Live from Philadelphia
It's the Constitutional Convention

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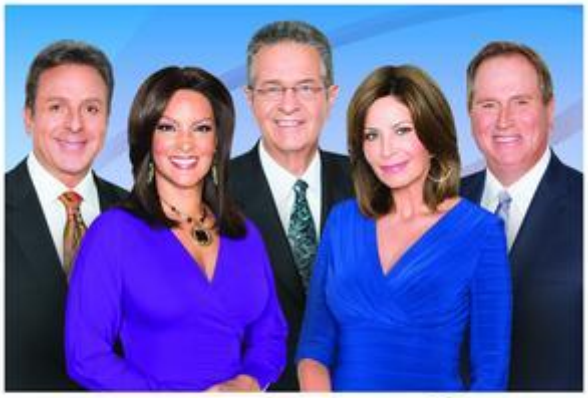
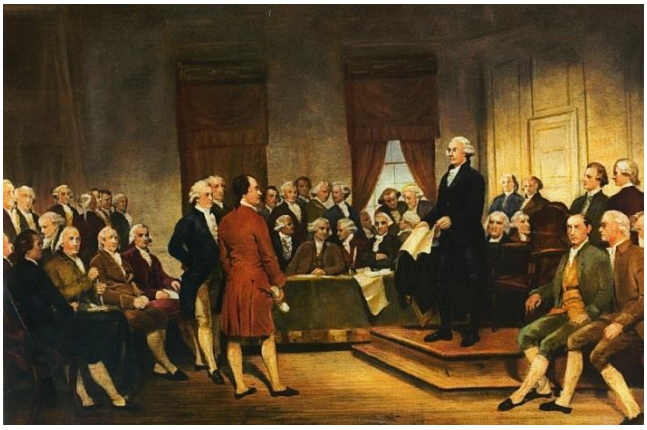


CAST OF CHARACTERS:

The News Team:
Johnny Dimitri, announcer
Jim Brewer, co-anchor
Renata Hernandez, co-anchor
Walter Watt, reporter
Karen Ware, reporter
Nancy Howe, reporter

The Newsmakers:
Louis Montmorin: French Ambassador to America
Lord Carmarthen: British negotiator
John Adams: American Ambassador
Daniel Shays: Massachusetts farmer and leader of the rebellion
William Shepard: militia commander
Robert Freeman: a slave
Joseph Brant: Iroquois Chief
Mary Brant: Iroquois Chief
Patrick Henry: Virginia legislator



Delegates to the Constitutional Convention:
George Washington
Alexander Hamilton
William Paterson
Luther Martin
James Madison

…and now it's time to make history come to life. ACTION!

Johnny Dimitri: Good evening and welcome to *On the Spot*. Tonight we'll be returning to June 1783. The American Revolution is over, but big problems lie ahead for the new country. I will be anchoring tonight's newscast with my co-anchors Jim Brewer and Renata Hernandez.
Jim Brewer: The trouble is with the government. When America declared independence in 1776, it set up a list of guidelines called the Articles of Confederation. The Articles established a weak central government led by the Confederation Congress.

Renata Hernandez: Congress can make war and negotiate with other nations, but that's about it. It can't make laws about taxes, trade or disputes between the states. It also doesn't have the power to enforce any of the laws it might pass.
Jim Brewer: The government is too weak and disorganized to get much done. Some people wonder if it is time to make a change. We turn now to Walter Watt, our government correspondent. Walter, what's the problem with Congress?
Walter Watt: The problem? The problem is I can't find it!
Hernandez: What do you mean you can't find it?
Watt: Someone told me it was in Philadelphia. But when I got there, they told me it had moved. I've been looking for it ever since.
Hernandez: A vanishing Congress?
Watt: Wait a minute. Here comes a fancy gentleman on horseback. He looks lost as well. Excuse me, sir. Who are you?
Louis Montmorin: I am Louis Montmorin, French minister to America.
Watt: Well, sir do you know what happened to Congress?
Montmorin: I do. Some soldiers from your Continental Army did not get their pay. So they marched in on Congress in Philadelphia.
Watt: Did Congress pay them?
Montmorin: Pay them?! Your Congress is broke! Under the Articles of Confederation, your government can't impose taxes. It has no way of raising money.
Watt: Then what did Congress do?
Montmorin: They ran from Philadelphia with – how do you say – their tails between their legs.
Watt: And where did they go?
Montmorin: I am not sure. But the Spanish ambassador told me they fled to Princeton, New Jersey.
Watt: I guess I'll follow you. This is Walter Watt reporting from . . .somewhere in New Jersey.
Brewer: Unfortunately, things don't look much better for America on the international front. We switch ahead two years to 1785 and our London correspondent Karen Ware.
Karen Ware: It's so foggy that nobody has seen me sneak into the negotiating session.
Brewer: What negotiating session?
Ware: The one between John Adams, the American ambassador, and Lord Carmarthen, the British negotiator. Let's listen in.
John Adams: This is absurd. You treat us as if we were still colonies.
Lord Carmarthen: Sir, you colonists – excuse me, I mean you Americans – wanted freedom and now you have it.
Adams: But you sell us your goods and won't buy anything from us, just like in colonial times. Our merchants are going broke and our artisans are out of work.
Carmarthen: But you fought to leave the British empire. Why should we let you sell your goods in our markets?
Adams: Because we let you sell in our country.

