

George Washington's Farewell Address (1796)- Group 3

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?

Of all the dispositions (*moods*) and habits, which lead to political prosperity (*wealth*), Religion and Morality are indispensable (*necessary*) supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labor to subvert (*overthrow*) these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and Citizens. The mere Politician, equally with the pious (*religious/moral*) man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connexions with private and public felicity (*happiness*).

Let it simply be asked, Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation (*duty*) desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition (*thought*), that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded (*accepted as to true*) 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.

It is substantially true, that virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government. The rule, indeed, extends with more or less force to every species of free government. Who, that is a sincere friend to it, can look with indifference upon attempts to shake the foundation of the fabric ?