The Revolution: Becoming A Nation Transcript

00:00
previously on the revolution
00:02
Washington's troops needed their French
00:04
allies to defeat Cornwallis at Yorktown
00:06
General Rochambeau the French commander
00:09
suggests a long-range siege of Cannon
00:12
and water it's important to remember
00:13
that France is in this conflict not to
00:15
secure American independence Frances in
00:17
this conflict to humiliate the British
00:19
Empire I have the mortification to
00:22
inform your excellency that I have been
00:24
forced to surrender the troops under my
00:26
command General Charles Cornwallis
00:29
Cornwallis is so humiliated by the
00:32
defeat that he cannot surrender in
00:34
person to George Washington for the
00:37
Americans certainly a euphoric feelings
00:39
of victory now though the more difficult
00:42
task of building the nation begins
00:58
October 1781 tench Tillman George
01:03
Washington's aide rides non-stop for
four days and nights to bring glorious
news from Yorktown Virginia to the
Continental Congress in Philadelphia
the Americans have decimated Britain's
southern army and forced the surrender
of its best General Charles Cornwallis
this was a huge victory over 7,000
people taken prisoner there are great
celebrations illuminations he called
fireworks ringing bells and so on but
the joy in Philadelphia is anything but
unanimous loyalists face a different
kind of illumination they would not have
imagined this house to be illuminated
last night but it was a mob surrounded
it broke the shutters and the glass of
the windows and were coming in it was
the most alarming scene I ever remember
Anna Rahl loyalist daughter Paris
November 19th
a month later as fast as 18th century
news can travel a midnight message is
delivered to Benjamin Franklin with the
news of Yorktown Franklin has been in
France for five years to secure and hold
on to French support at long last
victory and peace may be at hand
Londyn six days later ironically the
British are the last to know
Prime Minister Lord Frederick North gets
the dreadful news by way of a French
source my god he cries it's all over
the new stuns England the last anyone
had heard Cornwallis one of Britain's
most able generals had marched his army
from Charleston to Virginia uncontested
there's been no warning that such a
profound defeat was even possible
capture of Cornwallis comes as a nasty
shock
Britain's not supposed to lose it's not
supposed to lose to its own people to
tell colonists King George the third has
no intention of surrendering any part of
his empire he prepares a speech to steal
the spine of Parliament the late
misfortune calls loudly for your firm
concurrence and assistance I have no
doubt but that by the support of my
Parliament by the valour of my fleets
and armies and by a United exertion of
my people I shall be enabled to restore
the blessing of a safe and honorable
peace to all my dominions King George
the third in New York
Britain's man in charge of the American
War is still General Henry Clinton
his failure to reinforce Cornwallis at
Yorktown has made his troubled command
unbearable I am fairly worn out for
God's sake let me return to my little
family while I have something of life
left General Henry Clinton Henry Clinton
makes a willing and ready scapegoat for
this debacle
he has very few friends legions of
enemies so back in England immediately
there are renewed calls to bring this
war at least against the Americans to a
speedy conclusion while London weighs
its next move it orders Clinton to
maintain all positions on the Atlantic
seaboard the British still have 12,000
troops in New York 5,000 in Charleston
South Carolina and over a thousand in
Savannah Georgia
the Brittain still has substantial
forces in North America so no one is
under any illusion that the war is over
up in New Windsor New York Continental
commander George Washington has brought
his 10,000 man army 60 miles up the
Hudson River from New York to contain
Clinton and his army Washington's troops
may be savoring their victory at
Yorktown but the general himself is not
yet ready to celebrate because there is
this exuberant feeling of victory that
the Americans have won this great
victory a lot of the American soldiers
at this point are acclaimed to hang them
up and head back home and return to the
business of peace but the war is not yet
over and Washington recognizes this
yorktown didn't end it the British and
the loyalists in the Carolinas and in
Georgia wouldn't lay their arms down
once again it falls to Rhode Island
general Nathanael Greene
Washington's second-in-command to
continue his guerrilla war in the south
with only a thousand men Greene cannot
hope to capture Charleston or Savannah
but he relentlessly attacks British
outposts in the Carolina and Georgia
backwoods forcing British soldiers back
to the cities
Green and his men never let up on the
enemy and some of the bitterest fighting
of the entire war
the fighting in the backcountry is continuing there's fighting on the frontier and then skirmishing in other places there are more American deaths at the end of the war and at the beginning the war is not necessarily over London February 1782 the war in North America may not be over but it has grown increasingly unpopular with England's people and politicians the feeling among almost everything is her loss has been captured this war has been expensive it's been ruinous in terms of loss of men it's drawn us into a fight where we have no friends no allies in Europe or anywhere else Parliament's war opponents are determined to quit North America they introduce a motion that the war in America be brought to a close initially the motion is defeated by one vote but in a revote three days later
