

English articles

It's useful to read articles in English, even if you don't understand every word - it will help you increase your vocabulary and keep up to date with things happening in English-speaking countries!

*This page will be updated on **Mondays**. The first article is aimed at a B1 and upwards level and the second article is aimed at a B2 and upwards level*

Articles of the week



How President's Day has evolved from reverence to retail



By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — Like the other Founding Fathers, George Washington was uneasy about the idea of publicly celebrating his life. He was the first leader of a new republic, not a king.

And yet the United States will once again commemorate its first president on Monday, 293 years after he was born.

The meaning of Presidents Day has changed dramatically, from being mostly unremarkable and filled with work for Washington in the 1700s to the bonanza of consumerism it has become today. For some historians, the holiday has lost all discernible meaning.

Historian Alexis Coe, author of "You Never Forget Your First: A Biography of George Washington," has said she thinks about Presidents Day in much the same way as the towering monument in D.C. bearing his name.

"It's supposed to be about Washington, but can you really point to anything that looks or sounds like him?" she remarked in an interview with The Associated Press in 2024. "Jefferson and Lincoln are presented as people with limbs and noses and words associated with their memorials. And he's just a giant, granite point. He has been sanded down to have absolutely no identifiable features."

Here is a look at how things have evolved:

Washington's birthdays were celebrated, sometimes

Washington was born Feb. 22, 1732, on Popes Creek Plantation near the Potomac River in Virginia.

Technically, though, he was born Feb. 11 under the ancient Julian calendar, which was still in use for the first 20 years of his life. The Gregorian calendar, intended to more accurately mark the solar year, was adopted in 1752, adding 11 days.

Either way, Washington paid little attention to his birthday, according to Mountvernon.org, the website of the organization that manages his estate. Surviving records make no mention of observances at Mount Vernon, while his diary shows he was often hard at work.

"If he had it his way, he would be at home with his family," Coe said. "Maybe some beloved nieces and nephews (and friend) Marquis de Lafayette would be ideal. And Martha's recipe for an indulgent cake. But that's about it."

Washington's birthday was celebrated by his peers in government when he was president, mostly.

Congress voted during his first two terms to take a short commemorative break each year, with one exception, his last birthday in office, Coe said. By then, Washington was less popular, partisanship was rampant and many members of his original Cabinet were gone, including Thomas Jefferson.

"One way to show their disdain for his Federalist policies was to keep working through his birthday," Coe said.

The Library of Congress does note a French military officer, the comte de Rochambeau, threw a ball celebrating Washington's 50th birthday in 1782.

After his death, a market for memorabilia is born

Washington was very aware of his inaugural role as president and its distinction from the British crown. He didn't want to be honored like a king, Seth Bruggeman, a history professor at Temple University in Philadelphia, told the AP last year.

Still, he said, a market for Washington memorabilia sprang up almost immediately after his death in 1799 at age 67, with people snapping up pottery and reproductions of etchings portraying him as a divine figure going off into heaven.

“Even in that early moment, Americans kind of conflated consumerism with patriotic memory,” said Bruggeman, whose books include “Here, George Washington Was Born: Memory, Material Culture, and the Public History of a National Monument.”

Making it official with parades and festivals

It wasn't until 1832, the centennial of his birth, that Congress established a committee to arrange national “parades, orations and festivals,” according to the Congressional Research Service.

Only in 1879 was his birthday formally made into a legal holiday for federal employees in the District of Columbia.

The official designation for the holiday is Washington's Birthday, although it has come to be known informally as Presidents Day. Arguments have been made to honor President Lincoln as well because his birth date falls nearby, on Feb. 12.

A small number of states, including Illinois, observe Lincoln's birthday as a public holiday, according to the Library of Congress. And some commemorate both Lincoln and Washington on Presidents Day.

But on the federal level, the day is still officially Washington's Birthday.

A shift to consumerism

By the late 1960s, Washington's Birthday was one of nine federal holidays that fell on specific dates on different days of the week, according to a 2004 article in the National Archives' Prologue magazine.

Congress voted to move some of those to Mondays, following concerns that were in part about absenteeism among government workers when a holiday fell midweek. But lawmakers also noted clear benefits to the economy, including boosts in retail sales and travel on three-day weekends.

The Uniform Monday Holiday Act took effect in 1971, moving Presidents Day to the third Monday in February. Sales campaigns soared, historian C. L. Arbelbide wrote in Prologue.

Bruggeman said Washington and the other Founding Fathers “would have been deeply worried” by how the holiday became taken over by commercial and private interests.

“They were very nervous about corporations,” Bruggeman said. “It wasn't that they forbade them. But they saw corporations as like little republics that potentially threatened the power of The Republic.”

Coe, who is also a fellow at the Washington think tank New America, said by now the day is devoid of recognizable traditions.

“There's no moment of reflection,” Coe said. Given today's widespread cynicism toward the office, she added, that sort of reflection “would probably be a good idea.”

