

Karen Blanco  
Americanism Talk  
Jan. 3, 2025  
Valley Forge

Good morning, Everyone! Happy New Year to each of you!

Stepping back in time, here is a tribute to the American patriots at Valley Forge.

The story of the Continental Army at Valley Forge is one of great pain and unbelievable challenges, full of suffering, illness, and death. However, it is also a story of courage, perseverance, and triumph, which leaves us feeling proud to be Americans.

The Revolutionary War lasted eight and a half years, and the Valley Forge encampment took place in the third year of the war, from Dec. 1777 to June 1778. By this time, most Americans realized that the British were a formidable enemy, and that the Revolution would be a long, drawn out war.

When they arrived at Valley Forge, the Continental Army was a collection of different colonial militias, supported by hundreds of camp followers and allies. They were hungry, cold, inadequately armed, and poorly clothed when they entered the encampment. At the end of their stay, Washington's army emerged as a unified, well- trained fighting force, ready to take on the British for another five years.

At that time, British soldiers occupied the American capital of Philadelphia. Located eighteen miles NW from the capital, Valley Forge was a naturally defensible plateau where the Continental soldiers could train and recoup from past battles. The troops were close enough to maintain pressure on the British occupiers through patrols and skirmishes, but far enough away to prevent a surprise attack on Washington's troops.

What was life like in the encampment? The winter weather was not the coldest weather experienced during the war, but it was challenging. Food was obtained through a center for commissary operations from the army itself, as well as camp

stores where nearby farmers sold their produce, hogs, or eggs to the army. Local forest wildlife provided some meat for the troops.

How many people lived in the Valley Forge camp? At the start in Dec. 1777, there were 12,000 soldiers, plus 400 enlisted men's wives, with some children, who followed the army year-round. A few general's wives came on extended visits. Continental soldiers came from all thirteen colonies, and were of different ethnicities and religions. Included were free and enslaved black soldiers and civilians, indigenous peoples, wealthy officers, poor enlisted men, and European immigrants. Some served out of patriotism, others for profit, still others (such as indentured or apprenticed people) earned their personal freedom by fighting the British. By the end of the Valley Forge encampment in Spring 1778, when the army massed for the campaign season, there were some 20,000 people there.

During the encampment, Gen. Washington ordered the troops into construction squads who managed to build about 2,000 log huts for shelter, each measuring 14 x 16 feet, using wood from nearby forests. They also built miles of trenches and five earthen forts, as well as a bridge over a nearby river. Amazing work done in such a short time, all while coping with harsh cold, illness, and questionable food supplies.

What was the worst issue for them? Not starvation, but disease. Influenza and typhoid, for example, took nearly 2,000 lives. Dedicated volunteer surgeons and nurses worked to improve camp sanitation, and gave smallpox vaccines to the troops. One surgeon, Albigeance Waldo, left his wife, children, and medical practice to volunteer at Valley Forge. Writing in his journal, at a low point for him, he recorded, "I am sick [and] discontented. Poor food, hard lodging, cold weather, fatigue, nasty clothing, nasty cookery, [I] vomit half the time... Why are we sent here to starve and freeze? What sweet felicities [I have] left at home -- a charming wife, pretty children, good beds, good food. Here -- confusion, smoke and cold, hunger and filthiness -- A pox on my bad luck!"

And the best thing about Valley Forge? The maturation of the Continental Army into a professional force, ready to take on the British army again in the Spring,

thanks in large part to a fascinating, eccentric Prussian army officer named Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben. General Washington gave him the crucial job of training the disorganized Continental Army. In Spring 1778, in less than two months' time, Baron von Steuben and his assisting officers rallied the battered army into fighting shape. He offered to accept pay for his services only if America eventually won the war.

He wore a large silver star on his chest, along with a long blue cloak, and a French style beaver hat. He knew only a few words in English, and used mostly "Squad!" and "Halt!" in his shouts. When discipline broke down, he swore at the troops in a garbled mix of French, English, and German. But, soon enough, his Prussian army drills began to build morale in the troops. He taught them how to reload their muskets quickly after firing, how to charge with a bayonet, and how to march in compact columns.

Baron von Steuben wrote to a Prussian army friend about his admiration for the independent spirit of the Americans. He explained, "You say to your [Prussian] soldier 'Do this,' and he does it. But I am obliged to say [to the American soldier] 'This is the reason why you ought to do that,' and then he does it."

