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 [00:00:00]

**Adia Samba-Quee:** [00:00:25] Civics 101 is supported in part by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

**Archival:** [00:00:29] Are you prepared to take the constitutional question, your left hand on the Bible and raise your right hand and repeat after me?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:38] The parameters are pretty simple on a day proscribed by the Constitution, the president elect will say 35 words also prescribed by the Constitution. And then in a moment of Democratic alchemy, that president elect is transformed into the president of the United States.

**Archival:** [00:00:53] Mr. President.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:57] So we're talking about the inauguration.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:59] That we are and being Americans, we, of course, took these simple outlines provided by the law of the land and turned this moment into a gigantic to-do. This is Civics 101. I'm Hannah McCarthy.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:01:11] I'm Nick Capodice.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:11] And today we're taking that stroll down Pennsylvania Avenue to learn what happens during the presidential inauguration. I asked journalist and media consultant Brenna Williams to break it down for us.

**Brenna Williams:** [00:01:22] The president elect spends the night at Blair House, which is essentially America's guest house across the street from the White House right off of Lafayette Park.

[00:01:32] They wake up there and take a little jaunt or a drive over to St. John's Church.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:40] St. John's is also called the Church of the Presidents. My favorite fact about it is that Abraham Lincoln used to inconspicuously sneak into a back pew for evening prayer during the Civil War.

**Brenna Williams:** [00:01:51] After that, maybe you'll get a little meet and greet at the White House with the current president and the president elect. We saw that last time with the Obamas welcoming the tromps. And then after that, it is off to the races. We are off to the Capitol, and that is where the big show happens.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:11] Now, of course, we're doing things differently in the age of the pandemic, but typically there are many thousands of people in attendance at the inauguration. I've always wondered, who are these people who gets to go?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:02:22] Not just anybody can show up to the inauguration. In a typical year, 200000 tickets are given to members of Congress to give to their constituents.

**Brenna Williams:** [00:02:31] You get the inauguration, you'll have, you know, national anthem, a lot of patriotic things. You have members of Congress there. You have usually big crowds. Disputable how big the crowds might be sometimes.

[00:02:45] And you will get the oath of office around noon, the big speech afterwards, and then you will get a nice little luncheon inside the Capitol with the Joint Inaugural Committee they host it.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:02] What I found surprising is that even though most presidents get sworn in by the chief justice of the Supreme Court with their hand on a Bible, you don't have to use a Bible and it doesn't have to be. The chief justice John Quincy Adams used a book of law, Teddy Roosevelt, and use anything. And Calvin Coolidge was sworn in by his dad, who was a notary public.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:22] The only thing the Constitution mandates is the oath of office and the date. It used to be March 4th, but the 20th Amendment changed it to January 20th anyway. Oath, speech, John Kennedy started the tradition of having a poet recite a little something we will withhold.

**Robert Frost:** [00:03:40] They made us wait until we found out that this was ourselves we were withholding from our land of living.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:49] And then comes the parade.

**Brenna Williams:** [00:03:51] Then the now president will parade down Pennsylvania Avenue just about a mile, a little more than a mile between the Capitol and the White House on Pennsylvania Avenue.

[00:04:04] Maybe they'll get out and do a little wave.

[00:04:06] They go to the White House and there's a big grandstand kind of built out in front of the White House where the president and his guests will watch the inaugural parade, which includes, you know, members of the military and maybe some high school marching bands, various representatives of ideally all 50 states and the territories.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:04:31] Jimmy Carter apparently started this tradition. He spontaneously got out of his limo and started walking and waving.

**Brenna Williams:** [00:04:37] And then they go inside their new house, get all gussied up and they go to between two and 15 inaugural balls.

[00:04:45] I mean, it's a lot it's a it's a long, long day. And that is how they end the night. And then they go home again to their new residence at sixteen hundred Pennsylvania Avenue and get to get to lead in the free world.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:05:03] So the parade, the balls, the crowds, all that is going to be next this year due to the pandemic, but it is usually an enormous event, especially compared to all the other procedural stuff government does, which usually ends up unwatched on C-SPAN.

[00:05:18] So why put on this huge, exhausting show?

**Brenna Williams:** [00:05:22] The fact that this transfer of power from one administration to the other, maybe from one party to the other, is one of the only super symbolic things that we have baked into this young country's traditions. Right. That and I think, you know, the State of the Union address are two things that I think of as being very measured, very traditional, very straight forward and seeing usually the former president, former presidents sitting there watching their successor take the oath is a symbol to whoever voted for them when they were in office.

[00:06:13] This is our new leader. We're moving forward peacefully. We're moving forward together.

[00:06:18] We're moving forward in this way that that holds reverence for everything that America stands for.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:06:24] That does it for the presidential inauguration here on Civics 101. If you have questions about the way this democracy works, don't hesitate. Just ask. Click the button at the top of our home page at Civics101podcast.org.

[00:06:51] From PRX.