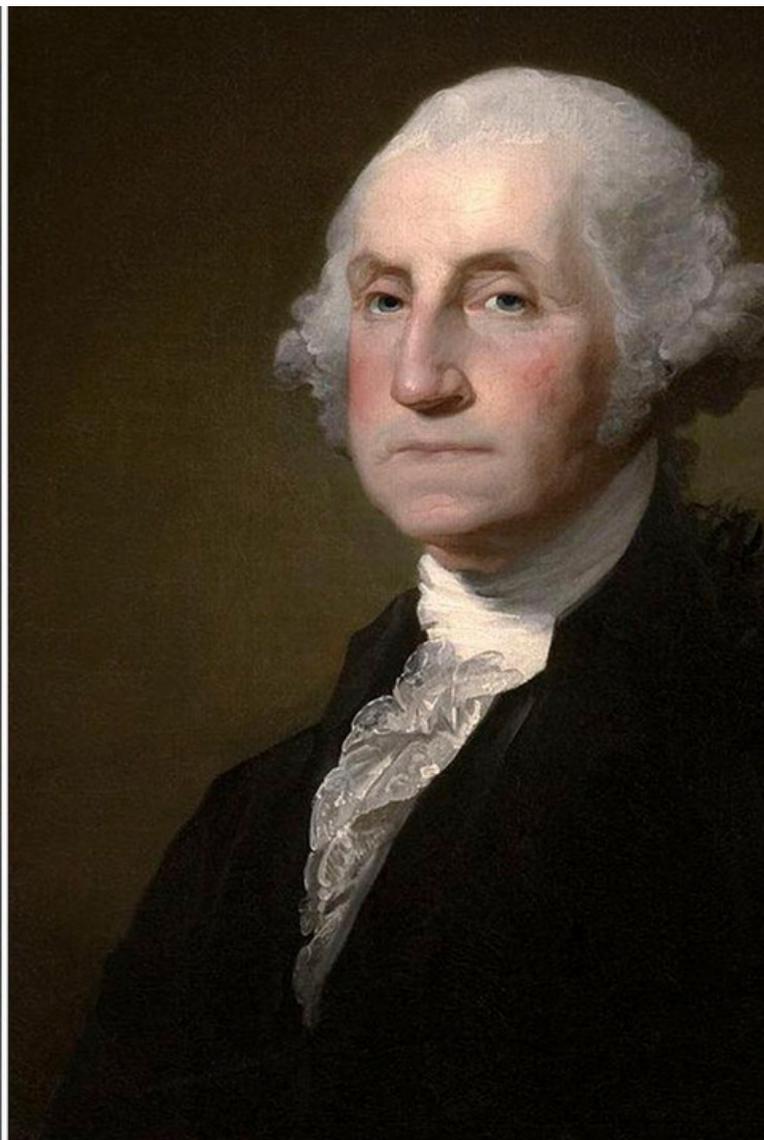


MANUEL BELGRANO AND GEORGE WASHINGTON'S FAREWELL ADDRESS TO THE PEOPLE OF THE U.S.

By Martín Boneo, president of Instituto Belgraniano in the U.S.



Manuel Belgrano (Left), George Washington (Right).

"My fervent desire for my fellow citizens to seize the genuine ideas they should cherish, if they love the country, and if they wish it to be prosperous on a solid and permanent basis, has led me to undertake this translation in the midst of other serious tasks".

Manuel Belgrano

The Enlightenment Era. My colleagues have studied in detail the convergences between the thoughts of General Belgrano and George Washington, so in this article we will complement these works with a look at the circumstances and people that brought Belgrano closer to the booklet of the first North American president.

A few years after the blades of the guillotines had subsided in a France that tumultuously passed from the 18th century to the 19th century, George Washington was giving up on indefinite reelection in the United States.

It was September 1796, and the founding father of the United States was laying the foundation for a prosperous republic based on freedom, alternation of power, and the division of powers.