On June 19, 1778, Washington's newly trained soldiers marched out of Valley Forge in pursuit of the British, who had evacuated Philadelphia and moved north. Five more years of war remained before American independence was won.

What a marvelous piece of our country's unique history is the winter spent at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. And what a truly unique and wonderful country we have today!

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Karen Blanco  
Americanism Talk  
Feb. 7, 2025  
The Star Spangled Banner

I enjoy watching football and baseball games on TV. When the National Anthem is sung at the openings of these games, I inevitably become teary-eyed. Here are a few tidbits about Francis Scott Key, and how he wrote "The Star Spangled Banner."

The War of 1812, which continued until 1815, began when the United States became increasingly frustrated by British trade restrictions placed on our new country. The British and Canadians also put up obstacles to plans for US Westward Expansion, so Congress officially declared war on Britain in June 1812.

Although the border between the US and Canada was a significant locale of the war, the British naval blockade along the Eastern coast was the main headache for America. US warships were successful at single ship engagements, but could not disrupt the British blockade, which was greatly harming our economy.

In June 1814, British forces landed at Chesapeake Bay, Virginia, marched north, and burned Washington DC, including the US Capitol, the Treasury, and the White House (which, at that time, was called The President's House).

In September 1814, British naval ships began firing at Ft. McHenry in Baltimore Harbor. The fort was one of the last lines of defense for the US, as both Washington and Baltimore were political and financial strongholds. Washington had already been attacked so, if Baltimore fell also, the British could declare absolute victory over our young country.

Enter Francis Scott Key, born in Maryland on August 1, 1779, while the US War for Independence was still being fought. Although his father, John Ross Key, was a commissioned officer in the Continental Army, several members of the Key family remained loyal to the British.

Francis, also known as Frank, became a successful and respected lawyer who, at only 28 years old, argued before the US Supreme Court. Key married Miss Mary Lloyd, the daughter of a member of the Continental Congress. Francis and Mary (known as Polly) were devout Christians, faithful members of an Episcopal Church. Key quoted the Bible extensively in his legal papers and personal correspondence. He and Polly eventually raised eleven children together.

In 1814, a friend of Francis Scott Key, named Dr. William Beanes, refused to give food and drink to some British soldiers who had approached his house in Maryland. For this, he was arrested and sentenced to be hanged by the British. He was held prisoner in Chesapeake Bay on a flagship of the British fleet.

Along with Col. John Stuart Skinner, known as a British Prisoner Exchange Agent, attorney Key met with British Admiral George Cockburn to lobby for Dr. Beanes' release. Fortunately, the Americans successfully negotiated the doctor's freedom. However, the men became privy to Britain's upcoming plans to attack Baltimore, since they had spent time on the British ship. Hence, they were not allowed to return to shore. On their own anchored ship, Key and the other Americans remained under heavy British scrutiny.

On September 13, 1814, the British naval attack on Ft. McHenry began, which Key watched from his ship about eight miles away. For 24 hours, the British hurled mortar shells and rockets at the fort, creating a huge cloud of smoke which was illuminated by the glow of the rockets. In the darkness, Key saw only redness erupting in the night sky, and was certain that the British would triumph.

As an aside, Francis Scott Key was also an accomplished poet and hymn writer. In these passages from letters he wrote describing what he witnessed that night, one can hear his creative skill with words: "It seemed as though Mother Earth had opened and was vomiting shot and shell, in a sheet of fire and brimstone. The heavens aglow were a seething sea of flame, and the waters of the harbor [were] lashed into an angry sea."

All night long, the attack raged. At one point, 1,200 British soldiers came ashore to attack the fort from the rear, but the American forces held them off. When "the dawn's early light" finally appeared, Key saw the American flag, not the British Union Jack, waving in the breeze outside Ft. McHenry, announcing an American victory.

The British, low on ammunition and fatigued after the long fight, admitted that they could not breach the fortifications of Ft. McHenry, hence they retreated and headed off to New Orleans.

