

Things you may not know about US inaugurations

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(Photo from Thinkstock)

For those who want to know more about the meaning and significance of presidential inaugurations, [Brian Brox](#), a Tulane University professor of [political science](#) in the School of Liberal Arts, has helped shed light on this quintessential American event.

Q. Why is this the 58th inauguration when there have been only been 45 presidents?

A. It's the 58th time a president has taken the oath of office, and some have taken it twice. For example, Barack Obama was the 44th president but he got both the 56th and 57th inaugurations. You should also consider that presidential terms are four

years long which equates to 25 per century. That would mean there were 25 in the 1800s, 25 in the 1900s (we're up to 50) plus 1788, 1792, 1976, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016 = 58.

Q. Are presidents required to take the oath of office on a Bible?

A. No, but most choose to do so. In fact, John Quincy Adams took it on a law book. Taking the oath is a solemn occasion and so swearing to uphold the constitution while making the promise on a solemn book fits the situation. George Washington choose to do so on a Bible, so most subsequent presidents have also done so either in keeping with the Washington precedent or because of their own Christian faith.

Q. Why are the inaugurations always held outdoors?

A. Inaugurations are held outdoors so the people can watch. Exceptions are usually a function of bad weather or unusual circumstance such as a previous president's assassination. For the inaugurations of Andrew Jackson through Jimmy Carter, the ceremony took place on the East Portico. It was changed to the West Portico in 1981 for Ronald Reagan because more people are able to view along the mall toward the Washington Monument.

Q. Are inaugurations and oaths of office one in the same?

A. No. There is a difference between an inauguration, which occurred Friday, Jan. 20, and taking the oath of office. LBJ took the oath of office on an airplane in Dallas in November 1963. That was not an inauguration. His inauguration took place in 1965 following his win in the November 1964 election.

Q. Why do presidential terms begin on Jan. 20?

A. Inaugurations were formerly held on March 4 until the enactment of the 20th amendment, which moved the beginning of the presidential term to Jan. 20. The first January inauguration was in 1937.

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