

# A PRESIDENT'S DAY



**John F. Kennedy Presidential Library & Museum**

## A President's Day

The Presidency has changed a great deal since George Washington's time. For one thing, the new capital city of the United States wasn't established until after Washington left office. (Of course it would be named after him.) And he never got to live and work in the White House. That wouldn't be finished until John Adams took over.

What hasn't changed though is the difficulty of the job. The duties "are essentially endless," according to Dwight D. Eisenhower (known affectionately as "Ike"), who served two terms as Chief Executive. What *are* some of those duties—and how do modern Presidents spend their time?

One of the best ways to find out would be to observe a President during the course of a day's work. So why don't we do just that!

Let's imagine being at the White House on the last Tuesday of September in the year 1962...



John F. Kennedy now occupies the Oval Office. His secretary, Mrs. Lincoln (no relation to Abe), has typed out a list of his engagements. It shows names of people with whom he'll be meeting today.



The President's Engagements  
Tuesday, September 25

8:00 a.m.	Leadership Institute
9:00 a.m.	Debate Club and a group of University men
10:00 a.m.	H. R. Rogers Donor Trust Constituting Secretary of State for Secretary of War Donor
10:30 a.m.	Madeline Kahn Barbara East 1000 Vermont
11:00 a.m.	The Right Reverend Robert Mennen Dennis, Secretary of Education
11:30 a.m.	Presidential Inauguration Presidential Inauguration and the National Guard of the U. S.
11:50 a.m.	Meeting to of W. Wilson White as Secretary of Labor
12:00 noon	Meet with group of members of the United Negro College Fund
12:30 p.m.	Meet the members of the American Furniture Makers Company Dunham
1:00 p.m.	1000 Vermont, CMA 1000 Vermont, 1000 Vermont 1000 Vermont
2:00 p.m.	Annual Meeting of "The President" of National Theatre

Let's see what roles and duties President Kennedy is carrying out as he keeps these various appointments.

The President is considered to be the leader of his political party. (George Washington didn't have this role because parties weren't formed yet.) President Kennedy belonged to the Democratic Party. As the **Party Leader**, he held a weekly breakfast meeting with the Vice President and other Democrats who had important positions in the U.S. Congress. That's how he started the day on Sept. 25, 1962.

After breakfast JFK went outside with his guests to address the Burros Club, whose members worked for Democrats serving in the Congress.

One subject on all their minds was the upcoming Congressional election. Naturally, they wanted to see their fellow Democrats win as many seats as possible. The President planned to travel around the country to campaign on behalf of his party's candidates.



9:30 – 9:37 a.m.  
In the Rose Garden with members of the Burros Club

“The record that this Congress has made...is one of the most impressive since World War II...It is a record on which the Democratic members of the House and of the Senate can run in November.”



Speaker of the House John W. McCormack is at the far right standing next to Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson.

✧ “Burro” is another name for donkey. Why does the donkey stand for the Democratic Party and the elephant for the Republican Party? (Do some research to find out.)

As **Head of State**, the President is in charge of international relations and often meets with foreign heads of state, ambassadors and government officials. On this particular morning, President Kennedy met in the Oval Office with leaders from two other countries.



10:00 – 10:52 a.m.  
Nguyen Dinh Thuan, government official from Vietnam



11:00 – 11:58 a.m.  
Robert Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia



12:41 – 12:47 p.m.  
Ambassador Antonio Carillo Flores and members of the Ballet Folklórico of Mexico

He later went out to greet a group of folk dancers and singers from Mexico who were brought to the White House by their country's ambassador. In his remarks, the President recalled how he and Mrs. Kennedy had enjoyed seeing the group perform during a recent state visit to Mexico.

“We want to express, Mr. Ambassador, our very warm welcome to you. You were very generous to all of us on our visit to Mexico City and made us feel that we were not visiting a foreign country but, instead, visiting the home of friends, and we were particularly impressed by your dancing.... Muchas gracias. Viva Mexico!”

✧ JFK believed that cultural exchanges were a good way to improve relations between countries. Can you think of any other ways to do this?

The President is also **Head of the Executive Branch** of the U.S. government. The Executive Branch carries out laws passed by Congress (the Legislative Branch) and performs other essential services. It includes a number of large departments—such as Defense, Treasury and Justice. The President is responsible for appointing the people in charge of each department.



