

George Washington's Farewell Address (1796)- Group 2

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?

I have already intimated to you the danger of parties in the state, with particular reference to the founding of them on geographical discriminations (*differences*). Let me now take a more (*bigger/wider*) view, and warn you in the most solemn (*serious*) manner against the baneful effects of the spirit of party.

The alternate domination (*ruling*) of one faction (*group*) over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension (*disagreement*), which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism (*ruling of someone*). But this leads at length to a more formal and permanent despotism. The disorders and miseries, which result, gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute (*complete*) power of an individual; and sooner or later the chief (*head*) of some prevailing faction, more able or more fortunate than his competitors, turns this disposition to the purposes of his own elevation, on the ruins of Public Liberty (*freedom*).

Without looking forward to an extremity of this kind, the common and continual mischiefs of the spirit of party are sufficient to make it the interest and duty of a wise people to discourage and restrain it.

It serves always to distract the Public Councils, and enfeeble the Public Administration. It agitates the Community with ill-founded jealousies and false alarms; kindles the animosity (*anger*) of one part against another, fomented occasionally riot and insurrection. It opens the door to foreign influence and corruption, which find a facilitated access to the government itself through the channels of party passions. Thus the policy and the will of one country are subjected to the policy and will of another.