

Washington's Farewell Address Answer Key

Name _____

George Washington's Farewell Address

Directions: Read through the provided excerpts from Washington's Address. Each excerpt highlights one of the five major ideas from his speech. On the line next to each excerpt, write the number (1-5) that best describes the overall meaning of the selection.

At the end of his two-term Presidency, Washington gave his famous Farewell Address on September 17, 1796. In his letter, George Washington gave the new country a few key pieces of advice:

1. *Remain neutral Stay out of European interests and affairs*
2. *Avoid permanent alliances*
3. *Taxes are necessary to escape debt*
4. *Checks and Balances are essential to avoid the domination of the Federal Government by one branch If necessary, the Constitution can be revised*
5. *As Citizens, we should always act at the just pride of patriotism*

1. _____ "It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world, so far I mean, as we are now at liberty to do it, for let me not be understood as capable of patronizing infidelity to existing engagements. I hold the maxim no less applicable to public than to private affairs, that honesty is always the best policy: I repeat it, therefore, let those engagements be observed in their genuine sense. But, in my opinion, it is unnecessary and would be unwise to extend them."

2. _____ "Europe has a set of primary interests, which to us have none, or a very remote relation. Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns. Hence, therefore, it must be unwise in us to implicate ourselves, by artificial ties, in the ordinary vicissitudes of her politics, or the ordinary combinations and collisions of her friendships or enmities."

3. _____ "For this you have every inducement of sympathy and interest. Citizens, by birth or choice, of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affections. The name of American, which belongs to you, in your national capacity, must always mail the just pride of patriotism, more than any appellation derived from local discriminations. 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 you possess are the work of joint councils, and joint efforts, of common dangers, sufferings, and successes."

Washington's Farewell Address is a pivotal document in American history, encapsulating the thoughts and warnings of one of the nation's founding fathers, George Washington. Delivered in 1796, as he prepared to step down from the presidency, this address has been studied extensively for its insights into governance, national unity, and foreign policy. In this article, we will explore the key themes and messages of Washington's Farewell Address, its historical context, and its lasting impact on American political thought.

Historical Context

George Washington, the first President of the United States, served two terms from 1789 to 1797. By the end of his second term, Washington recognized the increasing tensions within the fledgling nation, both domestically and internationally. The political landscape was becoming polarized, with the emergence of political parties and factions threatening the unity he had worked so hard to establish. Washington's Farewell Address was not just a personal goodbye; it was a prescient warning to the nation about the potential dangers that lay ahead.

The Creation of the Address

Washington's Farewell Address was the result of extensive collaboration. He worked closely with Alexander Hamilton, who helped him articulate his thoughts on various issues. The address was originally published in the newspaper "The American Daily Advertiser" on September 19, 1796, and circulated widely throughout the country. Washington

emphasized that his decision to retire was influenced by a desire to set a precedent for future leaders, reinforcing the idea of a peaceful transfer of power.

Key Themes in Washington's Farewell Address

Washington's Farewell Address contains several critical themes that continue to resonate today.

1. The Importance of National Unity

One of the most prominent messages in the address is the necessity of national unity. Washington warned against the divisive nature of political parties, suggesting that they could lead to the deterioration of the republic. He stated:

> "The spirit of party... serves always to distract the public councils and enfeeble the public administration."

Washington believed that factionalism could lead to the erosion of public trust and the effectiveness of government. He urged Americans to prioritize their shared identity as citizens over party loyalty, emphasizing that unity was essential for the nation's survival.

2. Avoidance of Foreign Alliances

Another crucial theme was Washington's warning against entangling alliances with foreign nations. He recognized that while international relationships were necessary, permanent alliances could compromise American sovereignty and lead to unnecessary conflicts. He advised:

> "It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world."

Washington's caution was rooted in the belief that the United States should focus on its interests and maintain independence in foreign affairs. He feared that alliances could drag the nation into wars that did not serve its interests.

