

# President George Washington's Farewell Address



**ABOUT THE READING** George Washington served as president for eight years. In 1796 he told Congress that he would retire at the end of his term. In September of that year he gave a speech to Congress. In it he outlined what he felt was most important for the young country to do in the future. In the excerpt below, Washington focuses on the importance of the national union.

## VOCABULARY

**constitutes** makes

**edifice** structure

**artifices** tricks

**inducement** attraction, lure

**speculation** guessing, theorizing



*As you read* note why Washington thinks it is so important for the country to stay united.

The unity of Government which **constitutes** you one people is also now dear to you. It is justly so; for it is a main pillar in the **edifice** of your real independence—the support of your tranquility at home, your peace abroad; of your safety; of your prosperity; of that very Liberty, which you so highly prize. But as it is easy to foresee that from different causes and from different quarters, much pains will be taken, many **artifices** employed, to weaken in your minds the conviction of this truth; as this is the point in your political fortress against which the batteries of internal and external enemies will be most constantly and actively (though often covertly and insidiously) directed, it is of infinite moment, that you should properly estimate the immense value of your national Union to your collective and individual happiness—that you should cherish a cordial, habitual, and immovable attachment to it; accustoming yourselves to think and speak of it as of the [protector] of your political safety

**The idea of national union is the one that will be most often attacked. Often these attacks will be hidden or subtle.**

**The Union is what will keep the country safe and successful. Be watchful of any attempt to weaken the ties that hold the country together.**

Source: From *Farewell Address of George Washington* from *The Independence Chronicle*, September 26, 1796.

and prosperity; watching for its preservation with jealous anxiety; discountenancing whatever may suggest even a suspicion, that it can in any event be abandoned; and indignantly frowning upon the first dawning of every attempt to alienate any portion of our country from the rest, or to enfeeble the sacred ties which now link together the various parts. . .

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 exalt 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 counsels and joint efforts, of common dangers, sufferings, and successes.

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. . .

These considerations speak a persuasive language to every reflecting and virtuous mind, and exhibit the continuance of the Union as a primary object of patriotic desire. Is there a doubt, whether a common government can embrace so large a sphere? Let experience solve it. To listen to mere **speculation** in such a case were criminal. We are authorized to hope that a proper organization of the whole, with the auxiliary agency of governments for the respective subdivisions, will afford a happy issue to the experiment. It is well worth a fair and full experiment.

You should always prefer the name *American* to any name linked to your local area.

Supporting the Union not only feels good, it is what is best for you.

A central government can manage a large country. Local and state governments provide help.

**WHAT DID YOU LEARN?**

1. Why does Washington say Americans should protect their Union from attack?

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2. Why does the name *American* create a feeling of shared pride?

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3. Why does Washington think the national government will be a success?

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