

The Hanging of George Washington

A Play in Two Acts

by

Joel Goodman

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Open

Act One - Scene One

(Background music - Miles Davis Kind of Blue)

Act One - Scene One

(Production note – each scene will have a flag appropriate for each era flown at the sides of the stage apron)

(James Madison in Colonial garb, enters from stage right, and positions himself just upstage of the apron. The stage lighting is bright, suggestive of Heaven, with clouds and a blue sky as a backdrop. There are several people sitting on benches amidst roman columns and low bushes. The speaker looks to each of them and they acknowledge each

other. He sits slowly, his head somewhat down. He then looks out to the audience and speaks.)

James Madison

Some few of you might think of me as the father of the Constitution; and from a certain vantage I might be seen as such; as I was in many ways its Sheppard. I did work diligently as a Federalist to gain passage of the Constitution, as I felt it was necessary for us. But, many years after the great convention, as the time neared when I would soon be judged by the maker of all things, I came to fear I would be revealed as the agent of a great and heinous treason committed upon my fellow countrymen; to be exposed in the very hue which Mason, Lee, Gerry, Henry - all the Anti-Federalists - had for so long painted me, that for short term political gain, Hamilton, Jay and I, used fancy words and high concepts to disregard the obvious threats to liberty that the great paper contained.

Pitifully, only after the passage of the Constitution did I take serious heed of the potential for great danger that the General Government presented, and then only because the Anti-Federalists had forced my hand, demanding satisfaction of the promise to amend that had been given at the various state conventions. I remember, as if it was yesterday, the eighth of June 1789, the first session of our new Congress. Suddenly realizing my words fell upon many deaf ears, that my planned oration was deficient in persuading those in opposition to amending the Constitution before the Government was fully organized, in desperation I was compelled to acquiesce to what my great rivals had so long proclaimed. With temerity choosing my words, I said 'I conceive that since *all* power is subject to abuse, it was *possible* that the government we had created *might* take advantage of *its* power, and that encroachments by the General Government might be guarded against in a more secure manner than was done'; admitting for the first time that what had been forged in Philadelphia had the potential to evolve into the despotic creature so feared. My rivals, of course, never had hesitated to raise alarm that what had been created was an unbridled national monster. Yet, in that one moment of political honesty, the best *I* could do was to utter that I conceived that 'we could *better secure* the liberties of the people.'

It was only my contrition at the gates that allowed me passage; and while it might appear that my reputation has allowed me to bask for more than two centuries in a most glorious

reward, truth be told, I am in a continual hell of my own making. Thomas was right. Even vile Elbridge Gerry was right. They were all right. I knew in my bosom that I had not tempered with conscience *my* ambition to be right. That I might someday have your forgiveness, is all I seek.

Act One - Scene Two

(The house lights come up partially, and two men come down the aisle and stop aside a patron seated just off the aisle. They show their badges. There is some discussion. The patron gets up and is patted down as he steps out into the aisle. The man is gently, but firmly escorted out. The trio passes two armed men stationed midway down the aisle. The armed men follow the two agents and the detainee out. There are two other armed men on the other side of the lobby door as it opens. The lights dim again.)

Act One - Scene Three

(The scene is 18th Century Charlestown, Massachusetts)

(There is an image of the town powder house projected on an upstage flat or the backstage wall. We hear a voice offstage over the PA system – with a broadcast effect applied to it.)

NPR Anchor

(He speaks with lisp)

And now we hear from NPR's Windy Beardsaby across the bay from Boston, giving us some background on what occurred in Lexington just several days ago. Windy -

Windy Beardsaby

(She speaks in a very NPR young announcer "totally tubular" manner - as if she is speaking to children – emphasizing several words in a sentence, and with a rising lilt at the end of a phrase.)

Steve, thank you. I am in Charlestown, standing, just across the road from the Powder House on Quarry Hill, where several months ago General Gage's troops in a surprise

move confiscated barrels of powder. The current heightened anger against the British may be said to have begun here. Determined not to be surprised again, John Hancock and Samuel Adams worked with the Committee of Safety to set up spy networks to protect military supplies. When Gage ordered his men to seize the munitions at Lexington and Concord, Joseph Warren warned the locals so they could move the ordnance in advance of the raid.

In a moment I will be moving to Lexington Green to meet with a participant of the action at Lexington on 19 April.

(The scene changes to Lexington Green. There is an image of Lexington Green projected on an upstage flat or the backstage wall.)

Windy Beardsaby

I am here with Mr. John Clark, a resident of Woburn who was present during the raid at Lexington on 19 April just several days ago, and ironically while helping his cousin with chores in Charlestown was also present during the earlier September raid at Quarry Hill. Mr. Clark, good morning.

