

The background of the slide features a large American flag on the left and the dome of the United States Capitol building on the right. The flag is waving, and the Capitol dome is shown in a blue-tinted, slightly desaturated style. The text is overlaid on this background.

# Leadership Skills for Engaging Differences Constructively: Lessons from the Founders

Keith Allred  
Executive Director



**COMMONSENSE**  
**AMERICAN**



# NICD – A Respected National Platform

Board is most impressive bipartisan group in the nation working to engage our differences more constructively



Our work is regularly covered in the national press

*The Washington Post*

*The New York Times*

*Los Angeles Times*

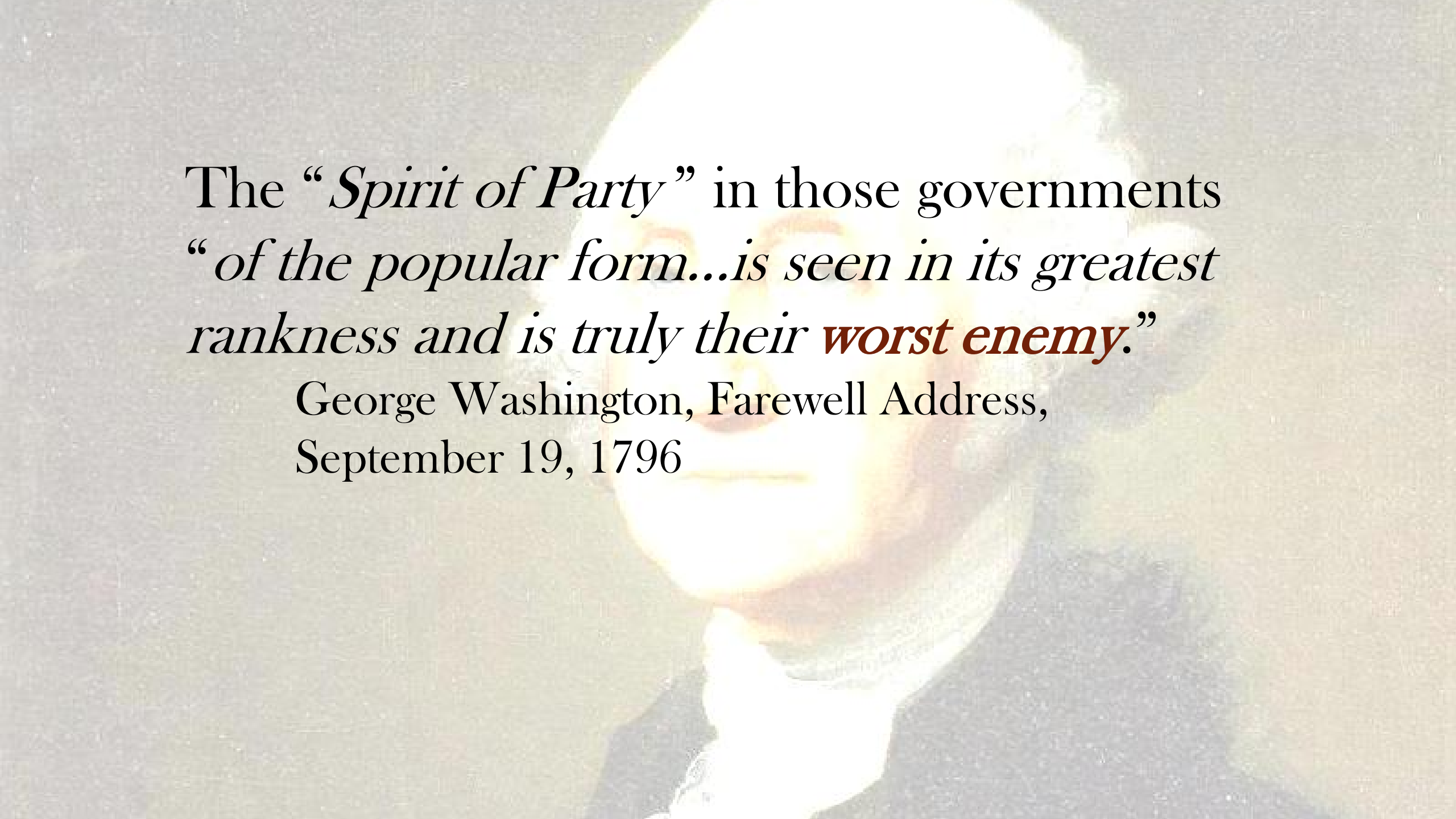






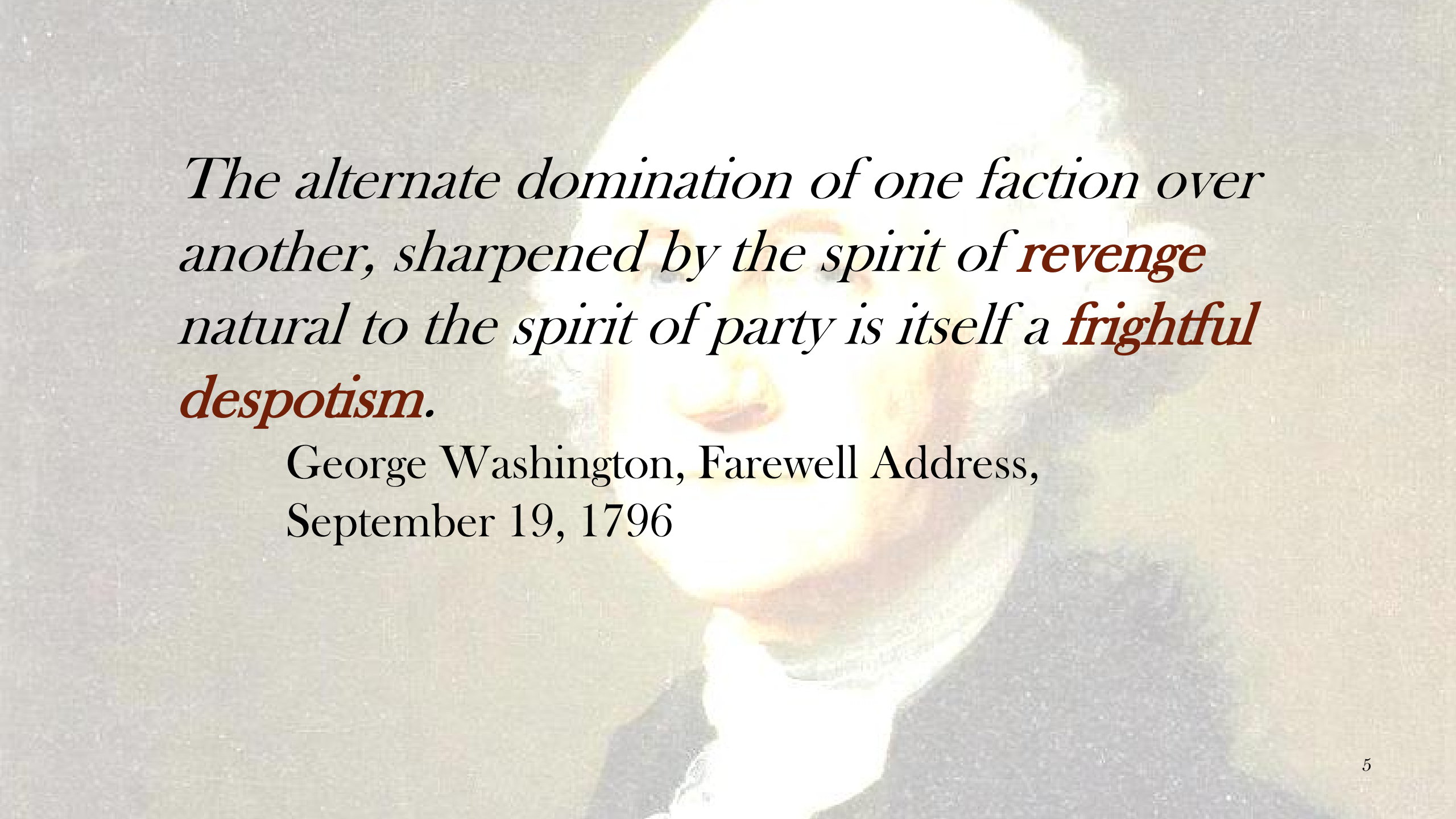
## Founders Believed Partisanship Would be Gravest Challenge

- Every experiment in self-government over preceding 3,000 years had failed
- Concluded main reason was the “spirit of party”
- Instability and incompetence open door to despotism



The “*Spirit of Party*” in those governments  
“*of the popular form...is seen in its greatest  
rankness and is truly their **worst enemy.***”

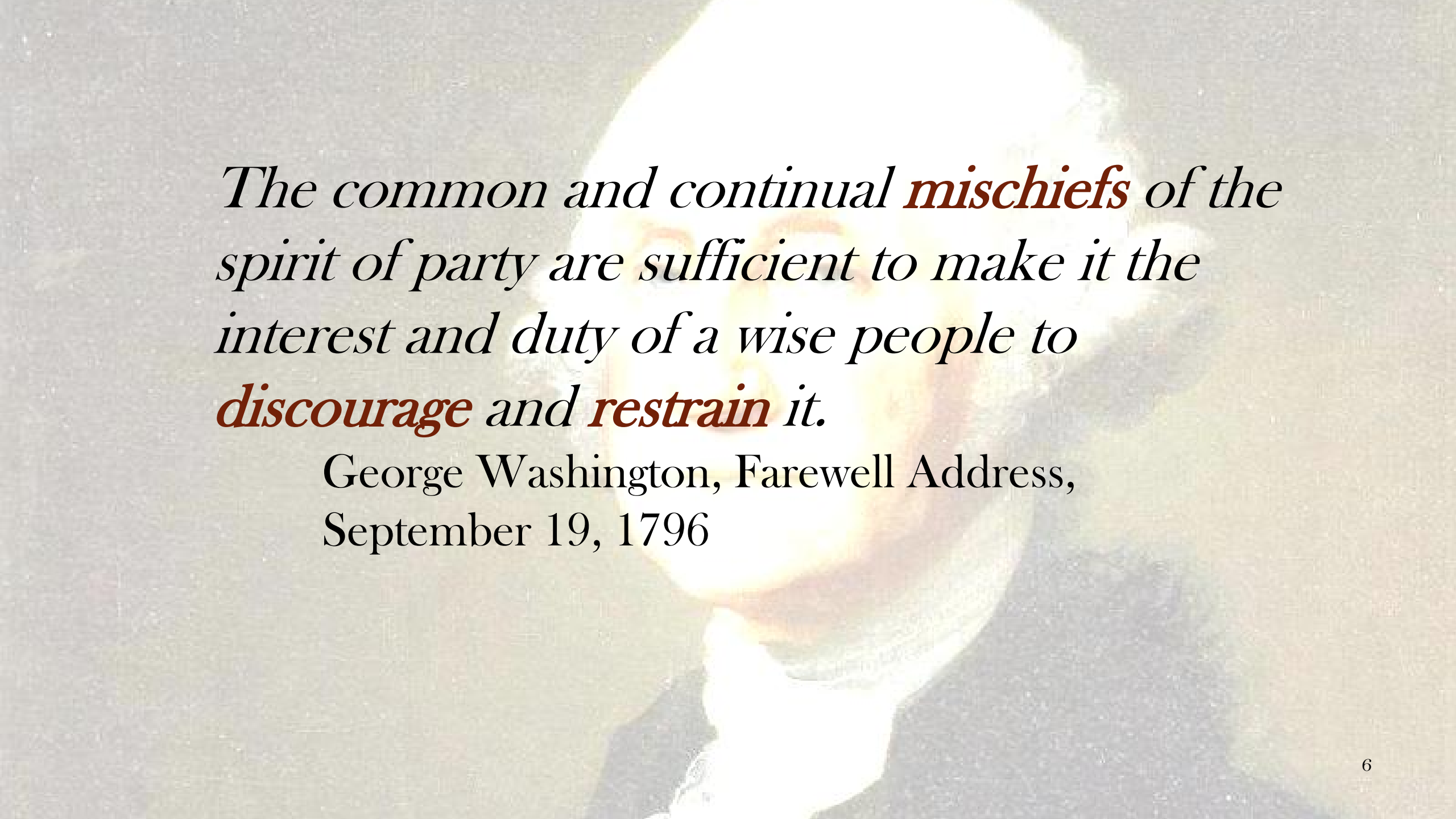
George Washington, Farewell Address,  
September 19, 1796