Trump's AI ambition and China's DeepSeek overshadow an AI summit in Paris



By SYLVIE CORBET and RAF CASERT Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — European leaders insisted Monday they must have a say in international talks to end the war in Ukraine despite the clear message from both Washington and Moscow that there was no role for them as yet in negotiations that could shape the future of the continent.

Three hours of emergency talks at the Elysee Palace in Paris left leaders of Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands, Denmark, NATO and the European Union without a common view on possible peacekeeping troops after a U.S. diplomatic blitz on Ukraine last week threw a once-solid trans-Atlantic alliance into turmoil.

U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer called for U.S. backing while reaffirming he's ready to consider sending British forces on the Ukrainian ground alongside others "if there is a lasting peace agreement."

There was a rift though with some EU nations, like Poland, which have said they don't want their military imprint on Ukraine soil. French President Emmanuel Macron was non-committal.

European call for working with the US

Macron said overnight he spoke by phone to U.S. President Donald Trump and then Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy following the meeting.

"We seek a strong and lasting peace in Ukraine," Macron said on the social platform X. "To achieve this, Russia must end its aggression, and this must be accompanied by strong and credible security guarantees for the Ukrainians."

"We will work on this together with all Europeans, Americans, and Ukrainians," he added.

Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof acknowledged the Europeans "need to come to a common conclusion about what we can contribute. And that way we will eventually get a seat at the table," adding that "just sitting at the table without contributing is pointless."

Starmer said a trans-Atlantic bond remained essential. "There must be a U.S. backstop, because a U.S. security guarantee is the only way to effectively deter Russia from attacking Ukraine again," he

said.

Top U.S. officials from the Trump administration, on their first visit to Europe last week, left the impression that Washington was ready to embrace the Kremlin while it cold-shouldered many of its age-old European allies.

The US to leave Europe out of negotiations

Gen. Keith Kellogg, Trump's special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, said Monday he didn't think it was "reasonable and feasible to have everybody sitting at the table."

"We know how that can turn out and that has been our point, is keeping it clean and fast as we can," he told reporters in Brussels, where he briefed the 31 U.S. allies in NATO, along with EU officials, before heading to Kyiv for talks on Wednesday with Zelenskyy.

His remarks were echoed by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who was equally dismissive about a role for Europe. "I don't know what they have to do at the negotiations table," he said as he arrived in Saudi Arabia for talks with U.S. officials.

Last week, Vice President JD Vance and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth in a flurry of speeches questioned both Europe's security commitments and its fundamental democratic principles.

Macron, who has long championed a stronger European defense, said their stinging rebukes and threats of non-cooperation in the face of military danger felt like a shock to the system.

The tipping point came when Trump decided to upend years of U.S. policy by holding talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in hopes of ending the Russia-Ukraine war.

Shortly before the meeting in Paris Monday, Macron spoke with Trump, but Macron's office would not disclose details about the 20-minute discussion.

Europeans stand by their support to Ukraine

Starmer, who said he will travel to Washington next week to discuss with Trump "what we see as the key elements of a lasting peace," appears to be charting a "third way" in Europe's shifting geopolitical landscape — aligning strategically with the U.S. administration while maintaining EU ties. Some analysts suggest this positioning could allow him to act as a bridge between Trump and Europe, potentially serving as a key messenger to the White House.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz told reporters a possible peace agreement with Russia cannot be forced on Ukraine. "For us, it must and is clear: This does not mean that peace can be dictated and that Ukraine must accept what is presented to it," he insisted.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said that any peace agreement would need to have the active involvement of the EU and Ukraine, so as to not be a false end to the war "as has happened in the past."

He went on: "What cannot be is that the aggressor is rewarded."

A strong U.S. component, though, will remain essential for the foreseeable future since it will take many years before many European nations can ratchet up defense production and integrate it into an effective force.

Sending troops after a peace deal?

Highlighting the inconsistencies among many nations about potential troop contributions, Scholz said talk of boots on the ground was “premature.”

“This is highly inappropriate, to put it bluntly, and honestly: we don't even know what the outcome will be” of any peace negotiation, he added.

European nations are bent though on boosting their armed forces where they can after years of U.S. complaints, and most have increased defense spending to 2% of gross domestic product, but the path to reaching 3% is unclear.

“The time has come for a much greater ability of Europe to defend itself,” Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk said. “There is unanimity here on the issue of increasing spending on defense. This is an absolute necessity.” Poland spends more than 4% of its GDP on defense, more than any other NATO member.

Casert reported from Brussels. Associated Press writers Thomas Adamson in Paris, Suman Naishadham in Madrid, Lorne Cook in Brussels, Geir Moulson and Kirsten Grieshaber in Berlin, Dusan Stojanovic in Belgrade, Serbia, Vanessa Gera in Warsaw, Poland, Justin Spike in Kyiv and Karel Janicek in Prague, Czech Republic contributed to this report.

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Last update: **2025/02/18 09:21**