Mr. John Clark

Good morning Mum.

Windy Beardsaby

Why were you in Lexington on the 19th of April? Had you gone to Lexington knowing of the British advance?

Mr. John Clark

Well, no Mum. I'm from up the way a bit towards Woburn, as was Mr. Porter, who was among the unfortunate that day. Them who lined up – most was all related a' each other. We was part of Lexington's "training band - not what was styled a minuteman company. I heard the Lexington bell ring and fearing there was difficulty there, I arose, grabbed my gun and went in haste to Lexington.

Windy Beardsaby

What it was like in Lexington that morning?

Mr. John Clark

I got there before dawn, just before the British come. I positioned myself on the green with the other militia.

Windy Beardsaby

How many British soldiers were there?

Mr. John Clark

I didn't rightly know at the time. But, Captain Parker knew we was outnumbered and told us to keep our muskets down; and not to shoot unless we was shot at.

Windy Beardsaby

Do you know what the British soldiers wanted?

Mr. John Clark

It was clear as dawn what they wanted. What King George's boys in their fancy red coats came out after was to destroy our stores that we had got laid up. Just as I saw 'em do at Quarry Hill. They wanted our guns.

Windy Beardsaby

Could you tell us what occurred? What was it that started the fighting?

Mr. John Clark

It was that Major Pitcarrin who started the whole affair. He stood there and screamed at us, as we stood off the Green - not directly interfering with him or his soldiers. One of his underlings seemed to give him a good deal of palaver that raised the Major's ideas and he vented his gall at him, "Damn them. We will have them," he screamed in this haughty tone that I'll never forget so long as I live.

Windy Beardsaby

You actually heard him?

Mr. John Clark

Mum - King George in London could have heard him. Then he turned to us, and called us common criminals for standing up for our right. 'Ye villains, Ye rebels, disperse,' he yelled. We stood our ground. Parker told us that if they wanted a war, it just as well should start here. When we didn't move, he screamed at us again in that tone of his, 'Damn you disperse. Lay down your arms and disperse.'

Windy Beardsaby

What happened then?

Mr. John Clark

What happened Mum? The bloody King's army started a civil war when they lay into us with musket and bayonet and straightaway killed eight of our good fellows. This was no Boston Massacre or Kent State or Chicago, or Oakland where we just lay back and took it. We was armed and fired as we retired from the green - leaving them something to think about. As I said, we were outnumbered and had a considerable tight scratch with the British. But, Parker kept his head and had us pull back before we all got killed.

Windy Beardsaby

You heard it from one of the participants. The sanguinary measures carried out by the Kings Standing Army started what is already being referred to as the beginning of an American civil war.

NPR Anchor

Windy – This is Steve Inky Dinky Doo – Can you hear me?

Windy Beardsaby

Yes, Steve – I can.

NPR Anchor

Windy, do you believe that the fact that the Colonists were armed caused the initial conflict? Has anyone spoken out about the proliferation of firearms in Massachusetts? Relating the tragic shootings to citizens being armed?

Windy Beardsaby

Steve in fact there are some people asking for some sort of gun control, which they feel would curb the violence. There happens to be a member of a local women's group that is asking for the elimination of guns from the militia groups, Miss Libby Softheart. Miss Softheart can you tell us briefly about what your group stands for?

Libby Softheart

Yes. I can. Thank you for asking me. Well, so – we believe that it is the firearms in the hands of the militia men that has been causing the friction between the British troops and our citizens, especially what happened in Lexington and Concord just several days ago. It was a terrible shooting tragedy that could have been avoided.

Windy Beardsaby

But, Miss Softheart we are told that the British intend to disarm the Colonials.

Libby Softheart

So – yes. That's right. But, if the men would just turn in their guns, then the British would have no need to confiscate them. The problem is the guns. Not the British. The British I am sure would be much more amenable to discussions if the men didn't insist on carrying around their firearms.

Windy Beardsaby

Well Steve Miss Softheart seems to represent a good number of people here in Massachusetts who are opposed to the individual citizen being armed, blaming them for the escalation of violence.

NPR Anchor

Very interesting Sarah, are the British preparing for some sort of action?

(The projected image changes to the campus of Kent State University, Akron. The scene shifts to Stage Right / Down Right Center, the green at Kent State University. Standing there are Minutemen and college students with backpacks.)

