



INTRO

The British have hundreds of warships floating by Staten Island, George Washington and his troops have been routed and chased out of Brooklyn and Manhattan, and soldiers are deserting en masse. Winter comes, and suddenly Washington realizes that many of his men don't even have shoes. After a series of humiliating defeats, Washington is on the run toward Philadelphia, the American capital, with thousands of British and German mercenaries on his tail.

There were some amazingly bleak moments during the American Revolution, during which very few held out hope for victory. But every humiliating defeat was soon followed by a triumph. After Washington was chased out of New York, he was able to sneak across the Delaware River



under the cover of night on Christmas to defeat the British at Trenton. After the winter at Valley Forge, where Washington's men were freezing to death, America signed a treaty of alliance with France, which helped to turn the tide of the war.

As the war raged, America tried to form its first federal government. The first (more or less) leader of that first government was a man named John Hanson. The fact that you've never heard of him probably gives you an idea of how successful that first government was. It totally failed. But as the old saying goes: "If at first you don't succeed ..."

It's the U.S. (Bust the A)

LYRICS

We the People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this constitution for the United States of America.

*It's the U.S., bust that A and come back.
It's the U.S., bust that A and come back.
It's the U.S., bust that A and come back.
We do it like that, we do that.*

Who's that? Working hard baby,
I'm not laid-back.
If you have money, better save that.
British want us to pay tax?
We'll lick your **Stamp Acts**!
We fought the revolution and won.
Time for states to form up like
Megatron. Some like "aww naww."
They liked **states' rights**, it stays nice.
Slave states get to keep their slave life.

Day one, drafted something to form
the nation:

Articles of Confederation.

It didn't have power
like **Masons**, so they're done.

FLOCAB SPITS FACTS LIKE AN ALMANAC

- The U.S. Constitution has 4,440 words, making it the shortest Constitution in the world.
- The U.S. Constitution contains many spelling mistakes, including the glaring misspelling of "Pensylvania" just above the signers' names.
- Patrick Henry declined to attend the convention because he "smelt a rat."
- The original Constitution is secured in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. During the day, the document is displayed in a bulletproof case. At night, the Constitution descends deep into an underground vault, where it is locked behind five-ton doors built to withstand a nuclear explosion.
- At the convention, eighty-one-year-old Benjamin Franklin was too frail to walk. Instead, he had four prisoners from a local jail carry him into Independence Hall each day on a sedan chair.

BREAKDOWN

The Executive (the President):

- commands the armed forces
- approves or vetoes federal bills
- makes foreign treaties
- carries out federal laws
- appoints judges and cabinet members
- can veto laws

The Legislative (Congress, composed of the Senate and the House of Representatives):

- passes laws
- declares war
- can ratify or refuse to ratify treaties and appointments
- can impeach and remove the president or judges
- can override a presidential veto with two-thirds majority

The Judicial (the courts, the highest of which is the Supreme Court):

- interprets and applies the law by trying cases
- can declare laws unconstitutional

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

We fought the revolution and won ...

Even before the Revolutionary War ended with the battle at **Yorktown** and the **Treaty of Paris of 1783**, the United States was trying to form a federal government. During the war, states acted independently, relying on their own governments and constitutions.

Some like "aww nawnw." They liked states' rights, it stays nice ...

Most states were concerned that a federal government could grow too powerful and turn into a tyrannical regime such as that in Britain. Small states were concerned that their voice wouldn't be heard. And slave states were fearful that Northerners would use the federal government to control or even abolish slavery.

Articles of Confederation. It didn't have power ...

The first try at forming a central government was the Articles of Confederation. The Articles established a virtually powerless central government. It had no executive branch, no judicial branch, no power to tax, no power to raise an army, no power to make treaties. It could only request taxes from states, not demand them. The country, meanwhile, was developing a huge wartime debt.

Farmer named Shay rebelled, caused trouble boys ...

A postwar depression made life terrible for many Americans. Farmers across the colonies were beginning to echo the sentiment "the pursuit of happiness idea is great, but I'm starving over here." In 1786 a farmer named



It's the U.S. (Bust the A)

LYRICS continued

It was too weak, like brittle bones
on bubble boys.

Farmer named **Shay rebelled**,
caused trouble boys.

A new **Constitution**,
that's the solution.

If you don't succeed,
you better try again.

*It's the U.S., bust that A and come back.
It's the U.S., bust that A and come back.
It's the U.S., bust that A and come back.
We do it like that, we do it like that.*

Don't put all your eggs in one basket.
Don't spoil your bag
with one bad apple.

Gimme a Break! Gimme a Break!
Break your government up
like a Kit-Kat Bar.

