

In honor of Presidents' Day February 19, I thought it would be good to look back at America's first President, George Washington, and first *Republican* President, Abraham Lincoln. The origin of Presidents' Day lies in the 1880s when the birthday of George Washington was first celebrated as a federal holiday. In 1968 Congress passed the "Uniform Monday Holiday Bill," which moved a number of federal holidays to Mondays. Washington's birthday was placed on the Monday before February 22<sup>nd</sup>.

During debate on the bill, it was proposed that Washington's Birthday be renamed Presidents' Day to honor the birthday of both Washington, February 22, and Abraham Lincoln, February 12. The Bill went into effect in 1971, with Congress rejecting the name change. But by then Presidents' Day had become the commonly accepted name, due in part to retailers using the name to promote sales, and the birth dates' proximity to each other.

In any case, it is thrilling each year to see Sunrise Blvd lined with American flags. I hope you feel that way, too.

Here are some fun facts about our first leader (He apparently didn't chop down a cherry tree, and he no doubt did tell a lie or two- at least as a child):

- George Washington's first job was as a surveyor.
- He once contracted smallpox while visiting Barbados.
- His first elective office was to the House of Burgesses - the lower house of the colonial Virginia legislature.
- He was unanimously elected President of the United States...TWICE!
- George Washington was meant to be buried at the Capitol, but passed away in December 1799, before construction. He was laid to rest at Mount Vernon instead.

Abraham Lincoln's Cooper Union address, delivered on February 27, 1860 in New York City, stands as one of the most legendary speeches ever given by an American politician.

At the time, the United States was deeply divided over the issue of slavery, and the nation stood on the brink of a Civil War. Lincoln was a relatively unknown figure outside of Illinois. He used the Cooper Union platform to articulate his views on slavery and its future expansion into the territories, propelling him to the forefront of national politics.

Lincoln's speech was a turning point in his political career. It showcased his intellectual rigor and his ability to present a compelling argument. The address helped him gain recognition on the national stage and solidified his reputation as a formidable orator. As a result, Lincoln emerged as a leading contender for the Republican nomination for the upcoming presidential election.

The ramifications of the Cooper Union address were significant. It bolstered Lincoln's credibility among anti-slavery Republicans who were wary of compromising on the issue. His moderate stance appealed to a broad coalition of voters, from abolitionists to conservative Republicans, providing him with a diverse base of support.

Lincoln's newfound national recognition played a crucial role in securing his nomination as the Republican candidate. His victory in the election further heightened tensions between the North and the South, ultimately leading to the secession of Southern states and the onset of the Civil War.

The Cooper Union address was also a turning point in American history. It propelled Lincoln into the national spotlight, united anti-slavery forces, and intensified the conflict between the North and the South. Lincoln's presidency, shaped by the ideas he presented at Cooper Union, would be defined by the challenges and crises of the Civil War, ultimately reshaping the nation and its commitment to the principles of freedom and equality.