Dr. Beanes, Key, and negotiator Stuart were sent back to the Maryland shore, and Key wrote notes for a future poem about what he had witnessed. He put his thoughts on paper, set them to a tune, and soon it appeared in print all over the country. It was named "The Star Spangled Banner," and it remained popular throughout the 19th century, serving as a symbol of unity during the Civil War. After 1889, it was sung at flag raisings by the Navy and, in 1929, Congress debated whether to name "The Star Spangled Banner" as the official national anthem of the United States.

There were a few objections to adopting the song, such as the difficulty in singing and playing the song (especially those high notes), the inability to dance or march to it, and the way it appeared too militaristic. Reintroduced to Congress in 1930, the resolution finally passed, and it was officially adopted by law on March 3, 1931.

There you have it! With the Super Bowl occurring this weekend, and baseball pre-season beginning soon, as we listen to "The Star Spangled Banner" being sung, we will all know the story behind this wonderful piece of our country's history.

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Karen Blanco  
Americanism Talk  
March 7, 2025  
The White House

Our first president George Washington never lived in the White House, however, he did select the site on the Potomac River for its construction.

The first White House architect was Pierre Charles L'Enfant, who produced an opulent, palatial design which would have resulted in a building four times the size of what stands today. This design was rejected, so Washington and his secretary of state Thomas Jefferson subsequently announced a national competition for the new design.

In March 1792, Jefferson drafted "An Advertisement for the President's House ... [offering] a premium of 500 dollars, or a Medal of that value ... to the person who, before the 20th day of July next shall produce ... the most approved plan ... for a President's House, to be erected in the Federal City."

Washington recommended an Irish born architect named James Hoban for the job. Mr. Hoban emigrated to the US after the Revolutionary War, eventually settling in S. Carolina. Although Washington did not know Hoban personally, he knew some gentlemen in S. Carolina who had highly praised his architectural skills.

Hence, Washington gave Hoban a presentation letter to show the Commissioners of the District of Columbia when he entered the design competition. It read in part:

"Gentlemen: The bearer of this [letter], Mr. James Hoban, was strongly recommended to me ... as a person who... was well qualified not only for planning or designing buildings, but to superintend the execution of them.

He informs me that he intends to produce plans for the building ... and is on his way to view the ground on which [it is] to stand. I have given him this letter of introduction ...for the purposes mentioned.

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With esteem and regard, I am, Gentlemen, your most obedient servant, George Washington."

In July 1792, in George Washington's presence, the commissioners awarded Hoban first prize in the competition to design the President's House. They hired him the next day to supervise the construction of his design.

The cornerstone for the building was installed in 1793, and construction continued until 1801. According to the White House Historical Association, the cost of construction was \$232,372.00. It is today valued at nearly \$400 million.

Mr. Hoban also supervised the reconstruction of the White House after British troops burned it during the War of 1812. Also, from 1793-1802, Hoban was one of the superintendents in charge of the construction of the US Capitol, which was designed by William Thornton.

Unfortunately, not much is known about James Hoban's life and personality. He was not famous in his lifetime, and his personal and business papers were mostly lost in a fire in the 1880s. Few sources about his life survive, and only in some scattered drawings, public and legal documents, and newspaper notices.

His contributions to the early growth and development of Washington DC are numerous: architect, builder, mason, civic leader, and captain of a militia company. His memory and reputation do live on to this day.

Early maps referred to the White House as "The President's Palace," but our country's founders wanted to avoid any concept of royalty connected to the building. In 1810, it was officially named the "Executive Mansion," and was also referred to as "The President's House" or "President's Mansion."



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In 1901, President Theodore Roosevelt changed the official name from "Executive Mansion" to "The White House," a name which had been consistently used throughout the 1800s.

John Adams became the first President to live in the White House, when he and his wife Abigail moved into the almost completed building on November 1, 1800. The White House has been the official residence of every President since then.

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Karen Blanco  
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Riding the Circuit

The Judiciary Act of 1789 was passed by Congress about 15 months after the ratification of the US Constitution. Signed into law on Sept. 24, 1789 by President George Washington, and officially named the "Act to Establish the Judicial Courts of the United States," it created the structure of the federal judicial system.

Five Supreme Court associate justices and one chief justice were appointed to meet twice yearly to hear cases important to the new nation. Congress also established district courts, which heard maritime and admiralty cases, as well as some minor criminal and civil matters. Circuit courts were also formed, which heard most major civil and criminal trials, as well as appeals from district courts.