*The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of **revenge** natural to the spirit of party is itself a **frightful despotism.***

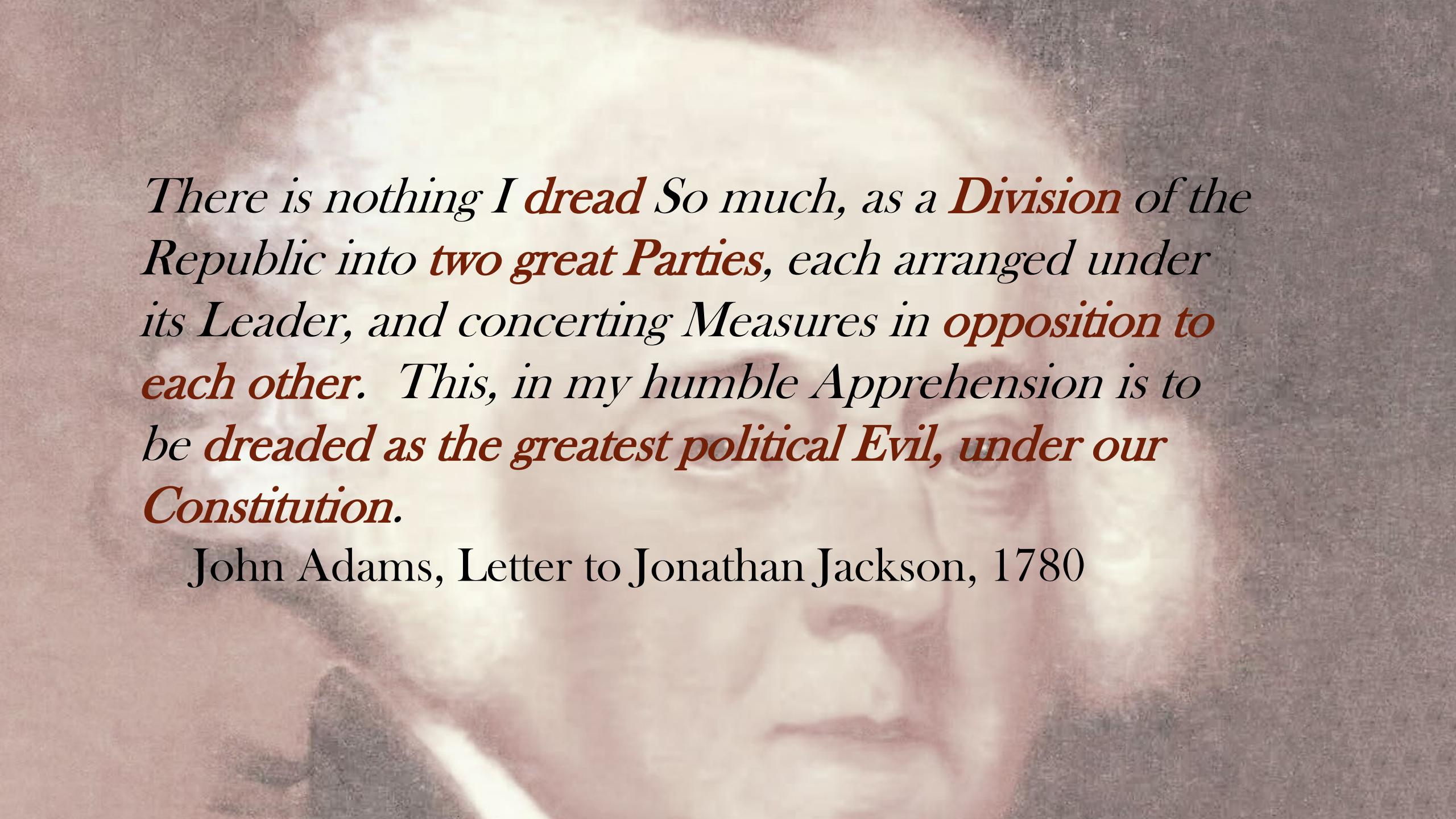
George Washington, Farewell Address,  
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*The common and continual **mischiefs** of the spirit of party are sufficient to make it the interest and duty of a wise people to **discourage** and **restrain** it.*

