges close for King Day, but few parades are held any more in honor of the man biographer James Flexner called “the indispensable man.”



Generally, schools remain open on Presidents Day, with little to no recognition of Washington.

While it is common today to refer to the third Monday in February as “Presidents Day,” no such holiday exists in federal law. The federal holiday is still “George Washington’s Birthday Observed,” but even the post office puts up signs on its doors letting customers know that they will be closed on “Presidents Day.”

It is another demonstration of the lawless attitude that exists, where laws or the Constitution do not have to be actually changed to accomplish liberal objectives.

The move to downgrade the father of our country is disgraceful.

Putting Washington in with Nixon and Clinton makes no sense. The reason that Washington was honored with a separate day was not just, or even principally, because he was our first president. Rather it was for his role in securing our nation’s independence as the commander in chief in the war against the British. Surely, Washington’s role as president of the Constitutional Convention and as first president of the United States added to his well-earned title as father of our country, but without Washington’s service in our war for independence, our country would have never been born.

Thus, he is the father of our country.

Near the end of the Revolutionary War, there was an effort by many of his highest-ranking officers to make Washington our first king, or at the very least, a military dictator. All Washington had to do was give his consent, and our experiment in self-government would have gone the way of most revolutions, subverted by one of its leaders to give us an authoritarian dictatorship.

In many ways, the difference between the Republic of Mexico and the Republic of the United States is the difference between Antonio López de Santa Anna and George Washington.

There was even talk a few years ago of replacing Washington’s image on the quarter-dollar coin with the progressive president Theodore Roosevelt!

Unfortunately, while the holiday is still “George Washington’s Birthday Observed” at the federal level, many states have switched the name to Presidents Day.

George Washington was born in Virginia on February 11, 1731, at least according to the Julian calendar then in use. Then, in 1752, Great Britain and the colonies adopted the Gregorian calendar. This



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changed Washington's birthday a year and 11 days forward to February 22, 1732. Americans celebrated Washington's birthday for many years before Congress declared it a federal holiday. Finally, his birthday became a legal holiday in 1879. Eventually, George Washington was the only American whose birthday was a legal holiday not only in the eyes of the federal government, but in all 50 states.

The drift away from the observance of Washington's birthday on February 22 began with a change in the law in 1968. Congress passed the Monday Holiday Law to "provide uniform annual observances of certain legal public holidays on Mondays." In other words, Congress wanted to provide several three-day weekends for federal workers. One of the law's provisions was to declare Washington's Birthday as the third Monday in February. This created a situation in which the holiday would never be observed on Washington's actual birthday, as the latest the third Monday in February can occur is February 21. Some argued for changing the holiday's name, as well, to Presidents Day, in honor of both Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

But the name was never changed to Presidents Day, at least at the federal level. Part of the reason the day's name changed in popular usage was to include Lincoln as part of the day of celebration, since the 16th president's birthday falls on February 12. From that has evolved the notion that the day is a time to honor all American presidents, not just George Washington.

Again, the reason to honor Washington is not principally because he was one of 44 presidents of the United States, but because of his role as commander in chief during the War for Independence. With the generic Presidents Day, Washington is now relegated to the ranks of Jimmy Carter and Richard Nixon.

As public awareness of the centrality of Washington to the nation's founding has receded in the public mind, "George Washington's Birthday" (designated by law as the third Monday in February) has been replaced on the majority of calendars with Presidents Day, and even by many government agencies, despite the law. One of the major culprits has been retailers, who like to advertise "Presidents Day Sales," complete with images of Washington and Lincoln. Schools, to the extent that they notice the holiday at all, tend to make the day about all the various chief executives who have occupied the office since 1789.

This has tended to mirror the increase in the power and prestige centered in the office of the president — the "imperial presidency" as some call it. With growing acceptance of the idea that the president "runs the country," or that he is the country's commander-in-chief (rather than simply commander-in-chief of the armed forces), it is not surprising that many Americans mistakenly believe the president can legally commence war on his own, or make laws on his own, through executive orders.

While flawed, like all human beings, Washington was a man of unusual moral character. While today it is common, fashionable even, to denigrate Washington as a deist — a person who believes a Supreme Being created the universe but otherwise does not interfere in earthly matters — the truth is that Washington was a Christian. John Marshall, who sat on the Supreme Court for more than a quarter of a century, was a personal friend of Washington's. In the biography he wrote about Washington, Marshall said that Washington was a "sincere believer in the Christian faith, and a truly devout man."

Washington himself clearly believed that God had given victory to the United States in its war against the British, believing the perseverance of the army was a "miracle." In 1778, Washington said, "The hand of Providence has been so conspicuous in all this, that he must be worse than an infidel that lacks faith, and more than wicked, that has not gratitude enough to acknowledge his obligations."



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Nearing the end of his second term as president, Washington declared he would not take a third term, and he gave his "Farewell Address" to country, reprinted in most of the nation's newspapers. It is clear from reading the address that Washington's faith in God had not wavered. "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports." He added, "It is substantially true that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government."

Previous generations of school children were usually taught other words of wisdom found in the Farewell Address. Today that is rarely the case, but we can still find much of Washington's advice of 1796 relevant.

He had a particular reverence for the Constitution, and the need for government officials to be bound by it. "The Constitution, which at any time exists, till changed by an explicit and authentic act of the whole people, is sacredly obligatory upon all."

There is little question that he would have rejected the notorious modern concept of a "living constitution," molded to fit the desires of progressives who want more governmental power without bothering to change the Constitution through the formal amendment process. He opposed disregarding the Constitution, even if one believed such disregard was for a good cause.

"If, in the opinion of the people, the distribution or modification of the constitutional powers be in any particular wrong, let it be corrected by an amendment in the way the Constitution designates. But let there be no change by usurpation; for though this, in one instance, may be the instrument of good, it is the customary weapon by which free governments are destroyed."

As America goes deeper into debt, members of Congress would be wise to heed the words of Washington: "As a very important source of strength and security, cherish public credit. One method of preserving it is to use it as sparingly as possible."

In the 20th century, American government began to abandon the traditional non-interventionist foreign policy first enunciated by George Washington in 1796. Woodrow Wilson's putting the United States into World War I was clearly at odds with the wise counsel of our first president, who said, "The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible." In the aftermath of World War II, the United States began constructing a number of alliances, such as NATO, which have the possibility of dragging us, even today, into wars where America has little to no vital national interest. Washington warned against this as well, saying, "It is our policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world; so far, I mean, as we are now at liberty to do it."

In his article in *American Thinker*, James Moran said it well: "Washington was indispensable to both the Revolution and the founding of the American government. Could the American republic have come into being and thrived without George Washington? It's hard to imagine an America without him."

Indeed it is. Yet, as little remembrance as Washington receives on "Presidents Day" across the country, practically nothing is done in his honor on February 22nd. Some calendars do not even note the day as anything special. Amazingly, some that neglect to note February 22nd as Washington's birthday, do note "Groundhog Day" on February 2nd.

We have King Day celebrations. We even have a day to drink green beer (St. Patrick's Day) and many other days which gain more attention, but no day really exists any more to honor the man without whom there would not even be a United States of America.



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More is said on February 2nd about whether the groundhog in Pennsylvania saw his shadow than is said about George Washington on February 22nd.

Image: Washington Crossing the Delaware by Emanuel Leutze

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