This is how the practice of "riding the circuit" began, a challenging additional responsibility placed on the Supreme Court Justices, which lasted until the early 1900s. Not only did the justices hear cases during the Supreme Court's 6-8 week official term, but they also traveled to different regions of the young country to serve as circuit court judges. Aside from their responsibility to interpret the US laws, they were also expected to educate the American public on the roles and responsibilities of their new government, especially the Judicial Branch.

"Riding the Circuit" was seen as beneficial for 5 basic reasons. First, the Supreme Court Justices could directly interact with the American public, learning about their lives and communities. Second, each region could feel connected to the federal government, as the Justices explained the US Constitution to the residents. Third, having the Supreme Court Justices listen to local cases kept the judicial branch's budget low, by not having to hire circuit judges. Fourth, it would coerce Justices to keep up with laws on the regional level, not just on the national level. Finally, according to the Supreme Court Historical Society, (and this point reminds me of our modern day system in Washington, DC), some Congress members "feared that if Justices were confined to the capital, they could be overly influenced by politics, which could affect their opinions and rulings." Does that sound familiar?

However, according to accounts from the Supreme Court Justices, the hardships of circuit riding outweighed the benefits. Our new country was a land of primitive roads and few bridges. Travelers dealt with harsh weather, unreliable transportation, and treacherous traveling conditions. Justices struggled to arrive to court on time.

Justice William Cushing wrote to President Washington, "... the traveling is difficult this season. I left Boston on January 13, [and reached] Middleton [Delaware] as the snow on the 18th began, which fell so deep there as to oblige me to take a sleigh, and now again [back to wheels]."

Justice Samuel Chase narrowly escaped death when crossing a near frozen river in Pennsylvania while returning to the capital. The Philadelphia Gazette wrote at the time of the accident, "The Hon. Judge Chase... was taken from the river almost lifeless."

Justice James Iredell traveled for months at a time on the southern states circuit. Oftentimes, the swampy conditions made it too dangerous to travel, leading him to cancel court sessions. Local papers chastised Iredell for his failure to show up, not realizing the danger he was facing.

If they could not stay with friends, the Justices stayed in public accommodations, rooming with fellow Americans they met along the dirt roads and rivers of our new nation. They paid their own travel expenses. Tavern food varied greatly in quality, and it was difficult to rest in the busy inns and crowded public houses. Justice Iredell wrote to his wife that he was forced to sleep "in a room with five people," and Justice William Cushing once shared a room with twelve other men. On the average, Justices spent from 6-9 months yearly on circuit, covering some 1000 miles for each circuit. One was unfortunately robbed on his journey.

One Justice, named William Paterson, wrote encouragingly to his wife, "Suffer not your Spirits to sink; I am in the Course of Duty, and being so, we must bear up under it with Patience and, if possible, with Cheerfulness."

Finally, however, worn down and exhausted from the hardships of the circuit, the Justices asked President Washington to present their case before Congress. In 1792, they wrote to Washington in part, "[We] request your attention to the enclosed Representation, and that you will be pleased to lay it before the Congress...We really, Sir, find the burdens laid upon us [to be] excessive...We cannot reconcile ourselves to the idea of existing in exile from our families." They signed their names to the letter, "With the most perfect respect, esteem, and attachment, we have the honor to be, Sir, Your most Obedient and most humble Servants."

Washington did indeed present their complaints to Congress, in early November 1792. The Justices' Presentation asked respectfully "that the System may be so modified as that [we] may be relieved from [our] present painful and improper Situation."

Unfortunately, change was slow to come for the traveling Justices. As more settlers migrated westward, and the population grew throughout the 1800s, Congress eventually began to restructure the circuits.

Circuit riding finally ended with the enactment of the Judicial Code of 1911, and the Supreme Court has remained in Washington, DC full time ever since.

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Karen Blanco  
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Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson is, for me, one of our country's most intriguing Founding Fathers. Best known as the author of our Declaration of Independence, he also served as our third President, and Secretary of State. Jefferson was a true Renaissance man.

The two most controversial topics about Jefferson – one, that he owned about 600 slaves and two, that he is believed to have fathered six children with one of his female slaves – I will leave to other people. Historians can debate about those sticky topics. I have other interesting tidbits to share with you about this important Founding Father.