3. The Role of Religion and Morality

Washington also emphasized the importance of religion and morality in maintaining a healthy republic. He argued that a moral and ethical citizenry was essential for self-governance. In his address, he declared:

> "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports."

He believed that without a strong moral foundation, the government would struggle to maintain order and justice. Washington's views reflect the Enlightenment philosophy that informed much of the founding of the United States, emphasizing reason alongside a moral compass.

4. The Dangers of Political Corruption

Washington expressed concerns about the potential for political corruption and the influence of money in politics. He warned that corrupt practices could undermine democracy and lead to the erosion of public confidence in government. He stated:

> "The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge, natural to party dissension, which in different ages and countries has perpetrated the most horrid enormities, is itself a frightful despotism."

Washington's words highlight the need for vigilance in protecting the integrity of political institutions and ensuring that leaders act in the best interest of the public.

The Legacy of Washington's Farewell Address

Washington's Farewell Address has had a lasting impact on American political culture and continues to be referenced in contemporary discussions about governance and civic responsibility.

1. A Guiding Document

The address serves as a guiding document for statesmen and citizens alike. Its themes of unity, caution in foreign affairs, and the need for ethical governance resonate with leaders as they navigate the complexities of modern politics. Many presidents and political figures have cited Washington's warnings to advocate for bipartisanship and prioritize national interests.

2. Influence on Political Parties

Despite Washington's warnings about the dangers of political parties, they have become a fundamental aspect of American politics. However, his insights continue to prompt discussions about the role of partisanship in governance. Many contemporary leaders echo Washington's sentiments, advocating for cooperation across party lines to address pressing national issues.

3. Education and Civic Engagement

Washington's address is often included in educational curricula, serving as a tool to teach students about the importance of civic responsibility and national unity. His emphasis on morality and ethics encourages citizens to engage thoughtfully in the democratic process and hold their leaders accountable.

Conclusion

Washington's Farewell Address remains a profound and relevant document that captures the essence of the struggles and aspirations of the early United States. His warnings about division, foreign entanglements, and the need for moral integrity resonate in today's political landscape. As we reflect on his words, we are reminded of the enduring principles that underpin American democracy and the responsibility of each citizen to uphold them. The wisdom contained in Washington's Farewell Address is not just a relic of the past but a vital guide for the present and future of the nation.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main purpose of George Washington's Farewell Address?

The main purpose of Washington's Farewell Address was to provide guidance to the nation as he stepped down from the presidency, emphasizing unity, caution against political factions, and the importance of foreign policy neutrality.

What warnings did Washington give regarding political parties?

Washington warned that political parties could lead to the erosion of national unity and create divisions that might threaten the stability and integrity of the nation.

How did Washington view foreign alliances in his Farewell Address?

Washington advised against forming permanent foreign alliances, suggesting that such commitments could entangle the nation in unnecessary conflicts and detract from its independence.

What did Washington mean by 'the spirit of party'?

The 'spirit of party' refers to the divisive nature of political factions that prioritize party loyalty over national interest, which Washington believed could lead to the downfall of the republic.

What advice did Washington give regarding religion and morality?

Washington emphasized the importance of religion and morality as foundational elements for political prosperity, asserting that they are essential for maintaining a just and stable government.

What was Washington's stance on the role of the military?

Washington cautioned against a standing army in peacetime, believing that it could be a threat to liberty, and instead advocated for a well-regulated militia for national defense.

What impact did Washington's Farewell Address have on future American politics?

Washington's Farewell Address set a precedent for future presidents and became a key reference point for discussions on national unity, foreign policy, and the dangers of political factions.

In what year was Washington's Farewell Address published?

Washington's Farewell Address was published in 1796, as he prepared to retire from public life.

How has Washington's Farewell Address been used in modern political discourse?

Washington's Farewell Address is often cited in modern political discourse to stress the importance of bipartisanship, national unity, and cautious foreign policy, reflecting its enduring relevance.

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