

The Early Republic

Narrator 1-4

George Washington (President)

Henry Knox (Secretary of War)

Alexander Hamilton (Sec of the Treasury)

Thomas Jefferson (Sec. of the State)

Paper-boy (Newspaper seller)

Citizen #1

Citizen #2

Citizen #3

Citizen #4 (woman)

John Adams (Vice President)

Congressman 1

Congressman 2

Congressman 3

Mary (Pennsylvania farmer's wife)

Tom the Tinker (Pennsylvania farmer)

Oliver Miller (Pennsylvania farmer)

☆ACT I: Developing the Early Republic☆

Narrator 1: The Constitution had been ratified. The year is 1789, and George Washington has been unanimously elected as the first President of the United States by the electoral college. He faces many challenges managing the birth of the new nation, and he is nervous and aware that many of his decisions will set precedent for the years to come.

Narrator 2: Washington calls a meeting of some of his top advisors, men he trusts: John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Henry Knox, and Alexander Hamilton are among them.

Washington: (*pacing around his office*): Good evening, gentlemen! Well, here I am. I am about to be the president of these United States. To be honest, this is truly not where I want to be. I'm tired, and wanted to retire to my Virginia farm at Mount Vernon. But tomorrow, I will take the oath of office as the first president of this new country. (*shakes his head*) And I need your help.

Henry Knox (*moving to stand beside George*): Sir, George, it has always been a pleasure to work with you. When I was selling books in Boston, you inspired me to take up the great cause of the American Revolution! It was my honor to serve as a general in your Continental army, and even more of an honor to be your close friend. I will do whatever I can to help.

Alexander Hamilton (*strutting pompously and importantly about the room*): I agree, George. I may not have been born in this great country, but I see its enormous potential. I enjoyed my time in the Continental army as well, and am eager to help you establish yourself as leader of this great nation.

Thomas Jefferson (*rolling his eyes at Hamilton*): Yes George, it has always been my honor and privilege to work with you. Although I am concerned about some of your choices (*looking sideways at Hamilton*) I too would be honored to work with you in whatever capacity you desire.

Narrator 1: Washington, relieved, nods gratefully to the men, and then begins his preparations for his inauguration the following day.

☆ACT II: Launching the New Government April 30, 1789☆

Narrator 2: Early in the morning of April 30th, 1789, Washington takes a few minutes to write in his daily journal:

Washington (*in deep thought, writing*): “About 10 o'clock I bade adieu to Mount Vernon, to private life, and to domestic felicity, and with a mind oppressed with more anxious and painful sensations than I have words to express, set out for New York in company with Mr. Thompson, and Colonel Humphries, with the best dispositions to render service to my country in obedience to its call, but with less hope of answering its expectations.”

Narrator 1: Washington was nervous about his new role as the first leader of the nation, and wasn't entirely certain that he was the best man for the job. Later that day....

Paper boy (*waving papers and shouting*): Special today! Special Today! Get the American Daily Advertiser! Read all about it! George Washington takes his oath of office as president of the United States!

Citizen #1 (*eagerly*): I heard that his inauguration was today, and that he planned to address both houses of the new Congress. Does it say anything in your papers about that?

Paper boy (*waving a paper at the man*): Mister, I don't get paid to read 'em, I get paid to sell 'em. Would you like a paper or not?

Citizen #1: (*rolling his eyes and handing the boy a shilling*) yes, I'll take a copy. (*waving the paper at the boy*) Well, see here! It turns out that Washington did address the Congress, and he was so nervous, he was actually shaking as he requested that they “work with him to put in place the wise measures on which the success of the government must depend!”

Citizen #2: (*coming over to look at the paper*) Well, I had my doubts about a general as our first president, but maybe this will all work out for the best after all....

☆ACT III: The Title Debate☆

Narrator 3: We now join Washington in the Senate Chamber, shortly after the inauguration, with his new cabinet members, a few members of Congress, and his vice president, John Adams.

Washington (*addressing his VP*): John, I am so nervous! Congress seemed so divided today! Some seem to want a strong government, other seems very concerned about limiting the power of the government. With all of this arguing, I had no idea that we'd even have to argue over titles! Who cares what I am to be called?

John Adams: (*nodding seriously*) Well, sir, in Europe, many nation-heads are known as “Your Excellency.” That seems an appropriate title. Many of the Congress, who would like to see a title that re-enforces your power, would agree.

Washington (*blushing*): I don't know, it sounds a bit too much like royalty to me. The people will not be at all agreeable to anything that sounds too kingly.

John Adams (*shaking his head*): I disagree, George, you want a title that demands respect!

