George Washington's Farewell Address

George Washington's Farewell Address is a letter written by the first American President, before his retirement to his home Mount Vernon. Originally published in Daved Claypole's American Daily Advertiser on September 19, 1796, under the title "The Address of General Washington To The People of The United States on his declining of the Presidency of the United States," the letter was almost immediately reprinted in newspapers across the country and later in a pamphlet form. The work was later named a "Farewell Address," as it was Washington's valedictory after 20 years of service to the new nation. It is a classic statement of republicanism, warning Americans of the political dangers they can and must avoid if they are to remain true to their values.

The first draft was originally prepared in 1792 with the assistance of James Madison, as Washington prepared to retire following a single term in office. However, he set aside the letter and ran for a second term after the rancor between his Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, and his Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson, convinced him that the growing divisions between the newly formed Federalist and Republican parties, along with the current state of foreign affairs, would rip the country apart in the absence of his leadership.

Four years later, as his second term came to a close, Washington revisited the letter and, with the help of Alexander Hamilton, prepared a revision of the original draft to announce his intention to decline a third term in office. He also reflects on the emerging issues of the American political landscape in 1796, expresses his support for the government eight years after the adoption of the Constitution, defends his
The letter was written by Washington after years of exhaustion due to his advanced age, years of service to his country, the duties of the presidency, and increased attacks by his political opponents. It was published almost two months before the Electoral College cast their votes in the 1796 presidential election.

**SUMMARY**

At the same time, the thought of the United States without George Washington as its president caused concern among many Americans. Jefferson, who disagreed with many of the president’s policies and would later lead the Democratic-Republicans in opposition to many Federalist policies, joined his political rival Hamilton, the leader of the Federalists. He convinced the president to delay his retirement and serve a second term, fearing that without his leadership the nation would be torn apart. Washington most likely referred to this when he told the American people that he had wanted to retire before the last election, but was convinced by people “entitled to my confidence” that it was his duty to serve a second term. [6]

Understanding these concerns, Washington sought to convince the American people that his service was no longer necessary by, once again, as he had in his first inaugural address, telling them that he truly believed he was never qualified to be president and, if he accomplished anything during his presidency, it was as a result of their support and efforts to help the country survive and prosper. Despite his confidence that the country would survive without his leadership, Washington used the majority of the letter to offer advice as a “parting friend” on what he believed were the greatest threats to the destruction of the nation. [6]

**UNITY AND SECTIONALISM**

Washington begins his warnings to the American people by trying to convince them that their independence, peace at home and abroad, safety, prosperity, and liberty are all dependent upon the unity between the states. As a result, he warns them that the union of states, created by the Constitution, will come under the most frequent and focused attacks by foreign and domestic enemies of the country. Washington warns the American people to be suspicious and look down upon anyone who seeks to abandon the Union, to secede a portion of the country from the rest, or seeks to weaken the bonds that hold the constitutional union together. To promote the strength of the Union, he urges the people to place their identity as Americans above their identities as members of a state, city, or region, and focus their efforts and affection on the country above all other local interests. Washington further asks the people to look beyond any slight differences between them in religion, manners, habits, and political principles, and place Americans above their identities as members of a state, city, or region, and focus their efforts and affection on the country above all other local interests.

Washington continues to express his support of the Union by giving some examples of how he believes the country, its regions, and its people are already benefiting from the unity they currently share. He then looks to the future by sharing his belief that the combined effort, and resources of its people will protect the country from foreign attack, and allow them to avoid wars between neighboring nations that often happen due to rivalries, and competing relations with foreign nations. He argues that the security provided by the Union will also allow the United States to avoid the creation of an overgrown military establishment, which he sees as one of the greatest threats to liberty, especially the republican liberty that the United States has created.