Jefferson lived from 1743-1826. The elder of two sons in a family of ten, young Jefferson spent most of his boyhood on a plantation near Richmond, VA. When he was 14 years old, his father died and bequeathed almost 3000 acres to Thomas, making him the head of the family and master of the plantation.

His early education was spent with private tutors, and he entered the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg at age 17. He graduated college at age 19, studied law privately, and was admitted to the bar at age 24. At age 29, he married a widow named Martha Wayles Skelton, and they had 6 children together, one son and five daughters. Only two daughters survived to adulthood, and Martha tragically died after only ten years of marriage. Jefferson never married again. He had 12 grandchildren, several of whom lived with him at his beloved Monticello.

Jefferson was an inventor, lawyer, and educator. During his lifetime, he wrote over 19,000 letters, most of which have survived. He spoke 6 languages: English, French, Greek, Italian, Latin, and Spanish. An architect, he designed his home at Monticello, which he called "the hobby of my old age," as well as the Virginia State Capitol and the rotunda for the University of Virginia.

Jefferson was interested in economic theory, believed in free market policies, and opposed using bank notes as currency. He was a foodie, especially fond of French food, which he learned to enjoy during a five year stay in France.

While he was in France, helping Benjamin Franklin and John Adams to negotiate commercial treaties with European nations, Jefferson developed a special love for French wine. Back in America, he planted two vineyards at Monticello, seeking to promote wine as an alternative to American whisky and cider.

Jefferson believed that the United States should always be an agrarian society because it would keep us independent from other nations. He was one of the first American farmers to employ crop rotation, and he redesigned the plow to increase efficiency.

He was a prolific writer during his lifetime, having famously authored our country's Declaration of Independence. At the Library of Congress, the collection of Thomas Jefferson papers includes about 27,000 documents. He corresponded extensively with key historical figures. And we know that he loved books tremendously. His personal library contained 6,500 volumes which, after his retirement, he sold to the Library of Congress. At one point, he told his friend and fellow Founding Father, John Adams, "I cannot live without books."

To many historians, Jefferson's greatest achievement was orchestrating the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, which doubled the size of the US, giving the young country 529 million acres of fertile land, at a price of ...\$15 million. He sent Meriwether Lewis and William Clark on their expedition to explore this newly acquired valuable territory.

The list of accomplishments by Thomas Jefferson seems endless, but I want to leave you with a particularly touching part of his life: his long and endearing friendship with his fellow Founding Father, John Adams. They met at the Second Continental Congress in 1775, and remained lifelong friends, except for 10 years of separation after Jefferson defeated Adams in the bitter presidential election of 1801.

Here are a few excerpts from their correspondence at the end of their lives, as they exchanged special memories of their early days as Founding Fathers.

Jan. 1812: Jefferson (age 69) to Adams (age 77): "A letter from you calls up recollections very dear to my mind. It carries me back to the times when, beset with difficulties and dangers, we were fellow laborers in the same cause, struggling for what is most valuable to man, his right of self-government."

Continuing on, Jefferson wrote to Adams: "Sometimes indeed I look back to former occurrences, in remembrance of our old friends and fellow laborers, who have fallen before us. Of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, I see now living not more than half a dozen on your side of the Potomac [River] and, on this side, myself alone. I [enjoy] remarkable health ... I am on horseback three or four hours of every day. I walk little, however, a single mile being too much for me. I live in the midst of my grandchildren, one of whom has lately promoted me to great-grandfather."

Feb. 1812: Adams back to Jefferson: "I walk every fair day, sometimes 3 or 4 miles. [I] ride now and then but very rarely more than ten or fifteen miles ... I [am older than you] by at least ten years, but you are advanced to the rank of great-grandfather before me."



A particularly poignant sample of their correspondence is from 1818. Jefferson wrote to Adams after the death of Abigail, John's beloved wife: "I know well and feel what you have lost, what you have suffered, are suffering, and have yet to endure. The same trials have taught me that, for ills [which are] immeasurable, time and silence are the only medicines."

Jefferson continued, "I will not therefore, by useless condolences, open afresh...your grief...nor will I say a word more, where words are vain. [However], it is of some comfort to us both that [soon] ... our sorrows and [our] suffering bodies, [will] ascend in essence to an ecstatic meeting with the friends we have loved and lost, and whom we shall still love, and never lose again. God bless you and support you under your heavy affliction. Signed, Thomas Jefferson."

