

doing he had to batter away a numerous and vocal group which comprised many of his former dear companions.

John Adams confided to his wife that Washington was deeply hurt. "All the studied efforts of the Federalists to counterbalance abuse by compliment don't answer the end."

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#### FORTY-SIX

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## Washington's Farewell Address

(1796)

During May, 1796, Madison wrote Monroe in cipher, "It is now generally understood that the President will retire, and Jefferson is the object on one side, Adams apparently on the other." Although the Federalists were worried—"If a storm gather," Hamilton asked Washington, "how can you retreat?"—Washington wrote firmly that he would "close my public life on March 4 [1797], after which no consideration under heaven that I can foresee shall again draw me from the walks of private life."

In that embattled springtime, Washington believed that he would have to withdraw facing his enemies sword in hand. Although he did not intend to make his announcement before late fall, when "it shall become indispensably necessary for the information of the [presidential] electors," he jotted down a bitter and defensive draft of a farewell address. To prove that his desire to retire four years before was known "*to one or two* of those characters" (Madison and Jefferson) who were trying to "build their own consequence" by accusing him of tyrannical ambitions, Washington quoted entire the address which Madison had helped him prepare at that time.

Having argued for unity, for tolerance, for true neutrality, Washington launched angrily into one of those paragraphs which affirm what they deny: "As some of the gazettes of the United States have teemed with all the invective that disappointment, ignorance of facts, and malicious falsehoods could invent, to misrepresent my politics and affections—to wound my reputation and

feelings—and to weaken, if not entirely destroy, the confidence you have been pleased to repose in me; it might be expected at the parting scene of my public life that I should take some notice of such virulent abuse. But, as heretofore, I shall pass them over in utter silence."

He continued in a pitiful vein quite uncharacteristic of the proud old hero: he hoped that, "as I did not seek the office with which you have honored me, that charity may throw her mantle over my want of abilities to do better; that the gray hairs of a man" who had spent "*all the prime of his life* in serving his country, be suffered to pass quietly to the grave, and that his errors, however numerous, if they are not criminal, may be consigned to the tomb of oblivion."

He denied willful error. His administration, "the infancy of the government and all other things considered," had been "as delicate, difficult, and trying as may occur again in any future period," and throughout he had, to the best of his abilities, "consulted the true and permanent interests of our country, without regard to local considerations—to individuals, to parties, or to nations." He had not served because of ambition or in any ignorance of the hazards to which he was exposing his reputation. Noting that he had refused "the bounty of several legislatures at the close of the war," he stated that his service had brought no addition to his finances but rather the reverse. "I leave you with undefiled hands, and uncorrupted heart, and with ardent vows to heaven of the welfare and happiness of that country in which I and my forefathers to the third and fourth progenitor drew our first breath."

Worried, as he later stated, by "the egotisms" in this draft, Washington allowed it to lie in his desk until, at Hamilton's request, he sent it to his adviser. He empowered Hamilton to prepare an altogether new speech but wished also to have his own draft back in revised form. Hamilton did what he was asked. He removed from Washington's draft the most achingly personal passages and expanded it into an appeal to the nation concerning the problems being immediately faced. However, he realized that this document would not contribute to Washington's permanent reputation. Undoubtedly inspired by real affection and admiration for his longtime patron and also by the desire of the Federalists to have in the succeeding years a great figure to cling to, Hamilton wrote a new draft intended to be "*importantly and lastingly useful*." Washington agreed with his adviser that the new version—known to history as "Hamilton's Main Draft"—was the better. It became the basis for "Washington's Farewell Address."

Washington began his own revisions by transcribing the text in his own handwriting, making innumerable verbal changes. The ideas he found expressed were with a few exceptions his own. No man was more familiar than Hamilton with Washington's sentiments, and long experience had taught him that Washington would not knowingly allow himself to be pushed. The way to influence him was to put forward ideas in a manner that made them seem an extension of his own thinking. Had Hamilton drafted the address according to his own thinking, Washington would have simply laid it aside. The experienced aide only inserted sentiments with which Washington might not agree if he thought he could do it so inconspicuously that the President would not notice. Almost all of them came out. Washington also cut out almost all the "egotisms" which Hamilton, probably in deference to Washington's draft, had inserted in the new manuscript.

The chances are very good that, had Washington been left to himself, he would never have released the defensive, angry, and almost lachrymose draft which he had written long before the need and which would have shattered his principle of avoiding partisan controversy. However, the fact remains that it was Hamilton who presented the alternative on which the final address was based. Despite Washington's many changes, much of Hamilton's style remains. This is most conspicuous in the prolixity. Washington's natural tendency was to be concise, to pack sentences until a dense but clear paragraph covered all phases of the problem. Hamilton argued things out, as in a legal brief. The Farewell Address could be considered Hamilton's had it expressed Hamilton's ideas. It expressed Washington's. It was as much Washington's as any presidential paper was likely to be that had been drafted by an intimate aide. If all such documents were attributed to the speech writers, history would read very differently and surely less accurately. Although grounded on Hamilton's Main Draft, the famous paper is correctly called Washington's Farewell Address.

The address, as finally promulgated, passed quickly over personal considerations—Washington had not sought the Presidency, had not wished a second term, was getting older, and hoped from his retirement to see the nation continuing on a virtuous path that would lead the rest of the world to liberty.

The next section stated that since union was the basis on which American liberty rested, and also the nation's protection against involvement in foreign broils, it would obviously be the focus of