Windy Beardsaby

Steve, the soldiers had until now remained outside the campus, but entering and leaving the college has suddenly become quite an ordeal, as the soldiers are searching everybody who enters with a pack on their back. The tension is very discernable, as the college appears to be in a state of siege. In fact I have heard people referring to the situation as the siege of Boston. The students plans appear to be to keep up the protests, and they do not appear to be intimidated by the armed soldiers.

NPR Anchor

What appears to be the situation at this time?

Windy Beardsaby

So, Steve, there appears to be a military action of sorts already underway, with students being stopped and searched.

(Windy Beardsaby broadcast ends.

We hear voices of citizens, soldiers and cops.)

(One of the British soldiers standing by lowers his rifle with bayonet attached.)

Boston Citizen -1

Now just watch where you point that thing no need to come at me, hammer and tongs.

Soldier - 1

(Pointing to college student-1)

Be what it would

Soldier - 1

(Pointing to college student-1)

Let me see what you've got there in your bag.

College student -1

Sure. I don't have anything in it. Just my school stuff. Here. Here it is.

College student -1

(She spills everything out onto the table in front of her.)

Nothing. You see. Nothing.

Boston Citizen -2

What you be after lad? We're only making for home.

College student -1

I'm gonna be late for class if I don't catch the train.

Soldier - 1

Miss, we have a job to do. Please just calm down.

Soldier - 2

Let me see what you've got there.

Boston Citizen -2

Macaroni dandy he is. *(Gesturing to crowd)* There must be some real rebels around here someplace that he can molest in this fashion. I'm sure you have better things to do with your time than examine my grandmother's apple pie.

College student -1

I'm calm. I'm just late.

Soldier - 1

You'll be a lot later if you don't take it easy.

NPR Anchor

Windy – This is Steve Inky Dinky Doo – Can you hear me?

Windy Beardsaby

Yes Steve – I can.

NPR Anchor

Can you elaborate on the situation there?

Windy Beardsaby

Steve there appears to be a growing confrontation between some of the students and the local National Guard. The Guard now appears to be determined to clear the protesters out of the area.

NPR Anchor

Thank you, Windy. Be careful,

Windy Beardsaby

I will. Thank you, This is Windy Beardsaby, on the Campus of Kent State University..

(The lights rise on Stage Left / Up Left Center.)

Major Pitcarin

(Major Pitcairn is posed as if on a horse. He is off to the left side of Center Stage. He calls out in an authoritative voice. Militia men reappear among the crowd.)

Put down your weapons ye rebels, put down your weapons and disperse....

Put down your weapons...

(Guns are aimed at the crowd.)

Boston Citizen -1

Oh my god, no. Please god no.

College student -1

No. No. No.

Boston Citizen -1

Oh my god.

College student -1 / Boston Citizen -2

(Both screams in panic.)

(The soldiers upstage aim their musket fire down stage towards the audience. Several actors on stage fall during the fusillade.

There are British soldiers with gasmasks.

Minutemen appear from the wings stage right. The British open fire and several Militia men and students fall. The militia fire back and then retreat. The college students continue to remain and open their packs to show that they have nothing in the packs.

They are all shot down.)

(There are four actors seated in the audience, unknown to the patrons. When the shooting starts two of the “theater patrons” start screaming in fear. One runs to the aisle and a squib is exploded and blood gushes beneath her shirt. Another actor runs to the fallen actor and is shot in the leg as a squib explodes.

The other two actors also run to the fallen. An actor from the stage rushes to the fallen “patrons.” One yells for a doctor. If no doctor present responds, one of the actors pretends to be a doctor.)

(The house light partially come up.)

(We begin to hear Crosby Stills and Nash's "Ohio" - with additional drumming from a military drummer on stage. Some students are in colonial garb - Kent State image is projected as background.

As audience reacts and there is some confusion because there is a partial belief that people have actually been shot. Soon the play continues on stage – the shot audience members slowly get up and walk onto the stage - and the fallen actors on stage also rise again except for Mary Anne Vecchio who goes to Down Stage Center. Mary Anne screams in fear and anguish and horror.

Photographer John Filo's iconic image of Mary Ann Vecchio kneeling over the body of Jeffrey Miller - is recreated downstage center. The scene ends with Mary Anne screaming as the stage lights go down –the curtain stays open. The recording fades out to the cast singing the song from the wings. The house lights rise partially. The curtain closes.

The house lights remain partially up for a few moments- and then come down.)

Act One - Scene Four

(The two clowns come on stage apron quickly. They are spotlighted with a travel light.)

Clown #1

(To audience)

That was quite a bit having some of you audience people shot. I thought – the whole thing was a cheap shot, if you excuse the pun - it was shameful – scaring you all as if it was happening to you. After all you're just here to see a show and enjoy yourselves - not get involved in all what was happenin'.

