

FAREWELL ADDRESS

GEORGE WASHINGTON

from *The U.S. Constitution: A Reader*, pp. 139-152

George Washington had first prepared a farewell address to be delivered in 1792, upon the conclusion of his first term as president. Having been convinced to stand for a second term, he was unanimously re-elected. When he finally issued this address in 1796, it was his last public work. After nearly forty-five years of service, he retired to Mount Vernon.

SEPTEMBER 19, 1796

....Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and citizens. The mere Politician, equally with the pious man ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation *desert* the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded 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.

'Tis 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.

Promote then as an object of primary importance, Institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened....

George Washington, "Farewell Address," September 19, 1796, in W. B. Allen, ed., *George Washington: A Collection* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1988), 512–17. This material appears on the Online Library of Liberty [<http://app.libraryofliberty.org>] hosted by Liberty Fund, Inc.