George Washington, Farewell Address,  
September 19, 1796

A faded, sepia-toned portrait of John Adams, the second President of the United States, serves as the background for the text. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a white cravat and a dark coat, with his right hand raised to his forehead in a thoughtful or distressed gesture.

*There is nothing I dread So much, as a **Division** of the Republic into **two great Parties**, each arranged under its Leader, and concerting Measures in **opposition to each other**. This, in my humble Apprehension is to be **dreaded as the greatest political Evil, under our Constitution**.*

John Adams, Letter to Jonathan Jackson, 1780

*I never submitted the whole system of my opinions to the creed of **any party** of men... where I was capable of **thinking for myself**. Such an addiction is the **last degradation** of a **free and moral agent**. If I could not go to heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all.*

Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Francis Hopkinson,  
1789

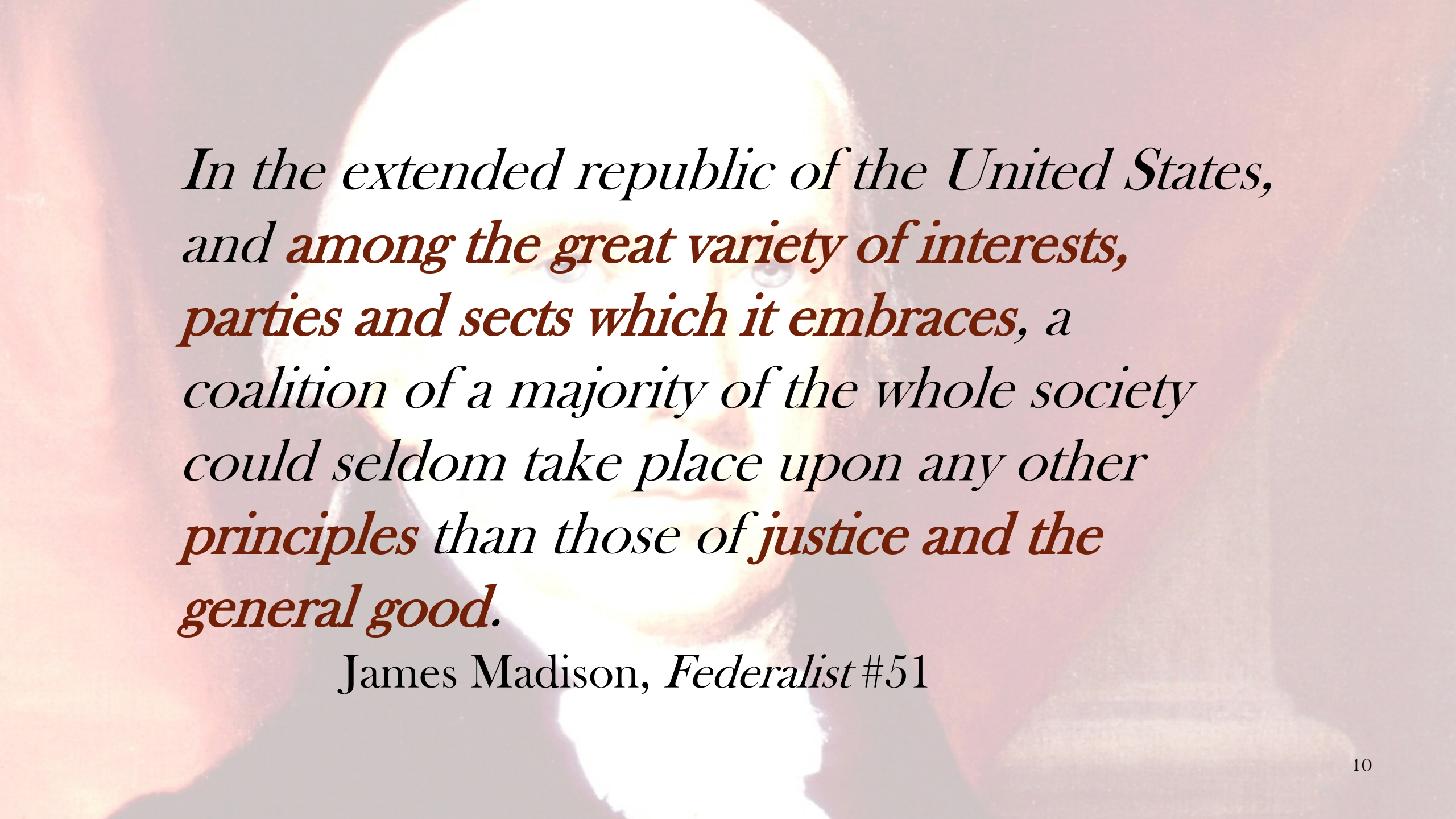




## The Founders' Structural Solution: A Constitution Against Partisan Tyranny

Erect barriers to one party imposing its will on everyone else

- Separation of powers
- Extended republic with a diverse people

A faded, sepia-toned portrait of James Madison, the fourth President of the United States, serves as the background for the text. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark coat and a white cravat. The text is overlaid on the portrait, with some words in a darker brown color for emphasis.