Washington goes on to warn the American people to question the ulterior motives of any person or group of people who argue that the land within the
and public happiness, but also in promoting the political prosperity of the nation. He argues that religious principles promote the protection of property, lead to the fall of free governments. This statement takes on added significance from a man who commanded the armies of British colonists who waged an armed rebellion against the British Government, during the American Revolution, and helped build a plan for a new government against the wishes of the acting Articles of Confederation government during the Philadelphia Convention of 1787. The French Revolution, which had fallen into a Reign of Terror during

THE CONSTITUTION AND POLITICAL FACTIONS

Washington goes on to state his support for the new constitutional government, calling it an improvement upon the nation's original attempt in the Articles of Confederation, and reminds the people that although it is the right of the people to alter the government to meet their needs, it should only be done through constitutional amendments. He reinforces this belief by arguing that violent takeovers of the government should be avoided at all costs and that it is in fact the duty of every member of the republic to follow the constitution, and submit to the laws of the constitutional government until it is constitutionally amended by the majority of the American people.

Washington warns the people that political factions who seek to obstruct the execution of the laws created by the government, or prevent the constitutional branches from enacting the powers provided them by the constitution may claim to be working in the interest of answering popular demands or solving pressing problems, but their true intentions are to take the power from the people and place it in the hands of unjust men. Despite Washington's call to only change the Constitution through amendments, he warns the American people that groups seeking to overthrow the government may seek to pass constitutional amendments to weaken the government to a point where it is unable to defend itself from political factions, enforce its laws, and protect the people's rights and property. As a result, he urges them to give the government time to realize its full potential, and only amend the constitution after thorough time and thought have proven that it is truly necessary instead of simply making changes based upon opinions and hypotheses of the moment.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Washington continues to advance his idea of the dangers of sectionalism and expands his warning to include the dangers of political parties to the government and country as a whole. His warnings took on added significance with the recent creation of the Democratic-Republican Party by Jefferson, to oppose Hamilton's Federalist Party, which had been created a year earlier in 1791, which in many ways promoted the interest of certain regions and groups of Americans over others. A more pressing concern for Washington, which he references in this portion of the address, was the Democratic-Republican efforts to align with France and the Federalist efforts to ally the nation with Great Britain in an ongoing conflict between the two European nations brought about by the French Revolution.

While Washington accepts the fact that it is natural for people to organize and operate within groups like political parties, he also argues that every government has recognized political parties as an enemy and has sought to repress them because of their tendency to seek more power than other groups and take revenge on political opponents. Moreover, Washington makes the case that "the alternate domination" of one party over another and coinciding efforts to exact revenge upon their opponents have led to horrible atrocities, and "is itself a frightful despotism. But this leads at length to a more formal and permanent despotism." From Washington's perspective and judgment, the tendency of political parties toward permanent despotism is because they eventually and "gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual."

Washington goes on and acknowledges the fact that parties are sometimes beneficial in promoting liberty in monarchies, but argues that political parties must be restrained in a popularly elected government because of their tendency to distract the government from their duties, create unfounded jealousies among groups and regions, raise false alarms amongst the people, promote riots and insurrection, and provide foreign nations and interests access to the government where they can impose their will upon the country.

CHECKS AND BALANCES AND SEPARATION OF POWERS

Washington continues his defense of the Constitution by stating his belief that the system of checks and balances and separation of powers within it are important means of preventing a single person or group from seizing control of the country, and advises the American people that if they believe it is necessary to modify the powers granted to the government through the Constitution it should be done through constitutional amendments instead of through force. This statement takes on added significance from a man who commanded the armies of British colonists who waged an armed rebellion against the British Government, during the American Revolution, and helped build a plan for a new government against the wishes of the acting Articles of Confederation government during the Philadelphia Convention of 1787. The French Revolution, which had fallen into a Reign of Terror during Washington's second term, may have helped shape Washington's opinion that while armed rebellions may sometimes result in good, they most often lead to the fall of free governments.