I hope you enjoyed hearing a bit about this marvelous man. Thank you for listening, and God bless America.

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Karen Blanco  
Americanism  
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Benjamin Franklin

In 1787, at 81 years old, Benjamin Franklin represented Pennsylvania at the Constitutional Convention. He was the oldest delegate and, although he did not take an active part, his calm and wise demeanor helped to keep the convention on track. Three years later, Franklin passed away, and some 20 thousand people honored him at his funeral.

Franklin lived from 1706-1790. He is the only Founding Father to have signed all four of the key documents in American history:

1. The Declaration of Independence
2. The Treaty of Alliance with France (1778), which formalized France's financial and military support for America's revolutionary new government
3. The Treaty of Peace with Great Britain (1783), signed by US and British representatives to end the Revolutionary War
4. The US Constitution

Franklin was a respected and admired negotiator and statesman.

Franklin was born in Boston, Mass., to Josiah Franklin and his second wife Abiah. Benjamin was one of 10 children born to Abiah. Benjamin had only two years of formal schooling so, as he grew up, he schooled himself by reading every book he could find, studying algebra, geometry, navigation, grammar, logic, and natural and physical sciences. He partially mastered French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Latin. His efforts made him one of the best educated persons of his time.

Having worked in his father's soap and candle making shop at age 10, cutting wicks and melting tallow, at age 12, Franklin became an apprentice printer at his older brother's printing business and, as an adult, he finally started a printing business of his own. Franklin ended up printing The Pennsylvania Gazette for 37 years.

I am sure we can all remember the famous sayings Franklin published in both his newspaper, and in Poor Richard's Almanac, sayings which emphasized industry, frugality, and thrift, such as:

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” – “Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.” – “God helps [those who] help themselves.” – “A small leak can sink a great ship.” --- and so on.

In 1730, at age 24, Franklin married Deborah Read, the daughter of his first landlady. A devoted couple, they raised three children, two boys and one girl. She was afraid to travel on the sea to be with him on his trips to Europe, so she kept their home fires burning. She died in 1774 and, at his death 16 years later, he was buried beside her in Christ Church cemetery in Philadelphia.

As a creative and enthusiastic scientist and inventor, Franklin studied the movement of the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic Ocean, charting its course, recording its depth, speed, and temperature. He invented a better heating stove by arranging its flues more efficiently, thereby keeping a large room warmer while using less fuel. He invented the lightning rod after doing his life-threatening experiments with electricity -- remember how he flew his homemade kite in a thunderstorm and almost electrocuted himself? His lightning rod invention subsequently saved countless lives and buildings.

Franklin is credited with the invention of bifocal glasses. He used two separate pairs of glasses, one for distance and one for up close, which grew cumbersome for him to manage. Franklin wrote to a friend, “Finding this [need to change glasses] troublesome, I had the glasses cut, and half of each kind [put together] in the same circle.” With his new invention, when he attended diplomatic dinners in Europe, for instance, he was first able to clearly see his food on the plate, and then to look up smoothly, and see who was speaking across the table. He told his friend that, by being able to see the facial expressions of his dinner companions clearly, “I understand French better by the help of my spectacles.” He was simply delighted with his invention.

Finally, Benjamin Franklin was a devoted American patriot, wholeheartedly dedicated to building a successful United States, and deeply committed to our cause for freedom.

At one particular point in the Revolutionary War, the British offered the American patriots the chance to surrender without punishment, and to be placed once again under British rule as colonies subject to the King. Writing to Lord Richard Howe, a British commander whom he knew well, Franklin's fiery and passionate words speak for themselves, promising that America would never capitulate:

"It is impossible [that] we should think of submission to a government that has, with the most wanton barbarity and cruelty, burnt our defenseless towns in the midst of winter ... and is even now bringing foreign mercenaries to deluge our settlements with blood. These atrocious injuries have extinguished every remaining spark of affection for that parent country we once held so dear."

As we prepare to celebrate our country's 250<sup>th</sup> birthday next year, let's be proud of our Founding Fathers such as Benjamin Franklin, for giving us our uniquely special country.

Let's always hold our heads up high as patriotic Americans, and continue to work hard daily to preserve this wonderful gift they left for us.