*In the extended republic of the United States,  
and among the great variety of interests,  
parties and sects which it embraces, a  
coalition of a majority of the whole society  
could seldom take place upon any other  
principles than those of justice and the  
general good.*

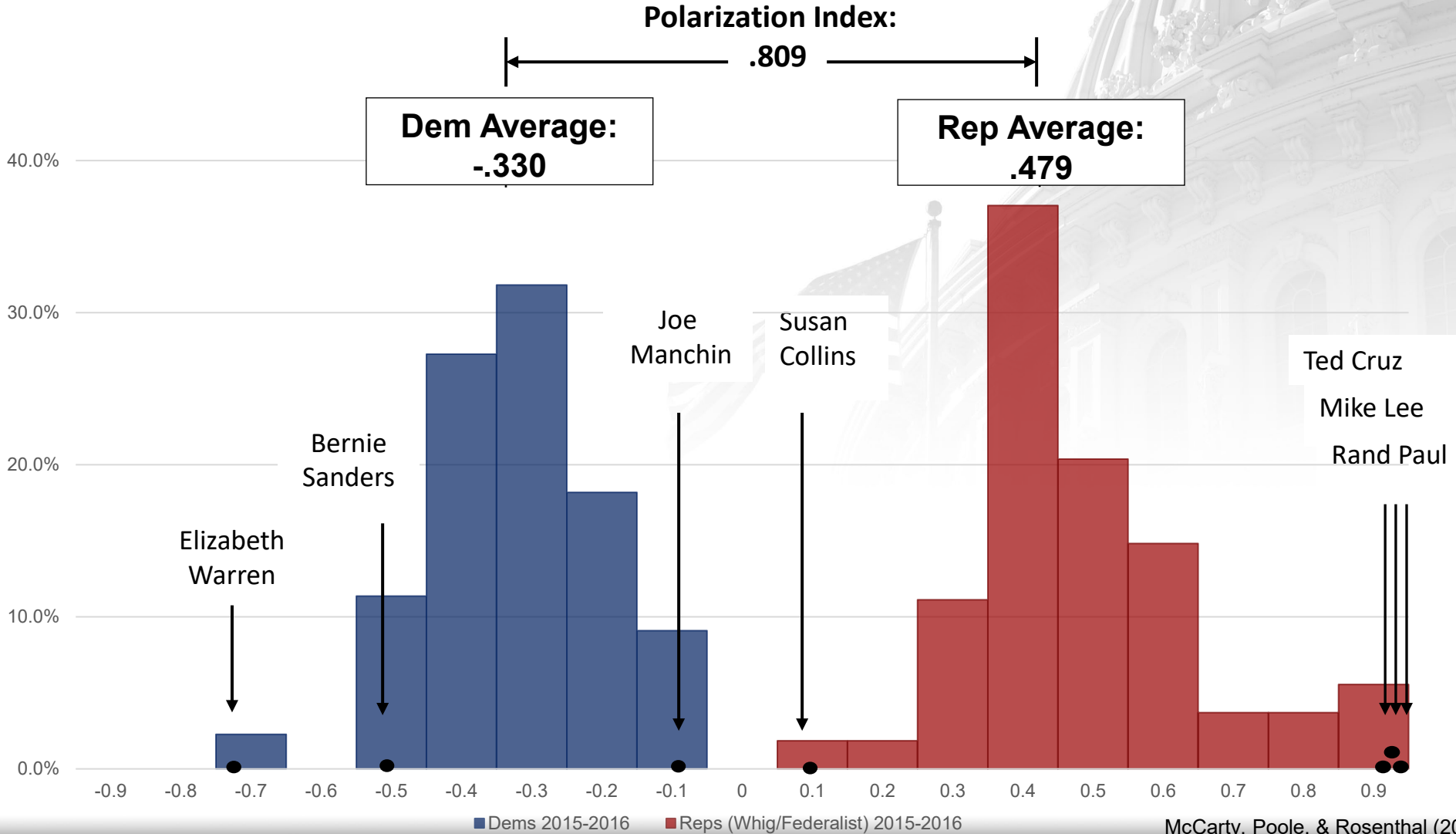
James Madison, *Federalist* #51



# The Commonsense Principle

- **Common sense:** A *sense* held in *common* across the lines that can divide us
- **Broad support like this indicates wisdom at two levels**
  1. Political expedience: Anything else just won't work
    - Otherwise it's partisan tyranny, not government by, for, of the people
  2. Deeper wisdom:
    - Conflicting self interests cancel each other out
    - Must be based on principles of "*justice*" and "*the general good*"