12:15 – 12:25 a.m.  
Willard Wirtz takes the oath of office in the Cabinet Room.

President Kennedy had recently chosen Willard Wirtz to head the Department of Labor. This was the day that Mr. Wirtz was to be sworn in and JFK attended the ceremony.

“I am delighted to have this opportunity...to witness the swearing in of our new Secretary of Labor, who succeeds a most distinguished Secretary who set an extremely high standard for Mr. Wirtz, a standard which we know he will meet.”

The group of people who head the main executive departments are known as “the Cabinet.” They serve as advisors to the President. The Cabinet member JFK trusted most was the Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy—who was his younger brother.

Usually, a President consults with the Attorney General about matters concerning the Justice Department. But JFK had such complete confidence in his brother (whom he called “Bobby”) that he talked with him regularly about many other matters as well.

That afternoon Robert Kennedy came to the White House for a meeting about a very serious situation involving Russian missiles in Cuba. Afterwards, the two brothers talked alone for nearly 20 minutes.



With Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy

✧ What qualities do you think a President should look for in choosing Cabinet members?

Just before he saw the Prime Minister of Australia, President Kennedy took time out from his official duties to greet some special visitors. Their names were Barney Ross and Ben Kevu. Barney served in the Navy with JFK during World War II. Ben was a native of the Solomon Islands. He helped to save Kennedy, Ross and other survivors of the PT-109, who had been shipwrecked after their boat was sunk by a Japanese destroyer. This was the first time that John F. Kennedy had seen his rescuer since 1943.



10:54 – 11:02 a.m.  
Barney Ross and Ben Kevu



Ensign Ross and Lieutenant  
Kennedy In 1943

The former navy lieutenant was now the **Commander-in-Chief**, and he had to make decisions about sending young men and women in the armed forces to dangerous places around the world. This is one of the toughest parts of any President's job.

At noon, officers of the Army and Air National Guard came to give their Commander-in-Chief a painting showing the Battle of Bunker Hill. In accepting it, JFK spoke of the important part played by volunteers serving in the Guard.

“I want to express my great appreciation to the Guard for this very generous gift to the White House. I think this is a first class painting....And the battle scene is symbolic, I think, of the civilian preparedness to serve.”



12:00 – 12:10 p.m.  
Presentation of a painting, “The Whites of Their Eyes”

✧ Do you believe it's necessary for a President to have been in the military to be a good Commander-in-Chief? Why or why not?

To really make a difference, a President needs to provide **moral leadership** for the country. That can mean speaking out against injustice. It can mean encouraging citizens to be steadfast and hopeful in times of crisis, or challenging them to serve others who are in need. In so doing, a President helps to bring out the best in the American people.

Presidents are also asked to speak on behalf of various worthy causes. President Kennedy would set aside time on this busy day for two charitable efforts that were close to his heart.

First, he met with directors of the United Negro College Fund to help give a boost to the fund-raising campaign they were about to launch. JFK realized that others would be more likely to contribute knowing that the President was a strong supporter. (He had also donated the Pulitzer Prize money he received for his book, *Profiles in Courage*, to the UNCF.)



12:26 – 12:40 p.m.  
Directors of the United Negro College Fund



11:30 p.m.  
Leaving the National Theater with Mrs. Kennedy

Later that evening, the President made an appearance at a special benefit performance of a new musical about life in the White House. The First Lady was there too, along with other members of the Kennedy family. The purpose of the benefit was to raise money for two of the Kennedys' favorite charities, helping children and adults with disabilities.

✧ If you were President, what injustices in our country would you want to fight against? What good causes would you most want to support?

Even though it was nearly midnight, the Kennedys went to another event after leaving the theater. They were to be the guests of honor at a late supper party for about 600 people at the British Embassy. The party was hosted by Ambassador David Ormsby-Gore, an old friend. President and Mrs. Kennedy enjoyed themselves so much that they didn't return to the White House until 2:45 a.m. Another full day of work would begin just a few short hours later in the Oval Office.



- ✧ There are many additional duties and activities that go with being the Chief Executive. Can you name a few others?

And, of course, the Presidency has continued to change since John F. Kennedy was in office. Do you suppose if George Washington were around today that he would still be interested in the job? Would **you**?

It's okay, take your time to think about it. You can let us know in about 30 or 40 years...