Congressman 1 (*angrily*): Sounds like royalty? With all due respect, sir, it STINKS of royalty! A title such as that has no place in a democracy!

Congressman 2 (*laughing*) I agree. It sounds a bit too “strong government” for my taste. However, I propose that we should call Adams “His Rotundity”....he needs to lay off the cornbread....

John Adams (*blushing and turning to the congressman angrily*), I never have been so insulted....who do you think you are?

Congressmen 2 (*nodding and smiling still*) All right, all right, easy John. Let’s get back to the matter at hand....what should we call Mr. Washington?

Washington (*pacing the room and looking out the window*): If President of the country is what I am to be, why not call me, “Mr. President”? I like it. It is simple and not obnoxious. In fact, I think it is what I prefer.

Narrator 4: In the end, it was decided to call the President “Mr. President”, as Washington wished. It was a name that would stick for every president that came after him, and established his first precedent, or standard, for all future presidents of America.

☆ACT IV: Setting up the Executive branch☆

Narrator 3: No sooner had Washington been given a title than Congress turned to the important task of creating executive departments. Much as Washington feared, arguments broke out almost immediately over what those departments should be, and what powers they should have.

Washington (*loudly*) Gentlemen of Congress! I would like to propose three departments that I believe to be essential to the proper operation of this nation, and I have in mind the men that I believe can do an excellent job for each of them.

Congressman 3 (*muttering under his breath*) Well, here we go with big government. Let’s hear what he has to say....

Washington (*nodding his head to Congress, and then looking at his friend, Henry Knox.*) Henry, it would be a great honor to me if you would put your expertise to serving in my cabinet at the nation’s first Secretary of War. I need a man of military experience in that role. We will need this department to defend the nation.

Henry Knox (*bowing*): I can think of no greater honor, Mr. President. I humbly accept, and will do my best.

Washington (*nodding and motioning to Alexander Hamilton*): And Alexander, you were such a tremendous aide as my personal assistant during the war. As one of New York’s richest and most powerful families, I can think of no one better to manage the country’s finances; and I would be honored to have you serve the post of Secretary of the Treasury.

Alexander Hamilton: Mr. President, thank you, I believe you have chosen the perfect man for the job. I agree that I can think of no one better!

Washington: (*nodding*): Also, I need someone diplomatic and fair-minded to manage my relationships with other nations. (*pointing to Thomas Jefferson*) Jefferson, I would like to appoint you to be my Secretary of State.

Thomas Jefferson (*throwing a disgusted look at Hamilton*) Mr. President, I humbly and graciously accept, and will do my best.

Congressman 3: Wait! Mr. President, I believe it would also be wise to establish a position for someone to serve as your legal advisor.....an attorney general perhaps?

Washington (*nodding*) Good thinking. I will need someone to give me legal advice as the president. I know just the man....get in touch with Edmund Randolph and see if he will accept the job.

Narrator 4: And so it was that Washington's first cabinet had been appointed. Henry Knox would serve as Secretary of War, Alexander Hamilton, as Secretary of the Treasury, and Thomas Jefferson, as Secretary of the State. Edmund Randolph accepted the job as first Attorney General, and Washington also appointed Sam Osgood to first Postmaster General under the Constitution as well. It looked like the new nation was well under way!

Narrator 3: But there was a big problem that the new government had to face right away. Because of its debts from the American Revolution, it had very little money, and Congress wasn't quite sure what to do about it.

☆ACT V: The Whiskey Rebellion☆

Alexander Hamilton (*muttering to Jefferson*). Money! Money! Money! Did you know the national treasury is practically empty? What has Congress been doing, if they haven't been raising taxes? How am I supposed to be in charge of the treasury if there's no money to be in charge of?

Jefferson (*sighing*): Congress has been arguing, that's what they've been doing. That's all Congress ever does, it seems. What to tax, how much to tax, and who to tax?

Hamilton (*nodding, and looking frustrated*) They're idiots. All they do is argue. What to tax? I'll tell them what to tax! Let them tax luxury goods...the carriages that stroll through the streets, and the whiskey and liquor of all those drunken farmers out in the Appalachian mountains!

Jefferson (*looking angry*) That's not fair, Hamilton. Not all of the farmers are drunk! And if you try to tax that western whiskey, you'll be in for trouble, I guarantee it. Most of those farmers only make that whiskey because they can't afford to ship their wheat to sell here in the east!

Narrator 1: Hamilton wouldn't give up on his idea. He convinced Congress to pass an excise tax (a tax on the production or sale of a product) on whiskey in 1791. When the news spread to the west of the Appalachian Mountains, Jefferson's prediction came true...