Clown #2

(To Clown #1)

You're an ass, a downright ass. These are bright intelligent people here. They came here to be educated not just entertained. They ain't got their heads up their arses like you.

Clown #1

I'm sorry. I guess you're right. I should keep my opinions to myself, I should. I should learn to keep my big trap shut - I should.....

(Clown #1 blinks at audience, and makes silly gestures and blows a long loud "pbbbt" - a "Bronx cheer" aka a "raspberry."

Cymbal and drum roll.)

Clown #2

Arss hole – you're an arss hole.... Always getting involved

(Clown #2 kicks Clown #1)

(The clowns exit)

Act One - Scene Five

(The scene is Down Stage Right Center - St. John's Church, Virginia 1775. The speaking begins as British Parliamentary style heckling diminishes but is still audible. The President bangs his gavel to quiet the assembly, which remains somewhat noisy.)

President

(The President bangs his gavel.)

Gentlemen please, I beg that we be allowed to continue this Second Virginia Convention in tranquility now that we have removed ourselves and are now sufficiently away from interference by Lieutenant-Governor Dunmore; please let us not manufacture more disturbance among ourselves than what might be brought upon this house by an appearance of the Royal Marines. Comportment gentlemen – please.

(Pause – The President bangs his gavel again.)

We have heard Delegate Patrick Henry present resolutions to raise a militia and to put Virginia in a posture of defense....and from Mr. Henry's opponents who have urged caution and patience until the crown replies to Congress' latest petition for reconciliation.

(Pause— The President bangs his gavel again.)

Mr. Henry wishes now to answer his critics. Mr. Henry.

Patrick Henry

Mr. President: This is no time for ceremony. For my own part, I consider it as nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery.

(Heckling)

It is natural to man to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth, and listen to the song of that siren till she transforms us into beasts.

(Heckling)

Are we disposed to be of the number of those who, having eyes, see not, and, having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation? For my part, whatever anguish of spirit it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst, and to provide for it.

(Heckling)

I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided; and that is the lamp of experience.

(Heckling)

Sir, we have done everything that could be done, to avert the storm which is now coming on. There is no longer any room for hope. We must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight! An appeal to arms and to the God of Hosts is all that is left us!

(Heckling)

They tell us, sir, that we are weak. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be when we are totally disarmed, and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house? Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance, by lying supinely on our backs, and hugging the delusive phantom of hope, until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot?

(Heckling)

The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave. Our chains are forged! Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston!

(Heckling)

Gentlemen may cry, Peace, Peace but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take; but as for me, give me liberty

(Patrick Henry raises his hand over his heart as if he has a knife clenched in his fist. He quickly brings his hand to his chest as he speaks.)

– or give me death!

(The crowd yells “Huzzah, Huzzah)

(As scene changes the background music is Lou Reed New York- The time is now.)

Act One - Scene Six

(The lights rise on a courtroom scene upstage center. The Judge reads the sentence A man stands in silhouette with his back to the audience.)

Judge

Colonel Washington since having been arrested during the insurrection at Brooklyn Heights on Long Island, you have been uncooperative with and dismissive of this court, and of the Crown in general; that being your desire, the prosecutor has not seen reason to extend mercy to you; therefore, Colonel Washington, having been found guilty of the crime of treason against the Crown, you will be taken immediately hence to the prison in which you were last confined and from there to a place of execution where, you will be hanged by the neck, drawn and quartered and thereafter your body buried within the precincts of the prison and may the Lord have mercy upon your soul.

(Two clowns arrive on horseback – traditional clown hanging horse costumes. They are followed by several colonial foot soldiers. George Washington is saved.)

Clown #1

We have him. We have saved the General.

Clown #2

He lives to fight another day.

(The group exits the stage.)

(We hear the blare of British bugle horns Then the dominant sound of the French National Anthem played on French Horns. There is the sound of cannon. There is feigned fighting with an imaginary enemy. Ultimately Yankee Doodle is played with fife and drum. We see General Cornwallis and Washington get off their horses. Cornwallis surrenders in front of the battle scene of Yorktown projected on the rear wall.)

Clown #2

We have won the war. Hip Hip Hooray.

(Two clowns exit stage right.)

Act One - Scene Seven

(As scene changes the background music is Leonard Cohen –“I'm your man”.)

(The two clowns quickly return to the stage. They do a bad juggling act – they sing Yankee Doodle – they stop singing after a very short while and speak to the audience.)

Clown #1

(In a British Cockney type of accent)

Had ya' goin' - didn't we?

