

George Washington's Farewell Address (1796) – Group One

In 1792, George Washington nearly decided to retire from public life. He sat down with his friend, James Madison, to write a farewell letter to the nation. However, shortly thereafter he changed his mind and decided to run for re-election. When he was re-elected by a unanimous Electoral College vote, all the written notes were set aside.

However, four years later Washington set down a tradition that was followed until 1940. This tradition was to serve as President only for two terms and then step aside for someone new. In 1940, Franklin Roosevelt became the first president to break this tradition by running for a third term. Roosevelt won this election in a landslide, and was even elected a fourth time in 1944.

So in 1796 when Washington decided to retire he again took out the notes he and James Madison had written four years earlier. This time, Washington worked with his original notes and the thoughts of Alexander Hamilton and John Jay to write his farewell.

Although the resulting work is known as one of Washington's greatest 'speeches', he never spoke the words out loud to the public. Rather, this farewell address appeared first in a Philadelphia newspaper, and then seven days later, it appeared in the *Independent Chronicle*, a Boston newspaper.

The following is an excerpt from this address. You and your group need to read it, discuss it, and determine the main idea. What is Washington telling the nation? Why is he telling them that?

“Citizens, by birth or choice, of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affections (*love*). The name of American, which belongs to you in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of Patriotism, more than any appellation (*geographical name*) derived (*comes from*) from local discriminations (*differences*).

With slight shades of difference, you have the same religion, manners, habits, and political principles. You have in a common cause fought and triumphed together; the Independence and Liberty (*freedom*) you possess are the work of joint counsels (*groups*), and joint efforts, of common dangers, sufferings, and successes.

While, then, every part of our country thus feels an immediate and particular interest in Union (*being as one*), all the parts combined cannot fail to find in the united mass of means and efforts greater strength, greater resource, proportionably greater security from external danger, a less frequent interruption of their peace by foreign nations;

And, what is of inestimable (*can't be counted*) value, they must derive from Union an exemption (*free from*) from those broils and wars between themselves, which so frequently afflict neighbouring countries not tied together by the same governments, which their own rivalships alone would be sufficient to produce, but which opposite foreign alliances, attachments, and intrigues would stimulate and embitter.”