Station #5

Neutrality in foreign affairs

Another precedent that George Washington set was that of **neutrality in foreign affairs**. During the American Revolution, the French and Americans had entered into a permanent alliance with each other. This meant that the French would help the Americans in their war against Great Britain and the Americans would help the French in any of their future wars. In 1793, the countries of Europe were once again at war and as a result of the French Revolution, France found herself at war with much of Europe. Realizing that the new country was in no position to fight another major war, Washington set a policy of neutrality that would largely remain in effect until the start of the 20th century. Washington would also stress this point again in his Farewell address to the nation in 1796.

Proclamation of Neutrality (April 22, 1793)

Whereas it appears that a state of war exists between Austria, Prussia, Sardinia, Great Britain, and the United Netherlands, on the one part, and France on the other; and the duty and interest of the United States require, that they should with sincerity and good faith adopt and pursue a conduct friendly and impartial towards the belligerent powers: ...

And I do hereby also make known, that whosoever of the citizens of the United States shall render himself liable to punishment or forfeiture under the law of nations, by committing, aiding or abetting hostilities against any of the said powers, or by carrying to any of them, those articles which are deemed contraband by the modern usage of nations, will not receive the protection of the United States against such punishment or forfeiture; ...

Farewell Address (September 19, 1796)

Excerpt

...The great rule of conduct for us in regard to foreign nations is, in extending our commercial relations to have with them as little political connection as possible. So far as we have already formed engagements let them be fulfilled with perfect good faith. Here let us stop.

**Europe has a set of primary interests which to us have none or a very remote relation.**
Hence she must be engaged in frequent controversies, the causes of which are essentially foreign to our concerns. ...
It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world, so far, I mean, as we are now at liberty to do it; for let me not be understood as capable of patronizing infidelity to existing engagements. I hold the maxim no less applicable to public than to private affairs that honesty is always the best policy. I repeat, therefore, let those engagements be unwise to extend them.

Taking care always to keep ourselves by suitable establishments on a respectable defensive posture, we may safely trust to temporary alliances for extraordinary emergencies.

Foldable Instructions

1. On the fifth flap, write: Neutrality in foreign affairs and draw a picture to illustrate the precedent
2. Read the Neutrality Proclamation, what was George Washington asking for Americans to do regarding the war in Europe?
3. Read the Excerpt from the Farewell address and answer the following on the lower flap:
   a. Why did Washington feel that the United States should stay clear of Europe’s affairs?
   b. How do you think that Washington would feel concerning America’s role in world affairs today?