*(Second Banana / Top Banana Cymbal strike with drum Pa jum boom –
Music changes to Nino Rota music for 8 ½)*

Clown #2

(In a New England accent – to other clown)

Bet ya' thought for a minute the Germans won the war and they were goin' to hang the General - I mean the British won the war. I mean..

(The clown gets from his pocket what appears to be a script.)

Clown #1

You don't know what you mean. You don't even know who the bloody hell was fighting. Ya' bloke – you just don't get it! You are the Germans ya' wanker!

(To audience)

Well, anyhow – That's what would'a happened had the British beaten back the rebels and the French hadn't come to the rescue. We would'a been French fried had the French not come.

(Cymbal strike and drum boom!)

Clown #2

(to audience – makes a grimace)

Ouch!

Clown #1

They would'a drawn and quartered the general himself, they would have, along with all the rest of the rabble rouser colonials that put in with him. Those guys took quite a chance.

Clown #2

Yeah – yeah – yeah. You just wanted to get the audience's attention. *(Looking at book)*
Oh, I see the Americans did win that war. Whaddya' know? I just wasn't very good at history you know. And math too, and really English, that was a pretty big mess for.....

Clown #1

Who the hell did you think you was fighting ya lug?

*(He kicks clown *2 who exits stage – followed by Clown 1 who announces the*

“Second Banana / Top Banana” bad joke rift, aka- shave and a haircut. Dah dah - dah dah - dah dah - dah dah / dah dah - dah dah - dah dah / da da - da da - da daaaah dum - Cymbal strike and drum boom!)

End Act One

Intermission

Act Two

Act Two - Scene One

The lights rise on the Federal Convention. George Washington is standing and is seen partially from the rear, as he faces upstage left

George Washington

Doctor Franklin, I am told you wish to make some final words as we close this great Convention.

Ben Franklin

(Doctor Franklin is helped to his feet, and speaks frailly.).

General – Thank you. I confess that there are several parts of this constitution which I do not at present approve, but I am not sure I shall never approve them: For having lived long, I have experienced many instances of being obliged by better information, or fuller consideration, to change opinions even on important subjects, which I once thought right, but found to be otherwise. It is therefore that the older I grow, the more apt I am to doubt my own judgment, and to pay more respect to the judgment of others. Most men indeed as well as most sects in Religion, think themselves in possession of all truth, and that wherever others differ from them it is so far error.

Few express it so naturally as a certain French lady, who in a dispute with her sister, said I don't know how it happens, Sister but I meet with no body but myself, that's always in the right — Il n'y a que moi qui a toujours raison.

In these sentiments, Sir, I agree to this Constitution with all its faults, if they are such; because I think a general Government necessary for us, and there is no form of Government but what may be a blessing to the people if well administered, and I believe farther that this is likely to be well administered for a course of years, and can only end in Despotism, as other forms have done before it, when the people shall become so corrupted as to need despotic Government, being incapable of any other.

Act Two - Scene Two

(The scene shifts to the Virginia Convention, Monday, June 9, 1788,

There is a table perpendicular to the audience. There are several men seated on both sides of the table in benches. The president is Upstage Stage of the table.)

President - Judge Edmund Pendleton

Mr. Madison, Thank you for your remarks. The chair recognizes Mr. Henry.

Patrick Henry

Mr. President – With all due respect to the accomplished gentlemen from Montpelier, it is obvious that signing a document with a promise of amendments after passage is nothing more than signing a blank document – and, as an attorney I am not in the habit of signing blank documents. Therefore I am constrained to make a few remarks on the absurdity of adopting this system, and relying on the chance of getting it amended afterwards. Does it not insult your judgments to tell you, Adopt first, and then amend! Is your rage for novelty so great, that you are first to sign and seal, and then to retract? You agree to bind yourselves hand and foot — for the sake of what? Of being unbound. You go into a dungeon — for what? To get out. Is there no danger, when you go in, that the bolts of federal authority shall shut you in? Human nature never will part from power. Look for an example of a voluntary relinquishment of power, from one end of the globe to another: you will find none. If gentlemen find peace and rest on their minds, when the relinquishment of our rights is declared to be necessary for the aggrandizement of the government, they are more contented than I am. The great and direct end of government is liberty. Secure our liberty and privileges, and the end of government is answered.

When I rose yesterday to ask a question, I thought the meaning of my interrogation was obvious. The fate of this question and of America may depend on this. Have they said, we, the states? If they had, this would be a confederation. It is otherwise most clearly a consolidated government; we should not have been brought to this alarming transition, from a confederacy to a consolidated government. Here is a resolution as radical as that which separated us from Great Britain.