Mary (*running with the newspaper out into the fields*) Tom! Tom! I was in town this morning to buy some new cloth for Margaret's Sunday dress, and everyone was gathered around the paper boy. I had to see what the fuss was about, so I bought one. (*handing the paper to Tom*)

Tom: (*taking the paper from his wife*) What are you yelling about, woman? Let me see. (*He takes the paper and flips it open to the front page, reading quickly*) Land sakes! This is unbelievable! What are they trying to do, destroy the western settlements before they've truly begun?

Mary: (*looking nervous*) What is it Tom? What is it? What do you mean, destroy us? What does it say?

Narrator 2: From across the road, Tom's neighbor, Oliver Miller, comes over to see what the shouting was all about.

Oliver (*tipping his hat to Mary*): What's the trouble, Tom? Ma'am?

Tom (*angrily*): Them boys in government are going to destroy us with theses new taxes! Have you seen this?

Oliver (*taking the paper from Henry*): It says here they're going to be putting a tax on luxury goods. (*shrugging his shoulders and laughing*) Ain't no problem for us, Tom, we don't have any luxuries!

Tom (*angrily*) Luxury goods? You arse! They're not just talking about big-city carriages, Oliver. They're talking about whiskey! Our whiskey!

Oliver: (*alarmed*) Whiskey? They aren't going to bother taxing us on whiskey.

Tom (*pointing to the paper*) Oh yes they are! As it is, it's too expensive to haul our grain across the mountains! The only way I can make that grain worth anything is to distill it all into whiskey.....whiskey's much cheaper to ship than all this bulky grain.

Oliver (*nodding angrily*) This tax will make the whiskey as expensive as grain to ship to the east. Didn't we just fight a war against unreasonable taxes? This is an outrage!

Mary: (*looking nervous*) What are you going to do, Tom? If our whiskey is too expensive because of a new tax, no one will buy it! How will we afford the cattle? The chickens? And what about the fabric I planned to buy for my new dress?

Oliver: (*looking determined*) I'll tell you what we'll do...we won't pay their taxes, that's what! Why, this is exactly what they tried to do to Daniel Shay up there in Massachusetts just 8 years ago!

Tom (*storming away toward the road*) I don't know what to do, but I know I didn't lose our boy to the War of Independence just to turn around a pay another set of ridiculous and unreasonable taxes. It's the Stamp Act all over again! Someone is going to pay for this, and it's not going to be us!

Narrator 3: Many of the farmers west of the Appalachian mountains reacted the same as Tom and Oliver. They decided to protest Congress' new tax, and refused to pay it. The farmers in Western Pennsylvania were particularly annoyed, and gathered as groups of "Whiskey boys" who threatened, and sometimes tarred and feathered the tax collectors who attempted to collect the taxes.

Narrator 4: As word of the rebellion spread across the frontier, a whole series of loosely organized resistance measures were taken, including robbing the mail, stopping court proceedings, and the threat of an assault on Pittsburgh. One group of farmers, disguised as women, assaulted a tax collector, cropped his hair, coated him with tar and feathers, and stole his horse.

Narrator 1: When word of this “Whiskey Rebellion” got back to the president, he was angry, and vowed to do something to squash the protests quickly. Back at the capital, Jefferson, Hamilton, and Washington gathered to discuss their options.

Hamilton (*speaking urgently to Washington*) This is absurd! These are a bunch of farmers that we’re letting push us around? These are men with pitchforks and cows! How dare they threaten the authority of Congress? We need to do something, swift and firm!

Jefferson (*looking angrily at Hamilton*) I think you forget, Alexander, that we were not all fortunate in our upbringing as you were. These are simple farmers just trying to earn their living in an honest way. You do nothing for your cause by insulting them.

Washington (*nodding to both men*) You both make good points, but what can I do? It’s not as if I can send the militia after them, they’re American citizens!

Hamilton (*smacking his fist into his palm*) that’s exactly what we need to do! Send 13,000 troops across the mountains, George, and we’ll crush this rebellion before it begins!

Jefferson (*looking horrified and urgently at the President*) Mr. President, that’s the worst advice I’ve ever heard! These aren’t rebels, they are simple farmers! Sending a force of that size to collect a few taxes would be foolish, and violating people’s liberties by using armed forces to put down opposition to the government won’t send a very good message to our new country.

Hamilton (*scowling at Jefferson and rolling his eyes*) Don’t listen to him, George! He’s always been soft when it comes to dealing with the little man! Send these forces and let’s crush these rebels!

