

**THE AMERICAN POLITICAL  
CLASSICS: JEFFERSON,  
WASHINGTON AND  
LINCOLN**

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The American Political Classics: Jefferson, Washington and Lincoln by George Clark Sargent

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**GEORGE CLARK SARGENT**

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To  
*Miranda Wilmarth Lux,*  
*whose sweet nobility of character*  
*was an inspiration to all*  
*who knew her.*

## AMERICAN POLITICAL CLASSICS

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The American Revolution was brought about by the ambition of the English Parliament to make itself supreme over a people who were not represented in it. As Benjamin Franklin expressed it, the Parliament claimed to be omnipotent before it had become omniscient. It started in a revolt against the king's officers, but it was soon seen that nothing less than complete independence could make the colonists safe. When this had been resolved upon, the writing of the great state paper by which it was proclaimed was committed to Thomas Jefferson. It is as follows:

### DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

"When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the

powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that, whenever any form of government becomes destructive to these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness."

Then follow statements as to the orderly way in which the government may be changed, after which comes an indictment

of the King of England for his many acts of oppression.

After seven years of war, the colonists made good their independence, and the country has since become the most powerful on earth.

The growth of a people is often marked by the speeches of great men. Currents of thought, having small beginnings, gather strength until all think alike, but in a crude and ineffectual way. Then comes a genius who voices the dimly felt sentiment of the people. When he has spoken, all can see, and seeing, believe the simple truths he utters. It is like a confused mass which suddenly bursts into crystal form,—clear, beautiful and sharply defined. Such was the farewell Address of Washington. The colonists, who were now the people of the new republic, remembered their recent trials, vexations and dangers, so that when he spoke, it was as if light had come out of darkness. No true American can read his noble words without being elevated to a higher plane of thought and citizenship. So true was



his vision, and so sound his advice, that his Farewell Address furnished the rule of conduct of this country for a century after he left the presidency. The address is as follows:

WASHINGTON'S FAREWELL ADDRESS.

"Friends and Fellow-Citizens: The period for a new election of a citizen, to administer the executive government of the United States, being not far distant, and the time actually arrived when your thoughts must be employed in designating the person who is to be clothed with that important trust, it appears to me proper, especially as it may conduce to a more distinct expression of the public voice, that I should now apprise you of the resolution I have formed, to decline being considered among the number of those out of whom a choice is to be made.

"I beg you, at the same time, to do me the justice to be assured that this resolution has not been taken without a strict regard

to all the considerations appertaining to the relation which binds a dutiful citizen to his country; and that, in withdrawing the tender of service, which silence in my situation might imply, I am influenced by no diminution of zeal for your future interest; no deficiency of grateful respect for your past kindness; but am supported by a full conviction that the step is compatible with both.

"The acceptance of, and continuance hitherto in, the office to which your suffrages have twice called me, have been a uniform sacrifice of inclination to the opinion of duty, and to a deference for what appeared to be your desire. I constantly hoped that it would have been much earlier in my power, consistently with motives which I was not at liberty to disregard, to return to that retirement from which I had been reluctantly drawn. The strength of my inclination to do this, previous to the last election, had even led to the preparation of an address to declare it to you; but mature reflection on the then perplexed and critical posture

of our affairs with foreign nations, and the unanimous advice of persons entitled to my confidence, impelled me to abandon the idea.

"I rejoice that the state of your concerns, external as well as internal, no longer renders the pursuit of inclination incompatible with the sentiment of duty or propriety; and am persuaded, whatever partiality may be retained for my services, that, in the present circumstances of our country, you will not disapprove my determination to retire.

"The impressions with which I first undertook the arduous trust were explained on the proper occasion. In the discharge of this trust I will only say that I have with good intentions contributed towards the organization and administration of the government the best exertions of which a very fallible judgment was capable. Not unconscious in the outset of the inferiority of my qualifications, experience in my own eyes, perhaps still more in the eyes of others, has strengthened the motives to diffidence of myself; and