

## Primary Source

# Washington's First Inaugural Address

## Guiding Question

- How did George Washington's leadership and decisions shape the early republic?

## Objectives

- ☐ I can read a primary source text with support and prompts.
- ☐ I can identify the virtues Washington discussed in his First Inaugural address.

## Background Information

George Washington was unanimously elected as the first president in 1788. Though the Constitution does not require it, he would establish an important precedent, or example, when he gave his inaugural address before the Senate and the House of Representatives before taking office in April 1789. In it, he laid out broad principles that he encouraged Congress and the American people to follow.

### Washington's First Inaugural Address

Source: [https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american\\_originals/inaugtxt.html](https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals/inaugtxt.html)

Fellow Citizens of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

**No event** could have filled me with greater anxieties than that of which the notification was transmitted by your order ...

**No event ...:** Washington here refers to his receiving notification of being elected.

<p>On the one hand, I was <b>summoned</b> by my Country, whose voice I can never hear but with <b>veneration</b> and love, <b>from a retreat</b> which I had chosen with the fondest predilection ...</p>	<p><b>summoned:</b> called upon</p> <p><b>veneration:</b> respect</p> <p><b>from a retreat which I had chosen with the fondest predilection:</b> after the war, Washington chose to retire to private life at his home, Mount Vernon.</p>
<p>On the other hand ... a <b>distrustful scrutiny into [my] qualifications</b>, could not but overwhelm ... one, who, ... <b>unpractised in the duties of civil administration</b>, ought to be <b>peculiarly conscious</b> of his own <b>deficiencies</b> ...</p>	<p><b>distrustful scrutiny into [my] qualifications:</b> doubtful of his abilities</p> <p><b>unpractised in the duties of civil administration:</b> Washington is saying he has never served in government before. He was a military commander before this.</p> <p><b>peculiarly conscious:</b> especially mindful</p> <p><b>deficiencies:</b> weaknesses</p>
<p>[T]here is no truth more thoroughly established, than that there exists ... an <b>indissoluble</b> union between <b>virtue</b> and happiness, between duty and advantage, between the genuine <b>maxims</b> of an honest and <b>magnanimous</b> policy, and the solid rewards of public prosperity ...</p>	<p><b>indissoluble:</b> unable to be broken</p> <p><b>virtue:</b> behaviors showing high moral standards</p> <p><b>maxims:</b> truths</p> <p><b>magnanimous:</b> generous and forgiving</p>
<p>Since we ought to be no less persuaded that the ... smiles of Heaven, can never be expected on a nation that <b>disregards</b> the <b>eternal</b> rules of order and right...</p>	<p><b>disregards:</b> ignores</p> <p><b>eternal:</b> forever or constant</p>

## ***Reading Comprehension Questions***

1. How does Washington demonstrate the virtue of humility in his address?
2. What other virtues does Washington discuss in his inaugural address?
3. In your own words, explain what Washington believes is the relationship between acting virtuously, prosperity and happiness.