RELIGION, MORALITY, AND EDUCATION

One of the most referenced parts of Washington's letter was his strong support of the importance of religion and morality in not only promoting private and public happiness, but also in promoting the political prosperity of the nation. He argues that religious principles promote the protection of property,
Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens. The mere politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked: Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

Washington references religious principle as being the foundation of public morality. He also argues that the American government needs to ensure that "the diffusion of knowledge" throughout the United States is a primary goal, since the government has been created to enforce the opinion of the people and as a result the opinion of the people should be informed and knowledgeable.

Of all the animosities which have existed among mankind, those which are caused by difference of sentiments in religion appear to be the most inveterate and distressing, and ought most to be deprecated. I was in hopes that the enlightened and liberal policy, which has marked the present age, would at least have reconciled Christians of every denomination so far that we should never again see the religious disputes carried to such a pitch as to endanger the peace of society.

- Letter to Edward Newenham (20 October 1792)

CREDIT AND GOVERNMENT BORROWING

Washington provides strong support for a balanced federal budget, arguing that the nation's credit is an important source of strength and security. He urges the American people to preserve the national credit by avoiding war, avoiding unnecessary borrowing, and paying off any national debt accumulated in times of war as quickly as possible in times of peace so that future generations do not have to take on the financial burdens that others have taken on themselves. Despite his warnings to avoid taking on debt, Washington does state his belief that sometimes it is necessary to spend money to prevent dangers or wars that will in the end cost more if not properly prepared for. At these times, argues Washington, it is necessary, although unpleasant, for the people to cooperate by paying taxes created to cover these precautionary expenses.

Washington makes an extended allusion, possibly in reference to the Whiskey Rebellion in Pennsylvania which he led a national army to put down, on how important it is for the government to be careful in choosing the items that will be taxed, but he also reminds the American people that no matter how hard the government tries there will never be a tax which is not inconvenient, unpleasant, or seemingly an insult to those who must pay it.

FOREIGN RELATIONS AND FREE TRADE

Washington dedicates a large part of his farewell address to discussing foreign relations, and the dangers of permanent alliances between the United States and foreign nations; so-called 'foreign entanglements'.[14] This issue dominated national politics during the French Revolutionary Wars between France and Britain. Federalists favored Britain and the Jeffersonian Republicans favored France. They wanted the U.S. to honor the 1778 Treaty of Alliance, which established the France-American alliance, and aid France. Washington had avoided American involvement in the conflict by issuing the Proclamation of Neutrality, which in turn led to the Neutrality Act of 1794. He clearly tries to further explain his approach to foreign policy and alliances in this portion of the address.

Once again making reference to proper behavior based upon religious doctrine and morality, Washington advocates a policy of good faith and justice towards all nations, and urges the American people to avoid long-term friendly relations or rivalries with any nation. He argues these attachments and animosity toward nations will only cloud the government's judgment in its foreign policy. Washington argues that longstanding poor relations will only lead to unnecessary wars due to a tendency to blow minor offenses out of proportion when committed by nations viewed as enemies of the United States. He continues this argument by claiming that alliances are likely to draw the United States into wars which have no justification and no benefit to the country beyond simply defending the favored nation. Washington continues his warning on alliances by claiming that they often lead to poor relations with nations who feel that they are not being treated as well as America's allies, and threaten to influence the American government into making decisions based upon the will of their allies instead of the will of the American people.

Washington makes an extended reference to the dangers of foreign nations who will seek to influence the American people and government. He makes
a point to say that he believes both nations who may be considered friendly as well as nations considered enemies will try to influence the government to do their will and it will only be "real patriots" who ignore popular opinion and resist the influence of friendly nations to seek what is best for their own country. Washington had a recent experience with foreign interference, when in 1793 the French ambassador privateers to seize British ships. His mobilization of supporters to sway American opinion in favor of an alliance with France crossed the line and he was ordered to leave.