We hit it that far with our
checks and balances:
honestly a bigger deal than
sex and violence is.

Executive is Presidential.

He's essential,
doesn't make laws

just **signs** or **veto**es.

Picks judges like **Sam Alito**.

Legislate law bringing heat though,
represent the people.

Two chambers like a shotty.

Senate kind of uppity, acting haughty.

Daniel Shay led 2,000 armed farmers through western Massachusetts, closing banks and courts. The federal government, however, could do nothing about it. With no army and no policing force, the government had to wait for militias in Massachusetts to suppress the uprising. **Shay's Rebellion** exposed the weakness of the Articles of Confederation.

A new Constitution, that's the solution ...

A convention gathered in 1787 to address the weakness of the Articles of Confederation.

Delegates included some big names: **George Washington, John Jay, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison.**

The first question became whether to try to amend the Articles or whether to trash them and start anew. The delegates decided to draft a new constitution, and the convention became known as the **Constitutional Convention**.

Don't put all your eggs in one basket ...

The issues facing the writers of the Constitution all had to do with power: who has it and who doesn't. Needless to say, everyone wanted it.

The small states were concerned that their voices wouldn't be heard in a legislature, where the number of state representatives was determined by the state's population. New Jersey led this group with the **New Jersey Plan**, in which each state would send the same number of representatives. Big states like Virginia favored the **Virginia Plan**, which argued that the number of representatives in the legislature should be determined by population.

The delegates eventually settled on the **Connecticut Compromise**, which created a **bicameral** (two-chamber) legislature. In the Senate, each state would have two seats. In the House of Representatives, the state's population would determine the number of seats.

PERSPECTIVES

But what if later I want something different?

The United States Constitution isn't a perfect document. It was forged out of political compromises and battles. But its writers were wise enough to realize that they hadn't covered everything and that some things might eventually need to be changed. So they wrote into the Constitution itself a way to change the Constitution. As of today, we have amended the Constitution twenty-seven times.

Other ideas proposed at the Constitutional Convention

There were more than 600 highly contentious votes at the convention. Some of the delegates had conflicting views of the specific makeup of the republic. Alexander Hamilton wanted the president and senators to hold their posts for life. George Mason originally wanted there to be three presidents. One proposal argued that the presidency should be open only to people who were worth \$100,000 or more (a multimillionaire in today's currency).

There was also a fight as to how to officially address the president. One proposal thought he should be addressed as, "His Highness the President of the United States of America and Protector of their Liberties." This was eventually passed over in favor of "President of the United States."

In the end, compromises prevailed. No term limits were set for elected officials (this was changed in the twenty-second constitutional amendment), but the president and congressmen had to run for reelection.

Democracy or Republic?

The terms democracy and republic have been used and abused for centuries. Technically speaking, the United States is a republic because its citizens do not vote directly on bills. Instead, the citizens elect representatives to do it for them. The word democracy doesn't even appear in the Constitution (neither does the word God).

True democracy is typically only found in small villages with "town-hall" meetings that allow everyone an equal vote. Still, many people call the United States a democracy, and many of the so-called republics, like the People's Republic of China, really aren't republics at all.

It's the U.S. (Bust the A)

LYRICS continued

House of Reps is by population.

Big states send a congregation
all across the nation.

Judicial are the judges,
the dudes in robes.

What they wear under there
nobody knows.

It's the U.S., bust that A and come back.

It's the U.S., bust that A and come back.

It's the U.S., bust that A and come back.

We do it like that, we do it like that.

Don't spoil your bag with one bad apple ...

The second big debate was over slaves. The Southern states wanted it all. They certainly weren't going to let slaves vote, but they wanted slaves to count toward their population (so they could send more representatives to the House). Ultimately the delegates agreed on a seemingly random fraction: each slave would be counted as **three-fifths** of a person.

Break your government up like a Kit-Kat Bar ...

To guard against tyranny, the Constitution organized the federal government into three separate branches: **executive**, **legislative**, and **judicial**. The members of each would be chosen in different ways: executive by **Electoral College**, legislative by popular vote, and judicial by executive appointment. Furthermore, each branch would wield different powers.

Checks and balances: honestly a bigger deal than sex and violence is ...

The different powers of each branch were not random. The constitutional delegates gave each branch specific powers and limitations, so that the three would "check" each other. In this case *check* means the same thing it does in the line "you betta check yaself before ya riggid-ywreck yaself." The idea is that the three branches are checking each other's powers, which creates a balanced government.

AMERICA SPEAKS

"Our new Constitution is now established and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes."

—Benjamin Franklin, in a Letter to Jean-Baptiste Leroy (November 13, 1789)