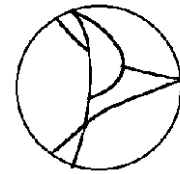


Barack Obama to be Inaugurated 44th US President

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It's been a long journey. For two years, Americans have endured the speeches, the commercials, the debates, the name-calling, the lies, and the rest of the theatrics. On Tuesday, Barack Obama will take the oath of office as the 44th president of the United States of America. All presidential inaugurations are historic, but this one is special. Obama will be our first African-American president.

I remember watching on television in the 1960s as the police used fire hoses, dogs, clubs, and guns to attack peaceful demonstrators who only wanted to vote, to use public facilities, and to be treated with respect. In that time and place, Obama might have been lynched just for trying to vote, much less run for public office. Most younger people don't understand that. I'm glad that they live in a country without it. But we older folks need just a little time to marvel at this, and to savor it.

The 70th presidential inauguration ceremonies will begin at noon on January 20. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts will administer the oaths. Vice President Joe Biden will take his oath first, followed by Obama. The inaugural address follows the oaths. George Washington's first address was the shortest at only 135 words. William Henry Harrison's was the longest at nearly 10,000 words.

Our constitution sets the oath of office as: *"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."* Washington added, "so help me God" at his first inaugural and it became a tradition, but it is not required. Presidents also traditionally hold a bible while taking the oath, but it is not required either.

Franklin Pierce was the only president to affirm the oath rather than swear it. A sworn oath acknowledges religious principles. An affirmed oath does not. Both accomplish the same thing. Theodore Roosevelt did not use a bible when he took his first oath in 1901 after the assassination of William McKinley.

Washington's first inauguration was on April 30, 1789. All inaugurals were held on March 4 after that, until the Twentieth Amendment to the constitution changed the date to January 20. Franklin D. Roosevelt's second inaugural in 1937 was the first held in January.

The pomp and ceremony of Inauguration Day have evolved and become more elaborate over the years. There is not enough space here to go into details about the Obama inaugural plans, but it will have all the bells and whistles. Events include a morning worship service, procession to the capitol, swearing-in ceremonies, inaugural address, departure of the outgoing president, a luncheon hosted by the Joint Congressional Committee on Inauguration Ceremonies, the parade, and the balls. Meanwhile, White House employees will move the Bush's furnishings out of the First Family's residence and move in the Obama's things.

Seven different organizations are responsible for various aspects of the day: the White House, Congress, the Obama/Biden Transition Team, the District of Columbia, the Washington Metrorail (subway) system, the Secret Service, and the US Armed Forces. All of this requires a great deal of organization, coordination, cooperation, and luck. I hope they get it.

Here are some interesting facts about presidential inaugurations:

- John Quincy Adams was the first sworn in wearing long trousers instead of breeches, in 1825.
- William Harrison became ill at his inaugural in 1841 and died of pneumonia 33 days later.
- Lyndon Johnson took his first oath aboard Air Force One in Dallas after President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963.
- Gerald Ford was the first person to hold both offices of vice president and president without being elected to either one. He was inaugurated after Richard Nixon resigned in 1974.
- On the day of Jimmy Carter's inauguration in 1977, a gas line ruptured beneath the University of Pittsburgh's Langley Hall in Oakland. The building exploded and two people died.
- Ronald Reagan's second inauguration in 1985 was the first held on Super Bowl Sunday.
- William Clinton's second inauguration in 1997 was the first held on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.

And here we are, back in the present. Most of the major TV networks will provide all-day coverage of the festivities. If you only have a chance to see one part, watch the swearing-in. And have your children watch it, too. Regardless of our political animosities, the United States still has one of the most peaceful and respectful transfers of power in the world.

For more information, go to: www.usa.gov and www.change.gov.

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