Washington goes on to urge the American people to take advantage of their isolated position in the world, and avoid attachments and entanglements in foreign affairs, especially those of Europe, which he argues have little or nothing to do with the interests of America. He argues that it makes no sense for the American people to wage war on European soil when their isolated position and unity will allow them to remain neutral and focus on their own affairs. As a result, Washington argues that the country should avoid permanent alliance with all foreign nations, although temporary alliances during times of extreme danger may be necessary, but does say that current treaties should be honored although not extended. (Despite his claim that current alliances should be honored, Washington had in fact through the Proclamation of Neutrality not honored the Treaty of Alliance, which promised aid in case the French were ever attacked by the British.)

Washington wraps up his foreign policy stance by advocating free trade with all nations arguing that trade links should be established naturally and the role of the government should be limited to insuring stable trade, defending the rights of American merchants, and any provisions necessary to insure that the government is able to insure the conventional rules of trade.

ADDRESS’S INTENTIONS

Washington uses this portion of the address to explain that while he does not expect the advice he has given in this letter to make any great impression upon the people, or to change the course of American politics, he does hope that the people will remember his devoted service to his country.

DEFENSE OF THE PROCLAMATION OF NEUTRALITY

Washington continues to defend his presidency by focusing on his reasoning behind the Proclamation of Neutrality he made during the French Revolutionary Wars, despite the standing Treaty of Alliance with France. Despite this alliance Washington argues that from what he, and his advisors, understood and continue to believe, the United States had a right to remain neutral in the conflict and furthermore that all nations, besides France and Britain of course, have agreed with his stance. Along with stating his belief that justice and humanity required him to remain neutral during the conflict, he also argues that the stance of neutrality was necessary to allow the new government a chance to mature and gain enough strength to control its own affairs.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Washington closes his letter to the American people by asking them to forgive any of his failures during his service to the country, assuring them that they were due to his own weaknesses and by no means intentional. The sentences are used to express the excitement he has about joining his fellow Americans as a private citizen in the free government they have created together during his 45 years of public service.

LEGACY

To this day, Washington's Farewell Address is considered to be one of the most important documents in American history and the foundation of the Federalist Party's political doctrine.

Despite his stated desire to retire from public service, Washington would later accept a commission from President John Adams, although Adams was largely forced into providing the commission by members of the Federalist Party, as the

Washington’s statements on the importance of religion and morality in American politics, as well as his warnings on the dangers of foreign alliances, although often stated and recognized arguments, were provided special consideration from the pen of an American hero and became common reference during political debates well into the nineteenth century.

ALLIANCES WITH FOREIGN NATIONS

Despite his refusal to recognize the obligations of the Treaty of Alliance with France, which the U.S. Congress later annulled in 1798, Washington’s hope that the United States would end permanent alliances with foreign nations would not be fully realized until 1800 with the signing of Convention of 1800 (Treaty of Mortefontaine). The treaty officially ended the 1778 Treaty of Alliance in exchange for ending the Quasi-War and establishing of most favored nation trade relations with Napoleonic France.

In 1823, Washington’s foreign policy goals would be further realized with the issuing of the Monroe Doctrine which promised non-interference in European affairs so long as the nations of Europe did not seek to re-colonize or interfere with the newly independent Latin American nations of Central and South America.

It would not be until the signing of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty, which formed NATO, that the United States would again enter into a permanent military alliance with any foreign nation.

READING IN CONGRESS
In January 1862, during the American Civil War, thousands of Philadelphia residents signed a petition requesting the Congress to commemorate the 130th anniversary of Washington's birth by reading his Farewell Address "in one or the other of the Houses of Congress."[5] First read in the United States House of Representatives in February 1862, the reading of Washington's address became a tradition in both houses by 1899.