Liberty, the greatest of all earthly blessing - give us that precious jewel, and you may take every thing else! But I am fearful I have lived long enough to become an old-fashioned fellow. Perhaps an invincible attachment to the dearest rights of man may, in these refined, enlightened days, be deemed old-fashioned; if so, I am contented to be so.

Twenty-three years ago was I supposed a traitor to my country? I was then said to be the bane of sedition, because I supported the rights of my country. May I now be thought suspicious when I say our privileges and rights are in danger.

There are many on the other side, who possibly may have been persuaded to the necessity of these measures, which I conceive to be dangerous to your liberty. Guard with jealous attention the public liberty. Suspect every one who approaches that jewel. Unfortunately, nothing will preserve it but downright force. Whenever you give up that force, you are inevitably ruined.

The Confederation carried us through a long and dangerous war; - and shall a government which has been thus strong and vigorous, be accused of imbecility, and abandoned for want of energy? Consider what you are about to do before you part with the government. There are many instances of the people losing their liberty by their own carelessness and the ambition of a few.

Let my beloved Americans guard against that fatal lethargy that has pervaded the universe.

The honorable gentleman who presides told us that, to prevent abuses in our government, we will assemble in Convention, and punish our servants for abusing the trust reposed in them. O sir, we should have fine times, indeed, if, to punish tyrants, it were only sufficient to assemble the people!

You will find all the strength of this country in the hands of your enemies; Your militia is given up to Congress. And, of what service would militia be to you when, most probably, you will not have a single musket in the state? For, as arms are to be provided by Congress, they may or may not furnish them.

And perhaps I might have been brought to consent to it so far as to the change of government. But there is one thing in it which I never would acquiesce in. I mean, the changing it into a consolidated government, which is so abhorrent to my mind.

When the American spirit was in its youth, the language of America was different: liberty, sir, was then the primary object. But now, sir, the American spirit, assisted by the ropes and chains of consolidation, is about to convert this country into a powerful and mighty empire. If you make the citizens of this country agree to become the subjects of one great consolidated empire of America, your government will not have sufficient energy to keep them together. Such a government is incompatible with the genius of republicanism.

Show me that age and country where the rights and liberties of the people were placed on the sole chance of their rulers being good men, without a consequent loss of liberty! I say that the loss of that dearest privilege has ever followed, with absolute certainty, every such mad attempt.

Act Two - Scene Three

(There is a group of colonial era Americans and a few modern people sitting in a period meeting hall, which is center stage. There is a podium on either side of the stage – each adorned with an oversized seal of the president of the United States.

The two clowns appear on stage. They each grab a costume coat and a partial mask – clown #1 is “dressed” as Lyndon Johnson and clown #2 as George W. Bush. Clown #1 goes to podium stage right. Clown #2 goes to podium stage left. The clowns may choose to do some shtick if they want as each of the presidents deliver their talk.

The “delegates” alternately turn their attention from side to side as each of the presidents speaks.

President Lyndon Baines Johnson

(President Johnson is looking at his appendix scar and describing it as he described it for the television cameras at one time.-

There is booing and hissing from the colonials seated in the meeting house – showing they dislike the showing of the scar. When President Johnson begins to speak they chant “No Scar, No war - No Scar, No war -”)

My fellow Americans: As President and Commander in Chief, it is my duty to the American people to report that renewed hostile actions against United States ships on the high seas in the Gulf of Tonkin have today required me to order the military forces of the United States to take action in reply.

The initial attack on the destroyer 'Maddox, on August 2, was repeated today by a number of hostile vessels attacking two U.S. destroyers with torpedoes. The destroyers and supporting aircraft acted at once on the orders I gave after the initial act of aggression. We believe at least two of the attacking boats were sunk. There were no U.S. losses.

President George Bush

(When President Bush begins to speak they chant “No lies, No war - No lies, No war”)

My fellow citizens, at this hour, American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger.

On my orders, coalition forces have begun striking selected targets of military importance to undermine Saddam Hussein's ability to wage war. These are opening stages of what will be a broad and concerted campaign.

President Lyndon Baines Johnson

The performance of commanders and crews in this engagement is in the highest tradition of the United States Navy. But repeated acts of violence against the Armed Forces of the United States must be met not only with alert defense, but with positive reply. That reply is being given as I speak to you tonight.

President George Bush

To all the men and women of the United States Armed Forces now in the Middle East, the peace of a troubled world and the hopes of an oppressed people now depend on you. That trust is well placed.