Thank you for listening, and God bless America.

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Americanism

Karen Blanco

September 5, 2025

Donald Trump and Andrew Jackson

I recently read that President Trump is an admirer of our seventh president, Andrew Jackson. One of the first things Trump did, as his second term began, was to re-install a large Andrew Jackson portrait in the Oval Office, which had been removed by the Biden administration.

At the beginning of his first term as president, in a speech given at The Hermitage, the historical Jackson family home in Tennessee, President Trump said, "From poverty and obscurity, Jackson rose to glory and greatness. He had courage, grit, and patriotic heart... and he was one of our great presidents."

To watch a video of that speech, take home the slip of paper on your table which gives the directions on how to find it on YouTube. It runs about 12 minutes, and it is well worth watching.

President Trump relates to Andrew Jackson for the many ways Jackson fought for change for the everyday American. As Trump says in the video, "During the Revolution, Jackson first confronted and defied an arrogant elite ... He rejected authority that looked down on the common people." After this statement, Trump laughs and says, "Oh, I know the feeling, Andrew."

In a nutshell, Andrew Jackson was born in 1767 and served as our seventh president from 1829-1837. He grew up on the frontier in a log cabin, the third son of a poor farm couple from Ireland. His father died a few days before Andrew was born, and his mother later died from smallpox, leaving him an orphan at age 14. Jackson said later, "I felt utterly alone."

Young Andrew was known for having a bad temper, which led to many fights which he never seemed to lose. He went to boarding school at age 11, where he studied reading, writing, grammar, and geography – but he mostly loved sports.

In 1776, at age 9, a precocious Jackson read the newly adopted Declaration of Independence aloud to his neighbors. At age 13, he joined S. Carolina's mounted militia with his older brother, Robert. The British captured the two brothers, and marched them 40 miles to a military prison. A British commander ordered young Andrew to scrub his boots and Jackson refused, saying he had rights as a POW. The officer slashed Andrew's hand with his sword and cut his head. Jackson was a tough Revolutionary soldier.

As an adult, he became a successful lawyer and landowner, with the nickname of "Old Hickory," because he was as tough and strong as the bark of a hickory tree. As told by an old timer resident of his town, Jackson was known as "the most roaring, rollicking, game-cocking, horse-racing, card-playing, mischievous fellow that ever lived in Salisbury, North Carolina."

Jackson led a busy and controversial life. He was married to Rachel Jackson and, although they had no biological children of their own, they helped to raise some of the children of Rachel's siblings. He was a founder of the Democratic Party of that time, and won the Presidency in 1828, having gained military fame as a General in the War of 1812. Many of Jackson's most famous quotes ring true for our political scene today. President Trump agrees with many of Jackson's governing stances, and has said so.

Here are a few Jacksonian quotes – see if you agree that they sound like they could be said by Trump himself these days.

From Jackson's first inaugural address: "The Federal Constitution must be obeyed, states' rights preserved, our national debt must be paid, direct taxes and loans avoided, and the Federal Union preserved. These are the objects I have in view and, regardless of all consequences, will carry into effect."

Another Jackson quote: "The people expect reform. They shall not be disappointed; but it must be judiciously done, and upon principle."



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Americanism Talk

September 5, 2025

From Jackson's second inaugural address: "Without union, our independence and liberty would never have been achieved. Without union, they never can be maintained."

In his speech at The Hermitage, Trump said, "Jackson reclaimed the peoples' government from an emerging aristocracy. They had turned the government into an engine for the support of the few, at the expense of the many."

Trump continues, "Andrew Jackson was the peoples' president. To clean out bureaucracy, Jackson removed 10% of the federal workforce. [He ran] a campaign to sweep out government corruption. He imposed tariffs on foreign countries to protect American workers."

Doesn't that sound like what Trump and his administration are trying to do today?

One last Jackson quote which sums up his dedication to the everyday American: "In the planter, the farmer, the mechanic, and the laborer, we will find the muscle and bone of our country."

In the Oval Office, Trump is proud to sit between portraits of Andrew Jackson and Thomas Jefferson, one portrait on each side wall next to his desk. Outside of Trump's office window grows a healthy magnolia tree, planted many years ago from a small sprout taken from the grounds of Jackson's home.

