

Primary Source Analysis – President Washington’s Farewell Address

“The name of American, which belongs to you in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of patriotism....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.

...In contemplating the causes which may disturb our Union, it occurs as matter of serious concern that any ground should have been furnished for characterizing parties by geographical discriminations, Northern and Southern, Atlantic and Western....You cannot shield yourselves too much against the jealousies and heartburnings which spring from these misrepresentations.

...Let me now take a more comprehensive view, and warn you in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the spirit of party generally....The discords and miseries, which results, gradually incline the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an individual....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 great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is in extending our commercial relations, to have with them as little political connection as possible....It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world....we may safely trust to temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies.”

-From “A Letter to the American People,” Sept. 17, 1796

Reflections

1. What concerns did Washington express in this excerpt?

2. What did Washington think would happen if political parties gained support?

3. What did Washington face that may have led to this advice?

4. What do you think of Washington’s advice?