it carries by 19 effectively ousting Lord North and his pro war regime. The king is furious. Now with the opposition in power he must agree to end the war despite his firm belief that an independent America will weaken perhaps destroy his empire. He even contemplates resigning as Parliament sets about the complex business of obtaining a workable peace. By spring the major conflict moves from the battlefields in America to the peace table in France. Will Britain recognize American independence? What will the French demand for their contribution to the war? The future of America now rests on the shoulders of a negotiating team headed by the wise and cunning Benjamin Franklin. The six months of limbo after the American victory at Yorktown is starting to break. Parliament has
voted to end the war in America and
forced out its prime minister Lord North
in New York a worn-out General Henry
Clinton gets his wish and is relieved of
his command he has been fighting this
war nearly from the beginning from
Bunker Hill in 1775 to Yorktown
for the last four years Clinton has
served as commander-in-chief his
greatest moment was capturing Charleston
in 1780 but he exits America forever
tarnished by the catastrophic failure at
Yorktown Clinton's replacement Sir Guy
Carleton the former Governor General of
Canada is charged with ending
hostilities and withdrawing British
troops George Washington ever where he
keeps his army alert and ready for any
British action from the former
infatuation duplicity and perverse
system of British policy I am induced to
doubt everything to suspect everything
General George Washington in Paris peace negotiations begins somewhat tentatively in April the Continental Congress has instructed the venerable Benjamin Franklin to sort through the many political agendas of the French British Spanish and Dutch whose recognition America will need to secure its independence Franklin is the one sitting in Paris when the peace feelers are first put forward so it's his job to begin to separate the valid ones from the sort of less serious ones to finally figure out which embassy is really barring negotiating power which is not as easy as it sounds but he holds this whole mess of peace feelers in place until he's joined in Paris by John J and ultimately by John Adams John Adams is currently in the Netherlands seeking Dutch recognition of the United States and is soon to join Franklin at the
Paris peace table

37 year old John Jay a lawyer from New York and a former president of Continental Congress is the youngest member of the American Peace Commission and plans to arrive in Paris by June for now Franklin is on his own just the way he likes it but Britain wanted out of negotiations more than anything else is to separate the United States from France because a persistent French US alliance would be a horrific prospect which is exactly what France is hoping for France has a great stake in the outcome Franklin's ally French foreign minister colt diversion persuaded his king Louis XVI to declare war on Britain his perennial enemy since joining the war in 1778 France has thrown its army and navy into the fight and has lent the
Americans 31 million dollars
version is anxious for a satisfying payoff to his investment American independence that will decimate England's wealth trade and power the Continental Congress has ordered Franklin to operate under the guidance and instructions of the French Court over the next several months in Paris and Versailles the old chess master takes care with every move Franklin knew that the cardinal rule of diplomacy was never to speak once you absolutely had to the patience of an old man coupled with the fact that he's naturally taciturn makes him enormously shrewd diplomat innumerable issues need to be ironed out with the British the big one of course is independence but there are other crucial items for both sides terms of trade fishing rights off the coast of Canada and on the Mississippi
River payment of pre-war debts who owns what north american territory outside the previous colonial borders but no issue is more sensitive than the fate of the americans who sided with the British the loyalists there was a great sense of obligation to the American loyalists and there was a sense that having expended so much effort and drawn the loyalists into public professions of allegiance Britons couldn't simply abandon their flesh and blood this way they have to be evacuated because they fought on the wrong side they see no life left for them who knows the river land is going to be confiscated probably they may well be killed for fighting on the wrong side July 1780 to Savannah Georgia with hostilities brought to a halt by the peace talks the exodus begins for those no longer welcome Sir Guy Carleton Britain's commander-in-chief orders the
14:41 evacuation of Savannah
14:43 as a thousand British troops sailed for
14:46 New York to join the main army 2,500
14:49 white loyalists and 5,000 black slaves
14:51 who joined the British set sail for
14:54 British controlled territory in Florida
14:56 and the West Indies a month later in