The enemies you confront will come to know your skill and bravery. The people you liberate will witness the honorable and decent spirit of the American military. In this conflict, America faces an enemy who has no regard for conventions of war or rules of morality.

President Lyndon Baines Johnson

In the larger sense this new act of aggression, aimed directly at our own forces, again brings home to all of us in the United States the importance of the struggle for peace and security in Southeast Asia. Aggression by terror against the peaceful villagers of South Viet-Nam has now been joined by open aggression on the high seas against the United States of America.

President George Bush

I want Americans and all the world to know that coalition forces will make every effort to spare innocent civilians from harm. We have no ambition in Iraq, except to remove a threat and restore control of that country to its own people. Millions of Americans are praying with you for the safety of your loved ones and for the protection of the innocent. For your sacrifice, you have the gratitude and respect of the American people.

President Lyndon Baines Johnson

The determination of all Americans to carry out our full commitment to the people and to the government of South Viet-Nam will be redoubled by this outrage. Yet our response, for the present, will be limited and fitting. We Americans know, although others appear to forget, the risks of spreading conflict. We still seek no wider war.

President George Bush

Our nation enters this conflict reluctantly -- yet, our purpose is sure. The people of the United States and our friends and allies will not live at the mercy of an outlaw regime

that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder. We will meet that threat now, so that we do not have to meet it later with armies of fire fighters and police and doctors on the streets of our cities. May God bless our country and all who defend her.

Act Two – Scene Four

(The scene shifts to Stage Left. We are in the meeting Hall of the First Congress.)

Speaker Mr. Boudinot

The House is again in a Committee of the Whole to discuss the proposed amendments to the constitution. The fourth proposition being under consideration, as follows:

Article 1. Section 9. Between paragraphs two and three insert no religion shall be established by law, nor shall the equal rights of conscience be infringed.

Speaker Mr. Boudinot

Mr. Gerry.

Elbridge Gerry

I am of the opinion that it would read better if it was, that no religious doctrine shall be established by law.

Speaker Mr. Boudinot

Mr. Sherman.

Mr. Sherman

Mr. Speaker – I think the amendment altogether unnecessary, inasmuch as Congress has no authority whatever delegated to them by the Constitution to make religious establishments; I would, therefore, move to have it struck out. I fear it might be thought to have a tendency to abolish religion altogether.

Speaker Mr. Boudinot

Mr. Carroll.

Mr. (Daniel) Carroll

As the rights of conscience are, in their nature, of peculiar delicacy, and will little bear the gentlest touch of governmental hand; and as many sects have concurred in opinion that they are not well secured under the present constitution, I am much in favor of adopting the words.

Speaker Mr. Boudinot

Mr. Madison.

Mr. Madison

I apprehend the meaning of the words to be, that Congress should not establish a religion, and enforce the legal observation of it by law, nor compel men to worship God in any manner contrary to their conscience. Whether the words are necessary or not, I do not mean to say, but they had been required by some of the State Conventions, who seemed to entertain an opinion that under the clause of the Constitution, which gave power to Congress to make all laws necessary and proper to carry into execution the Constitution, and the laws made under it, enabled them to make laws of such a nature as might infringe the rights of conscience and establish a national religion; to prevent these effects I presume the amendment was intended, and I think it as well expressed as the nature of the language will admit.

And furthermore, I think if the word ***national*** was inserted before religion, it would satisfy the minds of honorable gentlemen. I believe that the people fear one sect might obtain a pre-eminence, or two combine together, and establish a religion to which they would compel others to conform. I think if the word ***national*** was introduced, it would point the amendment directly to the object it was intended to prevent.

Speaker Mr. Boudinot

The chair recognizes Mr. Gerry

Elbridge Gerry

(Elbridge Gerry rises. He is obviously perturbed, and at the same time bemused; but very much in control of his speech as he winds into a point, which he has been waiting to make for some time.)

I do not like the term ***national***, proposed by the gentleman from Virginia, and I hope it will not be adopted by the House. It brings to mind some observations that had taken place in the various state conventions at the time they were considering the present Constitution. Those of us who were called Anti-federalists at that time complained that we had injustice done us by the title, because we were in favor of a Federal Government, and the **others, the Federalists, such as the most honorable gentleman from Virginia**, were in favor of a ***national*** one; the federalists were for ratifying the constitution as it stood, and we, the so-called Anti-federalists – not until amendments were made. Our names then ought not to have been distinguished by federalists and Anti-federalists, but rats and anti-rats.

Act Two - Scene Five

(The scene is the White House circa April 1813. In attendance are James Madison and Elbridge Gerry. Both men, especially Elbridge Gerry, take on the posture of much older, fatigued men)

Elbridge Gerry

Mr. President, I received your note. What is it that concerns you? I pray you are not ill.