Narrator 2: Hamilton ended up convincing Washington to send the troops. Washington himself led the army, and they crossed the mountains swiftly with 12,950 men. When the rebel farmers were confronted with such an overwhelming force, the rebellion quickly melted away.

Narrator 1: It was a significant moment. It was the first time that the government had used military forces to exert its authority over the American citizens.

☆ACT VI: The French Revolution☆

Narrator 3: While our new government was taking shape, people in America were caught up in the news of other governments experiencing the same struggles for independence that we had fought for so recently.

Narrator 4: The news reached America that the French had stormed the Bastille (the royal authority of Paris) on July 14, 1789, that they had rebelled against their king, and that the leaders of this “French Revolution” dreamed of building a new nation based on Liberty, Equality, and fraternity (brotherhood). The French were on the verge of declaring a war of all people against all kings.

Paper boy (*shaking papers on the sidewalk*) Read all about it! Get the Gazette! News here! The French have rebelled against their king and are calling for a new republic!

Citizen #2 (*purchasing a paper*) This is excellent! The more rebellions of this kind, the better! Freedom, liberty, and equality...the ideas are spreading!

Citizen #3 (*nodding in agreement*) Yes, it is wonderful. I wonder what Washington and his fellows are thinking about all of this?

Paper boy: (*nodding seriously*) Well sir, if Washington has anything to say, I’m sure we’ll all hear about it!

Narrator 2: Washington did not want to get involved in any fighting that was happening in France. He worried that the new American nation was still too weak and unstable to fight with or against any foreign powers.

Narrator 3: Jefferson was especially supportive of the cause of the French Revolution. He saw it as a great crusade for democracy, and the public who felt as Jefferson did began to call themselves the Democratic-Republicans, sometimes shortened simply to “Republicans.” They were thrilled by the French Revolution.

Narrator 4: Hamilton, who generally favored the rich and powerful, was not as supportive. He and his supporters, called Federalists, were horrified by the bloodshed and violence of the French Revolution. They did not approve when the angry French mobs cheered the lopping off of the heads of wealthy nobles, and began to fear that something similar could happen in America.

Narrator 1: The conflict in France began to set up a new conflict at home: political parties; with a division between the Republicans and the Federalists. And it was coming time for the end of Washington’s first term as president.

☆ACT VII: Washington's Farwell Address☆

Jefferson (*pleading with Washington*) George, you can't leave office now! You are the only person who can keep the nation from pulling apart!

Hamilton (*nodding*) As much as I hate to admit it, Jefferson's right, Mr. President. The nation is looking to you to unite us!

Narrator 2: Washington was so concerned, that as it came for his four year term in office to end, he reconsidered retirement and decided to stay on for four more years. But he was exhausted, and longed to return home to his farm at Mount Vernon, Virginia, and resume his farming life.

Narrator 3: The French Revolution was under way. The United States had close ties with France as a result of the Revolutionary War, but now France threatened to drag America into war. Washington still did not want to get the country involved.

Narrator 4: Near the end of his second term, Washington set another precedent, and announced that he would not run again. Before leaving, he prepared a farewell address, or message, to the American people.

Paper boy (*shouting*): Read all about it! Washington's farewell address! His final words to the nation before he returns to Virginia! Get your copy now!

Citizen #3 (*handing over a shilling and reaching for a paper*): I'll take a copy of that, son.

Citizen #4: (*curiously*) What does it say, James? Read it aloud so everyone can hear!

Citizen # 3: (*loudly*) "To the people of the United States. I would like to remind the country of the experiences that bind us together as a nation. With slight shades of difference, you have the same religion, manners, habits, and political principles. You have, in a common cause, fought and triumphed together! However, I see a serious threat to the future of our nation. The spirit of the "party" is a threat! It is natural for people to hold different opinions, but I am warning you now, Republicans and Federalists alike, of the danger of passionate loyalties to any one party.

Citizen # 4 (*under her breath*) Too late now, Mr. President. The Federalists and the Republicans don't show much sign of backing down.

Citizen #3 (*continues*) "If fighting between the parties is not controlled, it could tear our young nation apart!"

Narrator 3: Despite Washington's warning, it did not stop the rise of political parties in the new nation. The Federalists, supported by Alexander Hamilton, and the Republicans, supported by Thomas Jefferson, would remain divided on the best form of government, the ideal form of economy, relationships with foreign nations, and their views of human nature.

Narrator 4: But Washington had steered his country safely through some quarrelsome times in his presidency, and when he retired to his quiet life of farming at Mount Vernon, he was confident that he had left the presidency with the nation united, and at peace.