15:00 Charleston South Carolina
15:02 the British post a general notice
15:04 promising transport out for those who
15:06 cast their lot with the crown
15:10 by the end of the year Charleston will
15:12 see 126 ships carry nearly 12,000 people
15:16 white and black to Florida the West
15:19 Indies New York and England whatever
15:23 their uncertain future
15:24 they are almost certain to fare better
15:26 than the loyalists who stay behind
15:30 October 1782 John Adams finally arrives
15:35 in Paris
15:36 a commercial treaty with the Dutch in
15:38 hand the peace talks begin in earnest
Franklin has prepared the ground for the younger more aggressive Adams and John Jay to take over the reins with their wildly different personalities. These three make a brilliant though less than harmonious team. Adams mistrusts Franklin's reserve, which he interprets as devious and Adams' intensity rubs everyone the wrong way. Jay insists that American independence be a non-negotiable precondition to any serious talks. I think the United States were fortunate in having negotiators who had spent a fair amount of time in Europe, who were the intellectual peers of the men that they would be dealing with and were unusually sly and wily. Jay and Adams trust no one to look after United States interests, including their French allies. Defying Congress's orders, they cut the French out of the process and deal only with
the British in the end the 3 men worked quite brilliantly together and pull off terms that are so extravagantly great for America that essentially the French will be reeling how did these babes in the woods manage to pull this off the French to put it mildly are outraged without them the revolution would have surely failed yet these upstarts have dared to exclude them we have essentially violated our contract with the French and the French feel understandably cheated produced those treacherous Americans we knew we couldn't trust them in the first place it becomes Franklin's job to not only repair the insult but to extract yet another loan from Francis depleted Treasury he goes off to see the French Foreign Minister the count de Valjean and says to him two things first of all were babes in the woods we made a
mistake we didn't know how to do this properly which of course was completely the opposite of the truth and secondly the British really would like to divide us they love the idea that they've divided us let's not give them that satisfaction he does that masterfully as only Franklin could have he's extremely subtle and Belgian is dumb struck by the speech but really can't do anything about it and essentially jumps on board on November 30th the British signed a tentative agreement that for the first time acknowledges the former colonies as the United States of America almost all of its provisions prove favorable to the Americans Britain will recognize the thirteen free and sovereign states the states get guaranteed fishing rights off of Newfoundland the western boundary of the United States will be defined by the
Mississippi River with navigation and fishing rights shared by America and Britain but not France or Spain. The provisional treaty is sent back to America for approval. Parliament hoped to make a generous peace that would create goodwill in the United States and the United States emerge from the peace conference with far more than they could have had right to expect. But even among the winners of this generous piece there are losers many Americans will soon find out they have been left out as the war with Britain draws to a close. Discontent within the new nation threatens its very survival. Winter 1783 a year and a half after the climactic Battle of Yorktown General George Washington is still waiting for an end to the war. A provisional treaty has been signed; hostilities have all but ceased, but an official peace is not yet
declared with too much time on their hands and nothing to do but drill discontent Fester's at the New Windsor New York encampment mutiny is once again in the air the officers of the Continental Army were extremely frustrated peace negotiations were dragging on Congress had promised them officers pensions years ago they had still not approved that there was months of back pay their old that had not been collected they were enraged though they're on the verge of going home furious officers threatened not to disarm until Congress honors its financial obligations to its fighting men it was not outside the realm of feasibility that the army might have in fact marched on Philadelphia and tried to depose the government March 15th
Newburgh New York hundreds of officers assemble at a meeting hall near the camp. A coup against Congress is becoming a serious threat. They gather in the hall, which is an airing of grievances. It’s pretty obvious that they’re going to dig and decide the march on Congress force. The end now Washington has a dilemma. He’s the commander of the army and has to defend Congress against his own men. How can he do that? They’re mad at him, he hasn’t helped them in this. He said he would and nothing has happened. He told them that things take time. The wheels of Congress moved slowly, they didn’t want to hear that so they’re angry all of a sudden. As the meeting starts, the commander chief arrives alone. He walks to the front of the wall and makes a speech. As our have never left your side.