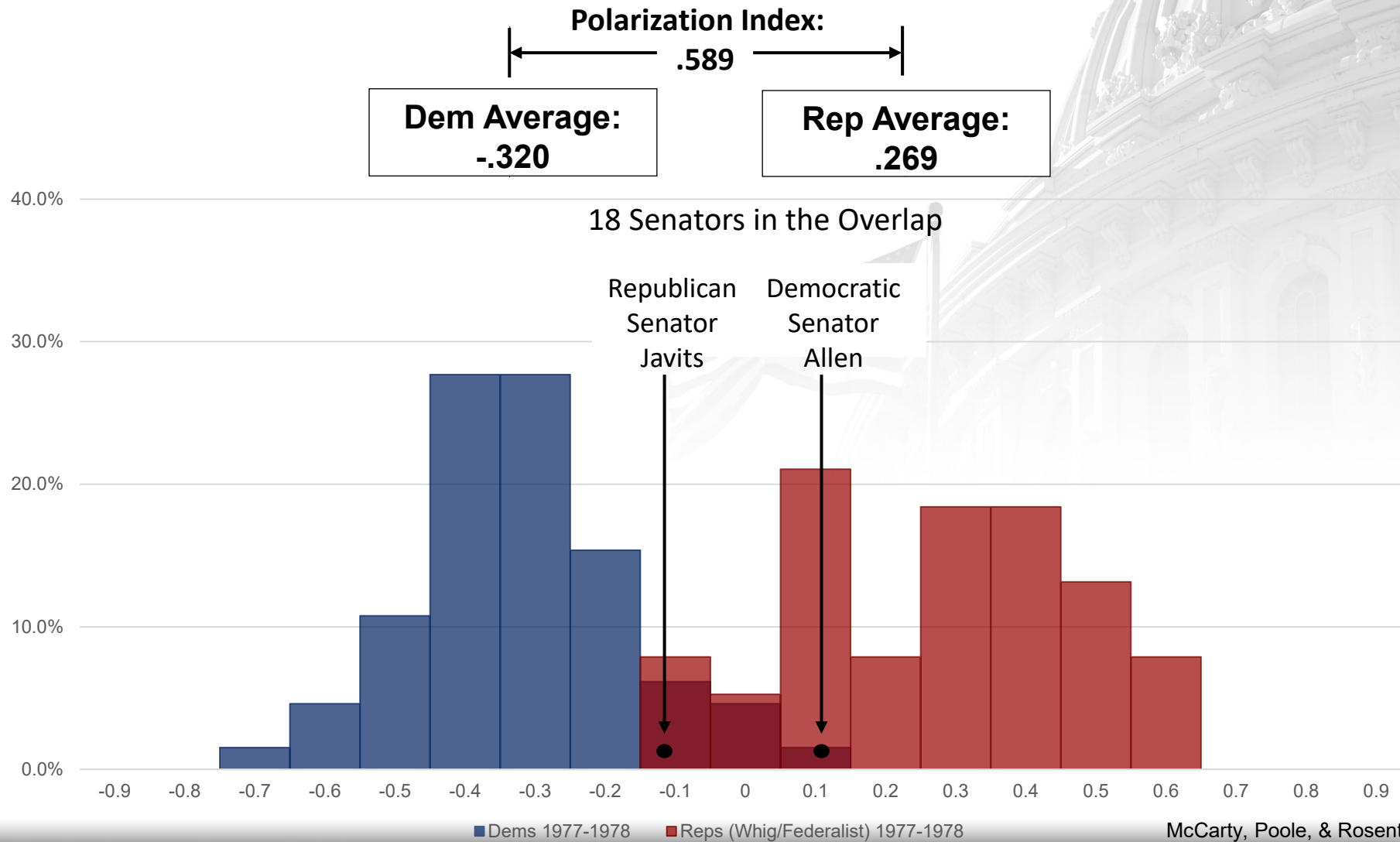
# US Senate Today



McCarthy, Poole, & Rosenthal (2016), *Polarized America*

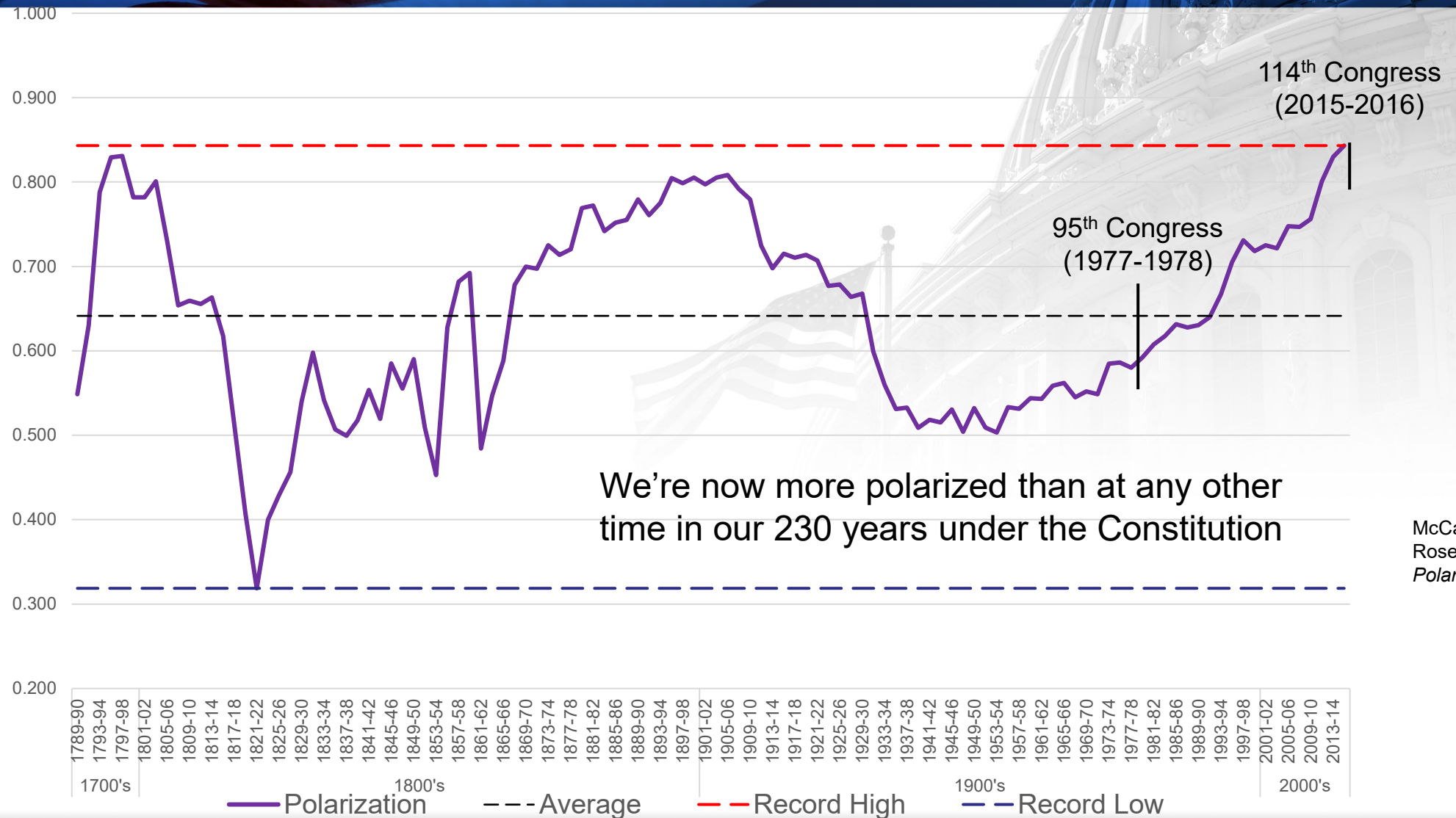