Trump concludes, "Andrew Jackson, we thank you for your service. We honor you and your memory. We build on your legacy. And we thank God for the United States of America."

Thank you for listening, and be sure to take home the little paper with the YouTube address if you wish to watch Trump's speech. God bless America.

Americanism  
October 3, 2025

This past year, many people, especially on the political Left, have loudly criticized President Trump for his numerous, bold Executive Orders. Many have labeled him “tyrant” or “dictator” for simply exercising one of his presidential rights and duties.

Hearing their endless complaints led me to do a little research into the Executive Branch, one of our wonderfully balanced three prongs of government, as well as Executive Orders themselves.

As head of the Executive Branch, President Trump’s four main duties are:

1. To enforce federal laws, treaties, and federal court rulings
2. To develop federal policies
3. To prepare the national budget
4. To appoint federal officials

The President holds emergency powers, used to prevent or to end a national emergency. He also holds the power to make Executive Orders, which are defined by World Book Encyclopedia as “directions, proclamations, or other statements that have the force of laws. These orders require no action by Congress (764).”

Looking back to our country’s founders for a moment, they described the presidency in rather general terms. They felt certain that George Washington would be our first president and, as a greatly respected wartime leader, they expected him to shape the responsibilities of the office for future presidents.

Washington pursued a delicate balance between making the presidency powerful enough to function equally and effectively within the national government, but also to avoid any image of monarchy or dictatorship.

Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and Abraham Lincoln each made decisions in his presidency which seemed to show little regard for Congress and its power. However, they did garner popular support by their actions.

In 1794, President Washington used federal troops to end the Whiskey Rebellion, a tax protest in Pennsylvania. By this action, he helped to establish the federal government's authority to enforce federal laws in the individual states. (Sort of sounds like President Trump now with his sending federal ICE agents into states, doesn't it?).

In 1803, President Jefferson approved a treaty to buy territory in Louisiana from France, which doubled the size of our country. There was no specific power in our Constitution for him to purchase new land. He said that the purchase was constitutional under his presidential treaty making power.

In 1832, under President Jackson, S. Carolina declared federal tariff laws unconstitutional, and refused to collect tariffs at its ports. Jackson declared that no state could cancel a federal law, and forced the state to end its rebellion.

In 1861, our Civil War began when Southern forces attacked Fort Sumter. In response, President Lincoln ordered a military draft to be formed, blockaded Southern ports, and spent funds without Congressional approval. He knew that he had used powers reserved for Congress, but believed it was necessary to save the Union.

The American Presidency Project out of UC Santa Barbara has an interesting table online of all the executive orders given by our presidents. So far, Trump has given a little over 200 orders in his second term.

On the White House website, [whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov), there is a section about Trump's Executive Orders, where one can read each actual and complete order, along with interesting fact sheets explaining the reasons for the order, and the anticipated outcome. It is fascinating reading, and I highly recommend it.

I will end with some poignant and fun quotes from the Founding Fathers and Mr. Trump about the office of the Presidency. In these tense times, it helps to remember their patriotism and love of our country.

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Americanism

October 3, 2025

In his final speech to Congress in 1796, President Washington said, “I repeat my fervent supplications to the Supreme Ruler of the universe... that the government which [the people] have instituted for the protection of their liberties, may be perpetual.”

In 1796, Jefferson wrote, “I have no ambition to govern men. It is a painful and thankless office.” Later, in 1810, Jefferson wrote, “In times of peace, the people look most to their representatives; but in war, to the executive [alone].” He also labeled the presidency “a splendid misery.”

In 1850, President Lincoln said, “The Presidency, even to the most experienced politicians, is no bed of roses.” And in 1861, Lincoln said to Congress, “The struggle of today is not altogether for today – it is for a vast future, also.”

Finally, with grace and dignity, President Trump spoke to the nation as he left office after his first term. He said, “... America is the greatest nation in all of history. We are, and must always be, a land of hope, of light, and of glory to all the world. This is the precious inheritance that we must safeguard at every single turn.”

He continued, “As long as the American people hold in their hearts deep and devoted love of country, then there is nothing that this nation cannot achieve... Our future will be brighter than ever before... The best is yet to come.”

Let’s keep fighting to preserve our wonderful country. Thank you for listening, and God bless America.

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