He was aware of the importance of these new ideas and that is why his Farewell Address takes on a greater dimension in light of the past centuries.

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The Spirit of Laws, a treatise on political theory and comparative law written by Baron de Montesquieu in 1748, found more avid readers in Virginia libraries than in Parisian castles, with the consequences known to all. In his Autobiography, Manuel Belgrano recalls the paradigm shift he experienced during the time he spent studying in Spain and how they impacted him.

Another Frenchman, Alexis de Tocqueville, would marvel at the proper functioning of the system during his journey throughout the new continent and wrote his views in the two volumes of Democracy in America published in 1835 and 1840.

Twenty years before this last publication, General Manuel Belgrano died in Buenos Aires, who, as we will see, was one of the most enthusiastic followers of the first United States president's ideas in the south of the continent.

Manuel Belgrano would undoubtedly have endorsed the words with which the French philosopher begins his book: "Of all the novel things which attracted my attention during my stay in the United States, none struck me more forcibly than the equality of social conditions. I had no difficulty in discovering the extraordinary influence this fundamental fact exerts upon the progress of society; it sets up a particular direction to public attitudes, a certain twist to the laws; new maxims to who is governing, and particular customs to the governed".

Very similar concepts arise in the Introduction that he sent, together with the translation of Alarrude's Farewell to the National Government on February 2, 1813. "Washington, a hero worthy of admiration in our age and that of future generations, is an example of moderation and true patriotism (...) I saw in his maxims the wisdom reinforced by the experience and constant observation of a man who had dedicated himself wholeheartedly to the freedom and happiness of his homeland (...) I beg not only the government, but also my fellow citizens and all those who wish America's happiness, to keep this little book in their pocket; read it, study it, meditate on it, and set out to imitate this great man, so that they achieve the goal we aspire to: becoming a free and independent nation".

Two North Americans and a General. Dr. James Redhead, the doctor who was present during Belgrano's last moments, redefines his influence on the life of the national hero, since as Belgrano himself recognizes in the introduction he sent to the government, "to carry it out more promptly, I have used Redhead, the North American doctor, who has taken the trouble to translate it literally, and explain some of the concepts to me".

His relationship with Manuel Belgrano began in Tucumán in 1812, and after that, he was one of the people closest to the General, accompanying him both in victory and defeat.

Due to the intellectual respect that he had for him, it is not surprising that Belgrano asked him for a first translation, and then the national hero understood it fully, thanks to the countless readings on history and political theory during his years as a student in Spain, and as a journalist in the Río de la Plata.

Manuel Belgrano first read the text in 1805, when he was serving as Secretary of the Royal Consulate of Commerce. We read, in his own handwriting, how he learned about the text: "after receiving a booklet containing the Farewell Address, which David C. de Forest has done me



Manuel Belgrano. Credit: Archivo Nacional de la Nación. Courtesy: Instituto Belgraniano of the U.S.

the honor of sending me, I hastened to begin its translation”.

That first copy had to be burned, which saddened him very much, along with the rest of his archive and public papers on March 9, the day of Tacuarí's defeat, in order to prevent important state secrets from falling into the hands of the enemy.

De Forest sent him a new copy on December 10, 1812, along with a heartfelt letter that was discovered and published in 1944 by Courtney Ledds de Espil, the wife of Felipe Espil, who was then the Argentine Ambassador to the United States.

According to Father Furlong, on December 15, 1812, Belgrano received the second copy, accompanied by these words from de Forest: “Although it might seem a trivial matter, it is something that deserves to be read many times,

and perhaps it can be a valuable and appropriate model for you.” De Forest was a complex character who attracted the attention of historians because of his commercial ties with the patriots.

The translated copy reached the public in Spanish, published by the Imprenta de los Niños Expósitos in 1813 and was reproduced by the University of Buenos Aires in 1946.

This is how history aligned so that Manuel Belgrano received this copy shortly after meeting Dr. Redhead, and in this way found an ally for a swift translation, one that for almost a decade he wanted to share with his compatriots.

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