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Greatest Man in the World

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Today, while we prepare our family’s feast or exchange our fastidiously purchased Presidents’ Day gifts or even find ourselves kissing under the cherry tree, let us take just a moment to consider the history of this momentous day.

When I was a kid, we celebrated Washington’s Birthday on February 22nd, each year. That officially recognized day honored George Washington, first president and the ‘father of our country,’ began in the 1880s (even before I was born). Then in 1968, someone discovered that Abraham Lincoln also had a February birthday and was apparently feeling slighted.

So, what could we do but get the two big guys together for a mega national holiday? Lincoln was a pretty consequential

president, after all.

But the holiday came to be known as Presidents’ Day ... and as the *Encyclopedia Britannica* [notes](#), “is sometimes understood as a celebration of the birthdays and lives of all U.S. presidents.”

Is this some sort of “everyone gets a trophy” thing?

No. “Washington deserves a day to himself,” [wrote](#) David Boaz years ago, “because he did something no other person did: He led the war that created the nation and established the precedents that made it a republic.”

Boaz also wrote of King George III, who, when told that Washington would not cling to power but return to his farm after winning the Revolutionary War, mocked the general. “If he does that he will be the greatest man in the world.”

But “no joke” — as a recent president was fond of saying — Washington did exactly that, handing back his commission as commander of the army.

Just as years later he stepped down after two terms as president, setting the tradition that ultimately led to the Constitution’s 22nd Amendment: presidential term limits.

So, Happy Washington’s Birthday!

This is Common Sense. I’m Paul Jacob.