

50 States in 60 Minutes

(excerpt)

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The action picks up with the end of the Revolutionary War....

WOMAN A: So.....now the Americans were free to get on with their lives. For a government, they had their Articles of Confederation, which was sort of like having 13 little countries all living next to each other. Each state was free to make their own laws and print their own money.

MAN A: Pennsylvania! How are you?

WOMAN C: New York! I'm great, how about you?

MAN A: I'm fine, thanks. So, what could I do for you today?

WOMAN C: I need to buy 50 pounds of cotton.

MAN A: Sure, we can do that. That'll be \$25 (*Woman C whips out her roll*) Whoa, wait....is that Pennsylvania money? I'm sorry, I need you to pay me in New York money.

WOMAN C: But I don't have any New York money.

MAN B: (*from Georgia*) Howdy!

MAN A: Ah, Georgia!

MAN B: 'scuse me, but we're having a problem here – those darn pirates boarded one of our ships up here – I need the New York Navy to go out there and get 'em.

MAN A: I'm sorry, but you'll have to send your own Navy. Ours is busy right now.

MAN B: Please? I promise not to borrow them for long.

MAN A: Sorry, no-can-do. You're on your own – that's what the Articles of Confederation say. Good luck!

MAN B: Y'know, this is getting' stupid. We're supposed to be one country, but it's almost like each of us is competing with the other.

WOMAN C: Preach it brother.

MAN B: There's gotta be a better way....

WOMAN B: So they all went back to the drawing board. (*they all start 'mulling'*)

MAN A: Aha, I've got it!

OTHERS: What?! What?!

MAN A: I know how we should do it. Look, what's the thing we fear the most?

WOMAN B: Taxes!

MAN C: The English!

MAN B: (*raises hand*) Fish!

MAN A: What? No. We fear tyranny! (*ahhh, tyranny...*) So to protect ourselves, we'll split the government into three branches, and each each branch will keep the other two from getting too powerful. For example, we'll start with a President to enforce the laws!

OTHERS: (*doubtfully*) yes.....

MAN A: But we'll have a Congress to make the laws!

OTHERS: (*intrigued*) yes.....

MAN A: And we'll have a court system to have final say on whether the laws are fair and constitutional!

OTHERS: (*enthusiastically*) Yes!

WOMAN C: So far, so good. But when they started talking more about the Congress, there was one point in which they couldn't seem to agree.

WOMAN A: New York has more people, we should have more say!

MAN B: (*southern accent*) But Georgia a small state – if you get your way our voices will never be heard!

WOMAN C: And so it went

WOMAN A: More representation!

MAN B: Equal representation!

WOMAN C: Until they finally had the bright idea of a Great Compromise.

MAN A: There will be TWO houses in Congress (*general 'ooooh'...*) – your house (*to Woman A*) will have a number of representatives proportionate to numbers of the people.

MAN B: What does ‘proportionate’ mean?

MAN A: It means that states with more people get more representatives. (*Man B starts to protest*) But there’ll also be a second house, and YOUR house (*to Man B*) will be made up of two Senators from each state, with each state being represented equally. No law can get made unless BOTH houses in Congress agree to it.

MAN B: (*thinking about how to game the system*) Now about that “proportionate” thing, what about our slaves? Don’t they deserve representation too? (*he pulls Man C close to him, buddy buddy – Man C mistakes this to mean that he’ll be liberated soon*)

WOMAN A: (*outraged at his chutzpah*) What?!!!

MAN C: No, don’t worry, it’s cool. (*he still thinks it means he’ll be “a person”*)

MAN A: Hm...well....yes. Yes, they do. Your slaves will each count as 3/5ths of a person.

MAN C: You’re kidding....

MAN B: There you go, you’re represented, now get back to work!

MAN C: But can’t I vote? Can’t I even get 3/5ths of a vote?

MAN A: No, unfortunately you’re a resident, not a citizen.

WOMAN B: How about women?

MAN A: What’s that you say?

WOMAN B: I said, how about us women?

MAN A: Hmm...well let’s ask these guys, what do you think? Should women be allowed to vote? (*work them, they usually say ‘yes’...*) I think I heard “yeah....RIGHT!” Nope, no women voters either.

MAN C: Man, this is gonna have to change some day.

WOMAN B: You got that right.

WOMAN A: Anyway!....The Constitution was adopted, George Washington was elected the first president...

MAN B: I didn't vote for him!

WOMAN C: This again?

WOMAN A: ...and everyone lived happily ever after. *(they all make moves to leave the stage)*...or maybe not. *(they come back)* Ya'know, I'm looking at this Constitution, and realizing that it doesn't really say anything about protecting us from the government!

MAN B: You're right – we need to amend the constitution to protect our rights!

WOMAN C: So the first Congress added ten amendments to the Constitution. These new amendments guaranteed many individual rights, including.....

WOMAN A: Freedom of religion and freedom of the press!

MAN A: The right to keep and bear arms.

MAN C: How about the right to arm bears?

MAN A: Doesn't mention it.

MAN C: Darn!

WOMAN B: Protection from unreasonable search and seizure. *(To Man A)* Hey, what are you doing in my stuff?

MAN A: We're looking for something!

WOMAN B: What are you looking for?

MAN A: We don't know yet – but if we find something bad, boy will YOU be in trouble!

WOMAN B: I got an amendment that says you can't do that. If you think I've done something wrong, you better go get a warrant before you look through my stuff!

MAN B: ..and the right to be protected from cruel or unusual punishment!

MAN C: You've been so bad, we're going to lock you in a room with Snooki and Justin Bieber – and they're feeling talkative today!

MAN B: NO, NO, NOT THAT!!!!

WOMAN C : Together, these first ten amendments were known as

ALL: The Bill of Rights! (*noisemakers, kazoos, etc*)

WOMAN C: And FINALLY – the people were ready to start building their country in earnest.