moment as I have been the constant companion and witness of your de-stresses it can scarcely be supposed at this late stage of war that I am indifferent to its interests this dreadful alternative of either deserting our country in the extremists hour of her distress or turning our arms against it has something shocking to it that humanity revolts at the idea my god he says wonderful things but a speech goes over like lead then he says he's going to read a letter from a member of Congress to add to what he has to say he picks up the letter he can't read the letter he takes out his glasses and he tells the men that I've got to read this letter with my glasses because like you in addition to growing gray I have gone blind in the service to my country this add lip line that he didn't intend to say hits these men like a punch to the
stomach and then all of a sudden these tough hard soldiers they begin to weep uncontrollably this admiration for the commander he never took a vacation he's been at the front lines being shot at like us he's held us together for eight years everywhere we've been he's been with us there's this unbelievable connection between the officers and him that was the end of the rebellion there was no rebellion I think that moment in 1783 is one of the great moments in American history and Washington at his finest it was a moment of real danger Americans had always suspected a standing army suspected what it might do suspected that it might actually take power and this is the moment where it might actually have occurred a month later in April Congress receives England's official declaration to end
all hostilities one after another the European countries have recognized the United States of America as a sovereign nation by June most of the Continental Army disbands in Washington awaits the peaceful evacuation of Britain's last stronghold New York City New York has become the last safe place for loyalists as the British military prepares to leave the city is overrun by thousands of black and white refugees who desperately need to get out some 100,000 blacks who had thrown in their lot with the British had been offered protection now the question is will the British make good on their promise Washington was demanding at the British restore slaves to their masters and so there was a lot of concern but by and large the British didn't do that by and large the former slaves left America with the British the fate of the slaves
who escaped is mixed we know that 3,000 went from New York up to Canada a few hundred went to England lots of them were sent to the Bahamas and other places as slaves and some were returned forcibly by the fall the Treaty of Paris is signed in November the last of the British soldiers leave New York after seven long years General George Washington with what remains of his army returns triumphant to New York City the scene of his most humiliating defeat one eyewitness observes the troops that marched in were ill clad and weather-beaten and made a four lone appearance but then they were our troops and as I looked at them and thought upon all they had done for us my heart my eyes were full and I admired and glory in them the more Americans can finally celebrate after a
war that's inflicted 25,000 military deaths 1% of the US population the people are ready to leave war behind and look to the future everyone realizes that something momentous has happened but the joy will be short-lived the war is at an end but the American Revolution is far from over we've only seen the first act the political and social sorting out was far from over the revolution second act will be every bit as perilous for the new nation as the first the wars aftermath is about to bring the fragile alliance of States dangerously close to disintegration the Continental Congress December 23rd 1783 having now finished the work aside me I retire from the great theater of action and bidding an affectionate farewell to this august body under whose orders I have so long acted I here offer
my commission and take my leave of all
the employment of public life George
Washington
at this moment if he wanted to George
Washington could rule the new United
States but he walks away
he submits $100,000 for expenses asks no
payment for his services and he goes
home to Mount Vernon
George Washington's decision startled
everyone what happens in revolutions is
that the head of the Revolutionary Army
that wins takes over you become a king
or a dictator for life
you take over you know leave and go home
he never really thought about it was
time to go and he went the war is
finally over the British and their
loyalists both white and black are gone
the American army has for the most part
disbanded but many in America will soon
realize that the long-awaited peace is
anything but for American Indians the revolution was a disaster they were on the losing side and the British walked away for the Indian allies the same American weapons the same American officers the same American enlisted men in many cases turned their guns west against the Native Americans and a long war of national expansion into the West occurred but it's not just the Indians who suffer Gaul the end of the war brings political and economic chaos fear and anger spread through all 13 states at every level people are tired out the economy was in shambles there was no currency at the end of the war it had lost all its value there's serious economic problems the new United States is really a very fragile country a lot of their leaders are very worried exactly how they're going to keep this
group of states together is always a question
the only thing binding the states into a union are the Articles of Confederation
