

This Day in History... September 19, 1796

Washington's Farewell Address

On September 19, 1796, the *American Daily Advertiser* published President George Washington's Farewell Address for the first time. It's considered one of the most important documents in United States history.

With the help of James Madison, Washington wrote the first draft of his Farewell Address in 1792, when he planned to retire after serving a single term in office. However, he grew concerned for the nation when Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jefferson became involved in a bitter feud resulting in the creation of the Federalist and Democratic-Republican Parties. Washington worried that their division as well as foreign affairs could rip the nation apart without his leadership. So Washington ran for president a second time and was unanimously reelected.

Four years later, Washington decided it was definitely time to end his presidency and revisited the letter. Alexander Hamilton helped him revise it. The letter was in part an announcement that he planned to not seek a third term in office.

Washington's 32-page hand-written address was first published in David C. Claypoole's *American Daily Advertiser* on September 19, 1796. It was formally titled, "The Address of General Washington To The People of The United States on his declining of the Presidency of the United States." It later became known simply as his Farewell Address, following decades of service to his nation.

In his address, Washington reiterated what he said at his first inaugural address, that he believed he was never really qualified to be America's president, and that if he'd accomplished anything, it was because of the support of the people. He expressed his confidence in the American people to do what was necessary to survive and prosper.

Issued the same day as US #1, this stamp paid the half-ounce rate for letters traveling over 300 miles.

Though Washington had the utmost confidence in the American people, he also used much of the address to offer advice as a "parting friend" on what he saw as some of the most significant threats to America.

Washington stressed the importance of national unity, the value of the Constitution and the rule of law, and warned of divisions brought on by political parties and partisan politics, and against foreign influence in domestic affairs. He also expressed hope that the United States would entertain peaceful and prosperous relations with other nations, but warned against American involvement in European wars and long-term alliances with foreign countries. Washington's words reveal that he foresaw America's rise to a world power if the young nation were given a period to rebuild and grow.

Following its first printing, Washington's address was quickly reprinted in a number of newspapers around the country. It was then printed and distributed as a pamphlet.

Years later, in 1862, thousands of Philadelphians signed and submitted a petition to Congress to honor Washington's 130th birthday. They requested that his Farewell Address be read "in one or the other of the Houses of Congress." It was first read in February 1862 in the House of Representatives. It went on to become an annual tradition in both houses in 1899. The House of Representatives ended the practice in 1984, though the Senate continues to read his address to this day.

From the 1869 Pictorials

Washington's Farewell Address served as the foundation for a substantial portion of American domestic and foreign policy. It was heeded throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th. In fact, the United States declined to sign a treaty of alliance with a foreign nation until the 1949 formation of NATO.

Fun fact – the writing of Washington's Farewell Address is featured in the hit musical *Hamilton* with the song "One Last Time."

Farewell Address Featured on American Credo Stamp

The Post Office Department released a new series of stamps in 1960 that shared well-known principles said in a few words by some of America's early leaders. The first stamp, featuring George Washington, was issued in January 1960, with five more released over the next year. The Washington credo stamp included a portion of his Farewell Address, "Observe good faith and justice toward all nations."

The credo stamps were designed to resemble colonial currency. Also, symbols that relate to the statement are used in the designs, as well as a likeness of the author's signature. One hundred distinguished Americans chose the individual principles. In addition to Washington, the selected quotes came from Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Francis Scott Key, Abraham Lincoln, and Patrick Henry.



Includes a portion of Washington's Farewell Address.



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The highest denomination stamp issued during the Civil War.

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