

Washington's Farewell Address 1796

[segments warning against political parties]

In [thinking about] the causes which may disturb our Union (*here he means the United States*), it occurs as matter of serious concern that any ground should have been [created] for characterizing parties by geographical discriminations, Northern and Southern, Atlantic and Western; where men may endeavor to [create and spread] a belief that there is a real difference [between them]. One way a party acquires influence within particular [areas] is to misrepresent the opinions and aims of other[s]. You cannot shield yourselves too much against the jealousies which spring from these misrepresentations; they tend to render [foreign] to each other those who ought to be bound together by fraternal (brotherly) affection.

Question 1: What is Washington trying to convince his audience of in this paragraph? In other words, what does he believe political parties will do to the population of the newly founded United States?

I have already stated to you the danger of parties in the nation, with reference to the founding of them on geographical discriminations (*here he means based on certain regions within the United States*). Let me now take a more comprehensive view, and warn you against the baneful (*harmful*) effects of the spirit of party generally.

This spirit, unfortunately, is inseparable from our nature, having its root in the strongest passions of the human mind. It exists under different shapes in all governments, more or less stifled, controlled, or repressed; but, in those of the popular form, it is seen in its greatest rankness, and is truly their worst enemy.

Question 2: What does Washington mean when he says that it “is inseparable from our nature”?

Question 3: What does he mean by “popular form” of government? How would a popular form government be dangerous? (Hint: Think back to J.S. Mill)