Carmarthen: Your Congress doesn't have the power to tax the goods we bring into your country. So we'll keep bringing them in free of charge. But don't get in a snit because my government is powerful enough to tax your goods when you try to sell then in England.
Adams: Well, then, what about your soldiers in the western forts?
Carmarthen: What about them?
Adams: What are they doing in our west? We won the Ohio Valley as a result of the war, but your soldiers have not abandoned their forts. That land is for our people settle and farm.
Carmarthen: I assume that you recall the peace treaty we both signed at the end of the Revolution.
Adams: Of course, I do.
Carmarthen: Then you'll remember that you Americans promised to pay back English citizens for the property you took from them and the money you owe. When you pay as promised, our soldiers will leave and we'll hand over all the land east of the Mississippi River.
Adams: But my government is powerless to make its citizens pay.
Carmarthen: That sir, is your problem, not ours. You Americans must learn that the world is controlled by powerful empires. If you are weak, you will get pushed around.
Ware: It looks as though the Articles are not helping America on this side of the Atlantic, either.
Brewer: Thank you, Karen. Let's jump ahead to January 1786, for an important update.
Hernandez: At least 700 farmers in western Massachusetts are up in arms against the new government. Reporter Nancy Howe is there.
Nancy Howe: I'm outside a jailhouse in Springfield with Daniel Shays, leader of the protest.
Daniel Shays: I don't have much time to chat. In a few minutes, about 1,000 state militia will be coming up the road.
Howe: And so you're protesting?
Shays: You're darn right. We've been stopping the sheriff from arresting people for debt. Uh, oh, here come the troops now. Excuse me.
Howe: Let's see what the other side has to say. Here comes someone official. Excuse me, what's your name?
William Shepard: I am General William Shepard, commander of the Massachusetts militia.
Howe: Why are you here?
Shepard: To crush the rebellion. These people must obey the laws.
Howe: Shays says that the farmers weren't represented when the laws were made.
Shepard: That is not my concern.
Howe: He also says that they have as much right to resist now as they had to fight Britain 10 years ago.
Shepard: Ridiculous! What if everybody decided to protest? Nobody would pay their debts or their taxes and the country would fall apart. Troops, ready, aim, FIRE!
Howe: This looks like a bloody blow to the new republic. Back to you, Renata.

Hernandez: Shay's rebellion has scared many politicians. They are worried that under the Articles, the national government is not strong enough to stop protests. Soon, they say, we'll have anarchy.
Brewer: As you can see, many people think there are plenty of reasons to set up a strong central, or national, government. A convention has been called in Philadelphia for the summer of 1787 to strengthen the Articles. Walter Watt has that story.
Watt: It's hot enough here in Philadelphia to fry an egg on the Liberty Bell and it's even hotter behind these curtains.
Hernandez: Curtains, Walter?
Watt: The curtains in Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence was signed 11 years ago. I'm hiding behind them because this Constitutional Convention is supposed to be secret and I sneaked in.
Hernandez: And what do you see?
Watt: It's a debate hotter than the 4th of July. It took weeks just to decide to throw out the Articles. Now they're discussing how many representatives each state should be given in the new Congress.
George Washington: As chairman of this convention, I call on William Paterson of New Jersey.
William Paterson: If representatives are decided on the basis of state population, big states with large populations will have the most power. Small states like New Jersey won't have a chance to be heard in this new government.
Washington: Mr. James Madison of Virginia would like to speak.
James Madison: Perhaps a compromise can be arranged, with two houses of Congress. One house will have votes fixed by population for the big states and the other house will have two senators each – regardless of population - for the small states.
Watt: Almost everyone is cheering for this solution. Let's skip to another key debate.
Washington: Mr. Alexander Hamilton of New York and Mr. Luther Martin of Maryland would like to speak.
Alexander Hamilton: We need more stability in government. We need a president and congress elected for life.
Luther Martin: No! If the president and congress are elected for life, there will be no checks on their power! We could be stuck with a tyrant like King George again.
Hamilton: As I have said before, democracy is dangerous. The public seldom judges correctly. Give the rich and well-born a permanent share in the government.
Watt: Many people in the crowd are arguing with Hamilton. He's storming out. There is an uproar among the delegates.
Washington: Order! We must get on with our work. Wait! Who's that man behind the curtains?
Watt: I've been discovered.
Washington: Will Mr. Madison and Mr. Martin please escort that intruder out of the hall?
Madison: Come with us, sir.
Watt: Mr. Madison, a few questions please. You argued that the Articles should be thrown out. Why?
Madison: I'm not to talk to you.
Martin: He's just scared to talk because the truth might come out.

