**Presidents’ Day Origin**

The story of Presidents’ Day date begins in 1800. Following President George Washington’s death in 1799, his February 22 birthday became a day of remembrance. At the time, [Washington](http://www.history.com/topics/us-states/washington) was the most important figure in American history, and events like the 1832 centennial of his birth and the start of construction of the Washington Monument in 1848 were causes for national celebration.

**Did You Know?**

President's Day never falls on the actual birthday of any American president. Four chief executives—George Washington, William Henry Harrison, Abraham Lincoln and Ronald Reagan\_were born in February, but their birthdays all come either too early or late to coincide with Presidents’ Day, which is always celebrated on the third Monday of the month.

Washington’s Birthday became a federal holiday at the late 1870s. The holiday initially only applied to the District of Columbia, but in 1885 it was expanded to the whole country. At the time, Washington’s Birthday joined four other nationally recognized federal bank holidays—[Christmas](http://www.history.com/topics/christmas) Day, New Year’s Day, Independence Day and Thanksgiving—and was the first to celebrate the life of an individual American. [Martin Luther King Jr.](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/martin-luther-king-jr) Day, signed into law in 1983, would be the second.

**Presidents’ Day: The Uniform Monday Holiday Act**

The shift from Washington’s Birthday to Presidents’ Day began in the late 1960s when Congress proposed a measure known as the Uniform Monday Holiday Act. This law shifted the celebration of several federal holidays from specific dates to a series of predetermined Mondays. The proposed change was seen by many as a novel way to create more three-day weekends for the nation’s workers, and it was believed that ensuring holidays always fell on the same weekday would reduce employee absenteeism.

The Uniform Monday Holiday Act also included a provision to combine the celebration of Washington’s Birthday with Abraham Lincoln’s, which fell on the date of February 12. Lincoln’s Birthday had long been a state holiday in places like Illinois, and many supported joining the two days to the third Monday of February as a way of giving equal recognition to two of America’s most famous statesmen.

[Columbus Day](http://www.history.com/topics/exploration/columbus-day) and [Memorial Day](http://www.history.com/topics/holidays/memorial-day-history) were also moved from their traditionally designated dates.

**Presidents’ Day: Celebrations and Traditions**

Like Independence Day, Presidents’ Day is traditionally viewed as a time of patriotic celebration and remembrance. In its modern form, Presidents’ Day is used by many patriotic and historical groups as a date for staging celebrations, reenactments and other events. A number of states also require that their public schools spend the days leading up to Presidents’ Day teaching students about the accomplishments of the presidents, often with a focus on the lives of Washington and Lincoln.