

Jefferson's 1801 Inaugural Address is Perfect for 2017

The 2016 election was one of the most divisive and most vitriolic in recent memory. Hangover from this division will likely exhibit itself throughout the inauguration festivities over the next few days.

History, however, often repeats itself, and on this inauguration day, we would be wise to remember that America has seen many vitriolic elections before, even during the dawn of the republic.

America's fourth presidential election, for example, a contest between incumbent John Adams and his vice president Thomas Jefferson, was a famously bitter feud.

Yet when Jefferson emerged the winner, he quickly sought to heal the divisions and solidify the rights of both those on the winning and losing sides, as the following segment of his [inaugural address](#) demonstrates:

"During the contest of opinion through which we have passed the animation of discussions and of exertions has sometimes worn an aspect which might impose on strangers unused to think freely and to speak and to write what they think; but this being now decided by the voice of the nation, announced according to the rules of the Constitution, all will, of course, arrange themselves under the will of the law, and unite in common efforts for the common good. All, too, will bear in mind this sacred principle, that though the will of the majority is in all cases to prevail, that will to be rightful must be reasonable; that the minority possess their equal rights, which equal law must protect, and to violate would be oppression. Let us, then, fellow-citizens, unite with one heart and one mind. Let us restore to social

intercourse that harmony and affection without which liberty and even life itself are but dreary things. And let us reflect that, having banished from our land that religious intolerance under which mankind so long bled and suffered, we have yet gained little if we countenance a political intolerance as despotic, as wicked, and capable of as bitter and bloody persecutions. ... But every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists. If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it."

America is headed into a time of transition in the days and weeks ahead. Would President Trump, Democrats, Republicans, and Independents of all stripes do well to put the recent past behind and take Jefferson's sage advice to heart?

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