# US Senate 1977-1978



# Record Congressional Polarization

## Polarization Index



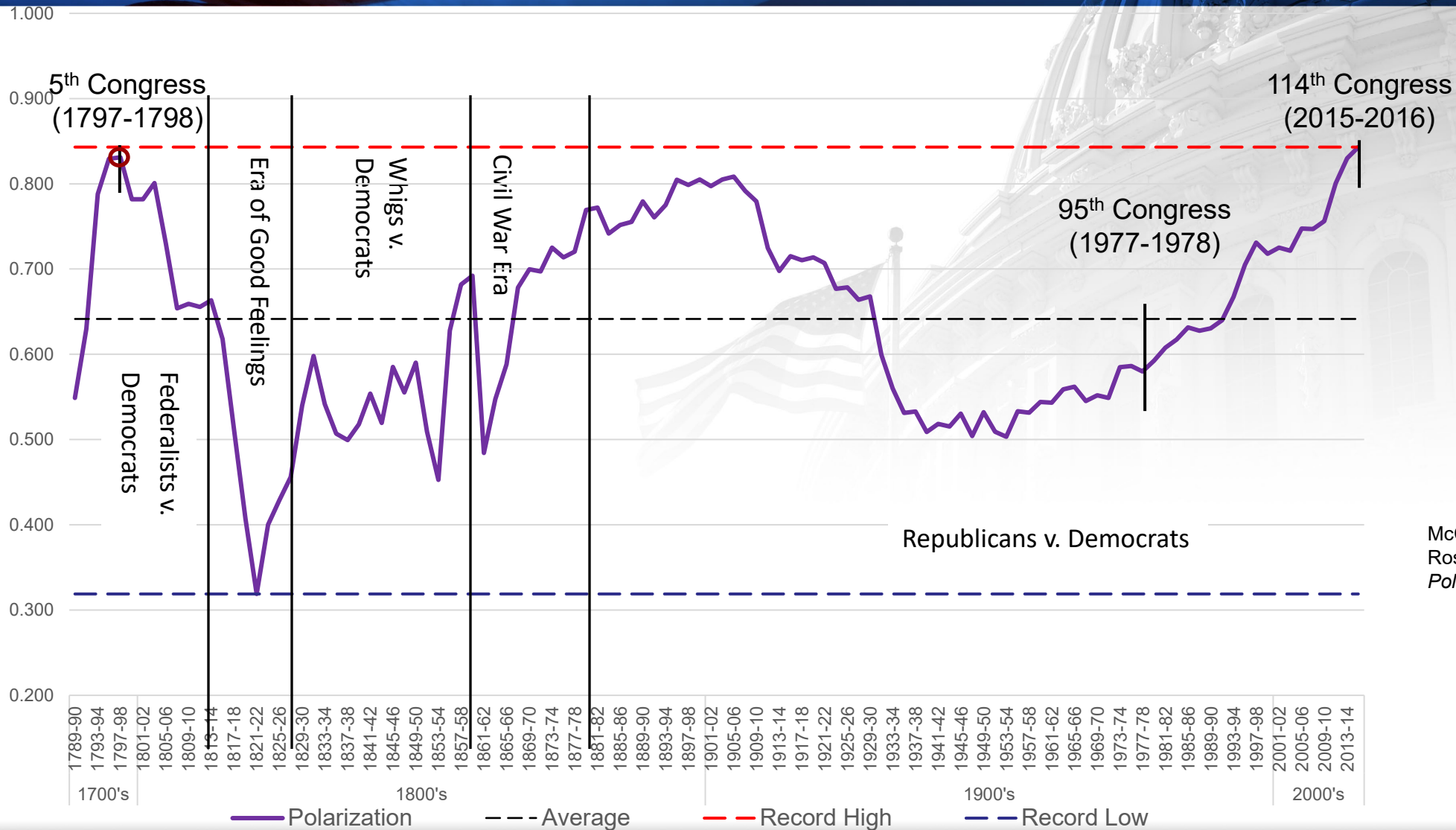
We're now more polarized than at any other time in our 230 years under the Constitution

McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal (2016), *Polarized America*



# Record Congressional Polarization

## Polarization Index



McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal (2016), *Polarized America*

# Important Dimensions of Today's Bitter Partisanship

## TYPE OF POLARIZATION

**Issues Polarization**—Distance between Republicans and Democrats on policy issues

**Social Polarization**—How much animosity each side feels towards the other



# Important Dimensions of Today's Bitter Partisanship

## TYPE OF POLARIZATION

## POLITICAL LEADERS

## POLITICALLY ACTIVE

## CITIZENS

## EVERYDAY AMERICANS

**Issues Polarization**—Distance between Republicans and Democrats on policy issues

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# Important Dimensions of Today's Bitter Partisanship

*We are the most deeply divided along party lines in American history, with one important exception*

TYPE OF POLARIZATION	POLITICAL LEADERS	CITIZENS	
		POLITICALLY ACTIVE	EVERYDAY AMERICANS
<b>Issues Polarization</b> —Distance between Republicans and Democrats on policy issues	Highest ever recorded and rising	Highest ever recorded and rising	<b><i>Low and slowly rising</i></b>
<b>Social Polarization</b> —How much animosity each side feels towards the other	Highest ever recorded and rising	Highest ever recorded and rising	Highest ever recorded and rising

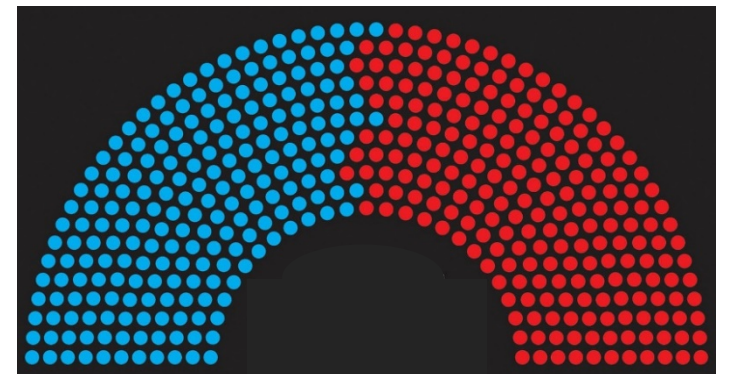


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*We are more evenly divided than almost anytime in American history*



Francis E Lee, *Insecure Majorities* (2016)

# NICD's Principles & Best Practices of Engaging Differences Constructively

## ***Engage the other side dignity and respect***

- Listening
  - For understanding
  - Be able to accurately describe their perspective, whether or not agree with it
  - For the merit not just for weaknesses to exploit
- Empathy
  - Put yourself in their shoes
  - Recognize the other not as a stereotype but as a fellow human and American
- Humility
  - Recognize there might be some sound reasons for their views, not just that they're dumb or immoral
  - Recognize the greater insights that can come from understanding different perspectives



# NICD's Principles & Best Practices of Engaging Differences Constructively

## ***Engage with dignity and respect for your own honest convictions***

- Conscience
  - Respecting a different perspective is not the same as agreeing with it
  - Only by honoring the dictates of your own conscience, can you provide others with the merits of your perspective
- Principled Advocacy
  - Simply accommodating other's views with which we genuinely disagree robs us of rigor needed to achieve wiser decisions
  - The needed rigor comes only when we make our case on the merits
  - Resorting to personal attacks or seizing on trivial missteps or misstatements takes us further from commonsense solutions

# NICD's Principles & Best Practices of Engaging Differences Constructively

## ***Build on Common Ground***

- It's easy to fixate on our differences
- Acknowledge shared values, aspirations, and experience
- Call out points of agreement
- American common ground
  - We've always had our disagreements
  - We've never fully realized our ideals
  - Still, we share a commitment to perfecting the promise of American self-government



# NICD's Principles & Best Practices of Engaging Differences Constructively

- Citizens: Engage the unengaged to identify broadly supported solutions
  - The usual suspects are often more polarized
  - Build on low issues polarization among everyday citizens
  - Provide low barrier, high hope opportunities for engagement

# NICD's CommonSense American Program

- Over 60,000 Americans have committed to spending 60 minutes reviewing a policy brief and before weighing in
- When then engage Congress with the results
- 3-for-3 in championing into law solutions wise enough to attract broad bipartisan support
- **To engage powerfully on issues with other citizens nationally, *please join!***



COMMONSENSE  
AMERICAN

**[CommonSenseAmerican.org](http://CommonSenseAmerican.org)**