Watt: And what's that?
Martin: The truth is that he wants to take power away from the states and give it to the national government.
Watt: Why is that?
Madison: I want America to be strong and to do that we must have a powerful central - federal, I call it - government that can regulate trade, impose taxes, and set up an army and a navy.
Martin: So we'll have our own empire like England, is that it?
Madison: Not at all. It's to protect American interests.
Watt: And what are those?
Madison: Keeping foreign powers out of North American and protecting our foreign and domestic trade.
Martin: Trade, huh! He really just wants to make sure people pay their debts and taxes. After Shay's rebellion, he thinks the states aren't strong enough to keep rebellious citizens in line.
Madison: and what's wrong with people paying their bills?
Martin: Nothing, except that you're giving the government too much power. The states should decide their own fate. Why did we fight against tyranny from London if we're going to replace it with tyranny from Philadelphia?
Watt: I think there's a long, hot summer ahead for these delegates. Back to you, Renata.
Hernandez: We switch ahead now to the fall of 1787. Reporter Nancy Howe is with one man who feels excluded from the Constitution.
Howe: I'm here on the salty seafront of Charleston, South Carolina, with Robert Freeman, a rope maker and a slave, who has just petitioned the state legislature for his freedom.
Robert Freeman: Excuse me, but my name is not yet Freeman. That will be my freedom name.
Howe: I see. What do you think of this new Constitution?
Freeman: From what I've heard, it's not for me.
Howe: Why not?
Freeman: It doesn't outlaw slavery. In fact, it keeps the slave trade open for 20 more years. Also, the slave owners now get to count every five slaves as three people. That means they will get more representatives, more votes and more power in Congress. With that additional power, do you think they'll ever vote to outlaw slavery? Not likely. Of course, we slaves still can't vote.
Howe: I didn't think the Constitution even mentioned slaves.
Freeman: That's because they're embarrassed to have the word in their great freedom document. They call us "other persons"—three-fifths of a person, that is…
Howe: It looks as though the slavery issue is going to be with us for a while. This is Nancy Howe, outside the South Carolina legislature.
Brewer: For another view of the Constitution, we turn to Karen Ware. She's back from London and has live coverage from the Iroquois Indian Council of Elders.
Ware: Chief Joseph Brant is getting up to address the elders.
Joseph Brant: This new Constitution makes whites more powerful than ever before.

Ware: Mary Brant, Joseph's wife and an important chief in her own right, is getting up to speak.
Mary Brant: With the Constitution, whites can build a great army. They have promised us our land for all time, but they will soon be strong enough to take it away from us.
Ware: This is amazing. There weren't any women in Philadelphia - and they sure aren't mentioned in the Constitution - but the Iroquois listen to Mary Brant with respect. It's clear there's not much excitement about the Constitution here. This is Karen Ware, reporting from an Iroquois village near the Mohawk River in New York.
Brewer: Now that the Constitution is finished, 9 of the 13 states must vote to Approve - actually, the word is *ratify* - the document. For an update on how the ratification is going, we turn to Nancy Howe in Williamsburg, Virginia's capital.
Howe: Gentlemen, please, calm down or someone will get hurt.
Brewer: What's going on Nancy?
Howe: I'm trying to keep Patrick Henry and James Madison from letting their fists fly. Henry has called Madison a white-wigged liar.
Patrick Henry: You're darn right he's a liar. He's been using my name to get the Constitution passed here in my native Virginia, but I bitterly oppose Madison and his Federalist friends.
Howe: Why's that?
Henry: Federalists want a strong federal government. I believe the states should have more power than the national government.
Howe: Why is that?
Henry: Because the states are smaller and closer to the people. Folks can participate in the decisions more easily and have more influence.
Madison: Like Shays, I suppose?
Henry: And what's wrong with that? As my friend Thomas Jefferson wrote. "The tree of liberty should be watered with the blood of tyrants." Rebellions keep the government true to the people.
Madison: Rebellions will destroy property and hurt business.
Henry: Your Constitution just lists what the government can do. Whatever happened to the rights of the *individual* - like freedom of speech, the right to a fair trial, freedom of religion? What stops the government from intruding in people's lives?
Madison: Well, some people are calling for a Bill of Rights to be added to the Constitution that would protect individual liberties….But it isn't necessary. The people are already protected by the Constitution as it was originally written.
Henry: Another lie from a blue-blooded, silk-stockinged aristocrat!
Howe: It looks like a close vote here in Virginia. Back to you, Jim.
Brewer: In the summer of 1788, Virginia did vote to ratify the Constitution by a very close vote.
Hernandez: After a big letter writing campaign by the Federalists to convince the people to approve the Constitution, the last big state, New York, ratified the Constitution as well and a new government was born.

Dimitri: In 1789, amid great celebrations, George Washington became the first President of the United States – a position created under the newly ratified Constitution. A few months later, the states also approved the Bill of Rights. It became part of the Constitution in 1791. Oddly enough, James Madison ended up a key advocate of the first 10 amendments that made up the Bill of Rights. He wanted unified support for the Constitution and realized that adding a Bill of Rights was the only way he was going to get it. For *On the Spot,* this is Johnny Dimitri.

--Jim Ciment and J. Kyle