a very weak compact that assigns joint policymaking power to the Continental Congress the Congress cannot however regulate trade levy taxes or issue currency the Articles were drafted at the same time as the Declaration of Independence in 1776 but it took five years for the fiercely independent states to agree to even this feeble central authority government under the Articles of Confederation failed badly there was no central chief executive Congress had no power to tax there were rebellions against Authority the revolution that started over British taxes has ended up with new conflicts over state taxes returning veterans are losing their farms to bankers and tax
collectors
this is not what they fought for and
many are ready to take action
take the farmer in Massachusetts at the end of the war in a broken economy he can't pay his taxes and the legislature says we can't retire the Revolutionary debt which is huge without imposing taxes so we have a very difficult situation here it leads to Shay's rebellion in 1786 Daniel Shays is a fed-up veteran and farmer from Western Massachusetts in August 1786 he leads 4000 men on an armed insurrection against county and state courts to halt farm foreclosures the same man fought in a Massachusetts line in the revolution are now fighting against their own government they're closing courthouses in September Shay's rebels forced closure of Massachusetts highest court the Supreme Court in Springfield the
Massachusetts governor sends 4400 state militiamen to put down the rebellion. Stephan's soldiers easily route Shay's and his men with cannon fire and grapeshot. Four of Shay's men died but the rebellion has made its point the states are in chaos and they had better unite behind some kind of central government fast as a whole this unit doesn't work yet and if it doesn't find a way to work what's going to be the mechanism that's going to ensure that that independence is preserved and secured we the people of the United States in order to form a more perfect union establish justice ensure domestic tranquility in the coming months fine for the common defense the quest for a more perfect union will begin do ordain and establish this constitution of the United States these are the grand words that will soon
introduce a brand new constitution to
the people of a floundering nation but
finding grand words will be the easy
part the hard part will be coming up
with a compact to satisfy all the
competing interests before the whole
noble experiment falls apart may 17 87
Philadelphia it's now or never for the
anything but United States of America if
they don't come up with a constitution
to establish a functioning central
government the new nation will most
certainly implode the states and 55
delegates to a Constitutional Convention
to repair the woefully inadequate
Articles of Confederation there are all
kinds of questions about what's going to
be the direction for this new nation and
you can't have 13 different answers you
need to have one answer these men are
charged with nothing less than devising
a whole new system of government the one
thing they can agree on is to keep the proceeding secret to ensure candor and allow a full range of argument among the group are both new and old faces including the most revered man in America Washington is the presiding chairman president of the Constitutional Convention his presence is very important for the legitimacy of this new constitution the last thing George Washington wanted to do after eight grueling years of war was leave his beloved Mount Vernon home at 55 he is tempted to rest on his laurels but he is keenly aware that all his efforts could be undone if government doesn't change I think Washington is nervous about what's going to happen to the country if they don't have a new form of government he has a national vision of America that's why he's important to be in that
room there are other visions in the room
Alexander Hamilton from New York is a brilliant 32 year old war veteran and attorney Benjamin Franklin the great negotiator now old frail but ever wise and reliable joins the Pennsylvania delegation among the missing are two of the revolutions most forceful voices John Adams and Thomas Jefferson who are serving as foreign ministers in England and France Adams and Jefferson just I think are frantic with the fact that a new government is being written about and they're not there in their place the man with the plan the Virginia Plan is James Madison a 36 year old career politician from Virginia Madison knew this moment would come and has spent years formulating a new governing structure his Virginia Plan with a foundation as old as the Greeks and as recent as the state's own
constitutions proposes three branches of government an executive a to house legislature and a judiciary with each branch serving as a check on the power of the others throughout the hot summer of 1787 arguments rage about the balance of power between large States and small states between south and north between civilian and military authority was a real concern about democracy run amok there's a real concern about monarchism returning there's a concern about States having too much power is a concern about this new national government having too much power this is really a balancing act to make sure that there is a structure that does not let anyone monopolize power a lot of folks in the country fear a new democratic federal government just as they fear the power of the crown another big issue how are
37:14 you going to represent people you can
37:16 have two houses but do you count the
37:19 small states the same as the big states
37:21 or the big states overwhelm the small
37:23 states how are you going to get around
