
In Addressing America: George Washington’s Farewell and the Making of National Culture, Politics and Diplomacy, 1796-1852, Jeffrey J. Malanson seeks to answer an unanswered question: how did Americans interpret the Farewell Address in the first half of the nineteenth century? During this period, Americans would constantly refer back to Washington as a guide, placing “complete faith in his judgment and wisdom” (p. 1). However, a gap soon emerged between what Washington said and what Americans thought he said. Although Washington warned only against “permanent alliances,” Thomas Jefferson’s caution against “entangling alliances” in his first inaugural was soon grafted onto the public memory of the Farewell Address. Malanson sees two different applications of the Farewell Address: the original Washington version providing a guideline based on American interests, which could be adapted to the needs of the future, and the corrupted Jefferson version, which imposed a fixed and unchanging foreign policy on the United States.

While Malanson discusses the influence of the Farewell Address on the first half of the nineteenth century, he focuses on three episodes as most illustrative of his thesis: the formulation of the Monroe Doctrine, the debate over American participation in the Panama Congress, and Hungarian revolutionary Louis Kossuth’s visit to the United States in 1851 and 1852. John Quincy Adams, both as secretary of state and president, emerges as the hero of the piece. Only Adams “remained dedicated to the original flexibility of Washington’s vision,” adapting the Farewell Address to the new world of the 1820s (p. 56). While Henry Clay wished to charge forward in a spirit of republican and hemispheric brotherhood, Adams in a speech given on the Fourth of July 1821 rejected precipitous recognition of the independence of Latin American countries as incompatible with American interests and neutrality. Malanson regards this speech as the embodiment
of the advice of the Farewell Address, despite the fact that Adams never mentioned Washington by name (p. 57). The Monroe Doctrine marked the culmination of Adams's adaptation of the Farewell Address to new circumstances. The two key principles of the Monroe Doctrine were non-colonization, that is, the removal of European influence from the Western Hemisphere, and the idea of two spheres, that Europe and the United States had distinct interests. Both, Malanson argues, were extensions of the true spirit of the Farewell Address.

However, the principles of non-colonization and two spheres were soon placed in opposition to each other during the debate over American participation in the Panama Congress in 1826. Secretary of State Clay instructed the American envoys to secure Latin American acceptance of American notions of neutral rights, which reflected the Adams administration's chief goal at Panama, the implementation of the non-colonization principle on a hemispheric scale. That would keep European influence out; however, opponents of the mission cited the two spheres principle as filtered through Jefferson's first inaugural address. The warning against entangling alliances was applied to Latin America as well as Europe. This corrupted version of the Farewell Address defeated the true one.

By the 1830s and 1840s the Farewell Address had fallen into disuse. John Tyler and James K. Polk both twisted the meaning of the two spheres doctrine to justify an aggressive course of expansion. The Address seemed to have less relevance in American political life. While the standard fare at celebrations of Washington's birthday, its caution did not speak to a generation prepared to play a greater role on the world stage. Its revival only came with the visit of Louis Kossuth to the United States in 1851 and 1852. Kossuth, the leader of the Hungarian revolt against Austrian rule in 1848, was in the United States to raise money (at which he was successful) and to turn American sympathy into concrete diplomatic action (at which he failed). Kossuth called for an explicit rejection of the Farewell Address and for American participation in European politics. In short, Kossuth asked the American people to choose between him and Washington. They chose Washington.

Malanson has presented an original and well-argued work on the long-term impact of the Farewell Address. It is, however, not without its difficulties. One of the hazards of the study of ideas is tracking down their source. The ideas of the Farewell Address were not original to Washington; they were orthodoxy from the American Revolution on and were restated by many of the statesmen of the period.
John Quincy Adams’s ideas, for example, could have come from the Farewell Address, but they could have also come from his father, or any number of other sources. Adams did not cite a source, and as a result it is difficult to prove that the Farewell Address influenced him. Indeed, there is far more direct evidence that his opponents on the Panama Congress were influenced by the Farewell Address. Malanson has also tried to impose order on chaos by dividing the political figures of the early nineteenth century into those who correctly interpreted the Farewell Address and those who did not. That is a difficult case to make without more evidence than Malanson presents. This study is more of an examination of the intersection of separation from Europe and the influence of Washington than of the Farewell Address itself. A book such as Addressing America should be judged by the arguments it starts rather than the ones it stops. In this way Malanson has made an important contribution to the study of early American diplomacy.


In Siblings, C. Dallett Hemphill focuses on brothers and sisters in America from 1600 to the Civil War to bring rich and long-neglected evidence to light. Additionally, she fashions a new story about American family history that avoids the ahistorical assumptions of former approaches, many of which relied on modernization theory. When historians studied the American family decades ago they concentrated on marriage and childhood. They hoped to explain how the privatized child-centered conjugal family separated itself from early modern communities and kin groups to become the family of the day. These historians created a stir, but as Hemphill shows, their field has not prospered lately. Apparently many of these historians did not anticipate that the seemingly indestructible American middle-class family,