In 1984, however, the House of Representatives abandoned the practice.[5] The Senate continues this tradition into modern times, observing Washington's Birthday by selecting a member of the Senate, alternating between political parties each year, to read the address aloud on the Senate floor.[5]

SEE ALSO
United States non-interventionism

FURTHER READING
Hostetler, Michael J. "Washington's farewell address: Distance as bane and blessing." Rhetoric & Public Affairs (2002) 5#3 pp: 393-407. online
Kaufman, Burton Ira, ed. (1969) Washington's Farewell Address: The View from the 20th Century(Quadrangle Books) essays by scholars
Washington, George (1796). Washington's final manuscript, images of his hand-written farewell address

EXTERNAL LINKS
George Washington
Military career

Revolutionary War

Military career | French and Indian War | Jumonville Glen |
Battle of Fort Necessity | Forbes Expedition |
Washington and the American Revolution | Commander-in-chief, Continental Army |
Boston campaign | Siege of Boston |
New York and New Jersey campaign | Delaware River crossing |
Battle of Trenton |
Philadelphia campaign | Valley Forge |
Battle of Saratoga | Yorktown campaign |
Siege of Yorktown |
Culper spy ring | Newburgh Conspiracy |
Newburgh letter |
Established, Badge of Military Merit | Purple Heart |
Aides-de-Camp | Commander-in-Chief's headquarters |
Morristown and Ford Mansion |
Horses: Nelson and Blueskin |

Other U.S. founding events

1769 Virginia Association | Continental Association |
1774 Fairfax Resolves | Court of Appeals in Cases of Capture |
1785 Mount Vernon Conference | Chairman, 1787 Constitutional Convention |
Presidency

United States presidential election, 1788–89

1792
First inauguration
inaugural bible

Second inauguration
Title of "Mr. President"
United States Cabinet
Secretary of State
Attorney General
Secretary of the Treasury
Secretary of War

Judiciary Act of 1789
Nonintercourse Act
Whiskey Rebellion
Militia Act of 1792

Coinage Act of 1792
United States Mint

Proclamation of Neutrality
Neutrality Act of 1794

Jay Treaty
Pinckney's Treaty
Slave Trade Act of 1794
Residence Act
Thanksgiving Proclamation

Farewell Address
State of the Union Address 1790

1791
1792
1793
1796
Cabinet
Federal judicial appointments

Views and public image

Presidential library
The Papers of George Washington
Religious views
Washington and slavery
Town Destroyer
Legacy
Life and homes

Early life |
Birthplace |
Ferry Farm boyhood home |
Mount Vernon |
Gristmill |
Woodlawn Plantation |
Samuel Osgood House, First Presidential Mansion |
Alexander Macomb House, Second Presidential Mansion |
President's House, Philadelphia |
Germantown White House |
Custis estate |
Potomac Company |
James River and Kanawha Canal |
Mountain Road Lottery |
Congressional Gold Medal |
Thanks of Congress |
President General, Society of the Cincinnati |
Washington College |
Washington and Lee University
Washington’s Farewell Address spoke to contemporary concerns that the Union was weak and vulnerable to attacks from internal and external enemies. But even after the uncertainty of the early national period had passed, his message of unity remained powerful. In the early nineteenth century, Federalists read the farewell address aloud as part of their yearly commemoration of Washington’s birthday. It is still recited annually in the United States Senate, a tradition dating back to the Civil War. The Farewell Address endures as a critical founding document for issues of Union, partisanship, and But these considerations, however powerfully they address themselves to your sensibility, are greatly outweighed by those which apply more immediately to your interest. Here every portion of our country finds the most commanding motives for carefully guarding and preserving the union of the whole. The North, in an unrestrained intercourse with the South, protected by the equal laws of a common government, finds in the productions of the latter great additional resources of maritime and commercial enterprise and precious materials of manufacturing industry. George Washington's Farewell address, delivered on September 19, 1796, remains a a towering statement of American political purpose. James Madison and Alexander Hamilton collaborated with Washington in penning his final address to the nation, which called for national unity above all else, and warned in particular about the divisive effects of political parties. It also urged American neutrality in international conflicts. 8. America’s Place in the Global Struggle a. New France b. The French and Indian War c. George Washington's Background and Experience d. The Treaty of Paris (1763) and Its Impact 9. The Events Leading to Independence a. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 b. The Stamp Act Controversy c. The Boston Patriots d. The Townshend Acts e. The Boston Massacre f.