37:25 that the months we're on and tempers
37:30 wear thin some delegates go home in some
37:33 states threatened to vote I fear worries
37:36 Alexander Hamilton that we shall let
37:39 slip the golden opportunity of rescuing
37:41 the American Empire from disunion
37:43 anarchy and misery but under
37:49 Washington's patient hand the delegates
37:52 stay the course and the long days and
37:54 nights of argument and compromise
37:56 produce a workable draft
37:59 it is only four pages made up of a
38:02 preamble and seven articles that outline
38:05 the structure of a new national
38:07 government article 1 section 1 all
38:11 legislative powers shall be vested in a
38:13 Congress of the United States which
shall consist of a Senate and a House of Representatives you can have two senators from each state and they'll be so where the brains are and representatives in the house of Congress will be apportioned by population and that's where the virtue will lie the sort of sense of what the people want so if you have them both you get the wisdom of the Senate and the virtue of the people article 2 section 1 the executive power shall be vested in a president of the United States of America he shall hold his office during a term of four years and together with a vice president exerts his greatest influence in fashioning the unprecedented role of an elected president after years of wrangling with Continental Congress during the war he knows better than anyone the need for a decisive executive the president will execute the laws of
Congress and as a civilian will act as the commander-in-chief of the national army and navy military tyranny something they're determined to avoid so the respect for civilian Authority is something that plays a large role in the new constitution these first two articles and the third establishing a Supreme Court form the heart of an unprecedented democracy but the document also contains a blatant anomaly slavery slavery was in clear counterpoint to the ideals of the revolution but these guys believed very strongly particularly in the plantation economies that slavery was the basis of their livelihood many of them felt that slavery was wrong those who were dependent upon it could not figure out a way to escape it with the South threatening to secede the delegates agree to continue the importation of slaves for another 20
years another Clause prohibits any state from harboring or freeing escaped slaves from their masters for the purpose of counting population slaves are defined as three-fifths of a person otherwise they are property not people even though slavery was such a hot topic of discussion at the convention the word slave or slavery does not appear in that document at all you will find slavery talked about just not names you know they will use euphemisms like those not free other persons and so on slavery is so interwoven in the economy of the south that they just can't bring themselves to right this wrong they basically postpone the problem to be reckoned with on another day that day became the civil war was a pretty bad day on September 17 1787 39 exhausted delegates signed the finished document the Constitution they have fashioned to
form a more perfect union is an imperfect compromise of visions and few of the signers if any are truly satisfied but with characteristic optimism Benjamin Franklin sets aside his own reservations and fully endorses it I think it will astonish our enemies who are waiting to hear that our states are on the point of separation thus I consent to this Constitution because I expect no better and because I am Not sure that it is not the best two days later the proposed United States Constitution goes into printing born in secrecy it takes the public by complete surprise few expected such a sweeping new form of government but the people will study it and argue it and soon they too will have their say for all the talk about popular sovereignty that had gone on during the war and that's what we were fighting for
what we come to in the end is a small group of people at the top determining what they think the fate of the nation should be and then having to sell it as if a product to the rest it will take nearly a year for the required two-thirds of the states to ratify this Constitution On June 21st 1788 it becomes the law of the land. Washington returns once again to Mount Vernon after the signing of the Constitution hoping to live out his days there but he knows like virtually every other American that when it comes time to elect the first president of the United States it is he who will be called he is the only person that could be the president nobody else could hold the United States together everybody trusted and admired him only he could do this he feels that history is drawing him to
this that is a destiny of some kind in a
time like no other when history has made
men and men have made history no one
more than George Washington has guided
the destiny of America twice he has
taken the stage and twice he has left it
now for the third time his people and
the lure of posterity call him to take
the helm of this new nation and lead it
into its unprecedented and uncertain
future as the United States of America
next time on the revolution Washington
will begin the trek from retirement in
Mount Vernon to New York for his
inauguration as the first president of
the United States of a new America it
isn't that they think he should be
pressing he must be the president his
eight-day ride will take him across many
of the former colonies of America it is
a journey that will have the future
president not only looking ahead but
looking back at what made George Washington the greatest American general