

Pomp and Pageantry

From:
The Wall Street Journal
January 22, 1985

We mean the Super Bowl, of course. It's proof of our healthy democracy that the nation's Chief Executive, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces and leader of the Free World postponed the festivities for his swearing in because it conflicted with a football game. And then that he cancelled his Inaugural Parade so the spectators and marchers wouldn't suffer frostbite. What other national leader would do such things?

A grump in some dark corner might bemoan the frivolity of the American public, to be placing affairs of state behind the hurling of a leather spheroid. But that misses the good sense of the American public spirit. No May Day parades for us. We save our patriotic spectacles for the half time shows, where they belong. The Super Bowl more than honored the constitutional sanctity of January 20 with half time marchers forming the American flag, bands blaring the ABC Olympics anthem, and U.S. space achievements commemorated by a model space shuttle and the ever-present rocket man, who seems to have become obligatory for the most important sports events.

The president received his due. He was allowed to do a televised coin toss from the Oval Office. After the game, he was congratulated by 49ers coach Bill Walsh on his own festivities.

It's a shame about the parade and the outdoor ceremony, of course. Having naturally failed to anticipate the deep freeze, Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan expended several hundred words on the Washington Post op-ed page yesterday congratulating President Reagan for his 1980 decision to move the inauguration to the Capitol's West Front, with its magnificent

view down the renovated Pennsylvania Avenue. Maybe next time. But at least Mr. Reagan was able to demonstrate, by calling off an inaugural parade, that the American president still possesses awesome powers. He may also have heeded a bit of history. The previous oldest person to be inaugurated as president, William Henry Harrison, died a month later of pneumonia apparently contracted during the ceremony.

For all the pomp of the 50 inaugurations, however, our favorite image remains that of Calvin Coolidge wishing his successor well and then carrying his own bags down to Union Station to go home. It's good for the republic when presidents have the good sense to play down their own importance. As for the young millionaires who play professional football, dealing with all that glory may be even harder. But for them it doesn't matter so much.

Village Advertiser Commentary

Would it not be appropriate for future Presidential inaugurations to be marked by less pomp than was planned for Reagan's second term? Would it not seem appropriate to use 12 million dollars for more practical purposes than pageantry?