James Madison

No. I am fine. I wanted to speak with you Elbridge, on a personal matter of sorts - advice on how to proceed in certain areas of concern. I have been of late perturbed with the course of the state. A growth of the government that I seem unable to reverse, even to retard, the factiousness of each and every debate, pursuit of the war with England that is being thwarted by the Federalists in New England.

Elbridge Gerry

Yes. I am troubled by those in my state who can see little further than the length of their arm holding out their pocketbook towards English trade. I could never have imagined this from some of the very men who stood side by side with those who shed blood fighting the King. Perhaps I have not been so blessed by reaching old age - being here to see these changes.

James Madison

Personally, I am most glad you are here.

Elbridge Gerry

I appreciate your sentiments on my longevity. There are many in New England, I might say, who feel that Aaron should have next turned his pistol upon me, albeit for very different reasons. Still, I may have outlived my time. (There is a pause from both men.) But, to the matter at hand. You were saying?

James Madison

(Madison pauses in reflection for a few moments)

How strange it is to me, that being at the center of the country leaves one feeling so alone. How more strange it is, that of all whom I admire, you who so opposed me in the past, I hold you in the greatest esteem of all. I know that from you I will always receive an honest reply to my inquiry. In my heart I truly hold you as one of the greatest heroes of the American story. *(Madison again pauses in reflection)* There are not many around us today that served in the Continental Congress, and had the privilege to sign the Declaration.

Elbridge Gerry

James, I thank you for the admiration you heap on an old soul, but you are sufficiently astute to know that I will not be remembered as you depict me. Oh yes, my signature on the Declaration puts me in a certain admirable light, but when I was later in attendance at the Federal Convention, as you well know, I refused to sign because it did not contain a Bill of Rights. I am more proud of that, and that I added my voice in Massachusetts and in the Congress to secure certain Amendments that guarantee rights that today we hold as inviolable

James Madison

Even so, they were recently under attack

Elbridge Gerry

Yes. They were. And may still be again. But, as regards my supposed accomplishments, I will be remembered only as the Governor of Massachusetts who used his political might to 'Gerrymander' districts to his party's favor.

James Madison

How ironic of course that you were among those few who opposed faction in our government until it could no longer be avoided.

Elbridge Gerry

None but my one devilish political accomplishment shall be recalled. All else will all have been overshadowed by your reputation as the father of the Constitution, by your reputation as the author of the Bill of Rights - the very paper that you so opposed at the Convention; and that I and my cohorts forced upon you as a demand for passage, (*Gerry smiles as he recalls a fond memory*) that "paper on the table", as Henry so often referred to in Virginia.

James Madison

I now wish that it had been different. I still, though, believe we needed a vigorous government.

Elbridge Gerry

Yes - and the strength and perseverance of that belief has brought us the government that now so challenges you. No, what history students will be taught is that you created an energetic government. Those of us who saw the weaknesses and opposed what you offered will be little discussed.

James Madison

Elbridge, I do not believe for a moment that you are envious that your work will not receive the recognition that it deserves. None of what you did was for glory. If it was glory and remembrance that you wanted, you would have signed the document and said that you could do no more. (*Madison becomes firm in his tone*) That you were right - I say to you here and now that you were right, as the recent times have shown. There are those among us - many with whom I toiled in bringing forth this government - that of late have wanted to change our country into something never intended, a most consolidated government with a near monarchical President controlling each and every state and each and every citizen. This current mood alone tells me that you were right.

Elbridge Gerry

(*Gerry sits*)

Yes. I was right. And yet you were most victorious.

James Madison

Did I not separate myself from Hamilton, may his soul rest in peace, and the Federalists? Did Thomas and I not scribe the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions which we hoped would stem the tide of consolidation?

Elbridge Gerry

Ah - but forced to scribe in secret, less you be seen as traitors. James, I am old and tired and should not have taken up this responsibility as your Vice President. I fear I may not be of health sufficiently sound to finish the full term of this office. (*Gerry rises and slowly meanders a few steps. As he begins to speak he is not facing Madison*)) As regards my advice, the fault that is of your making may never be undone. As Patrick warned over and over, power once taken will never be returned. Each successive President, if he only accrues a small increase in power leaves that power for the next, and along with it more and more government servants to execute what legislation has been enacted. Never will it be that power once put into the hands of government will be reduced.

James Madison

Elbridge, in my heart and by my word I am committed to reducing the central power, and yet at this very moment I am obligated to increase the power of that same government in successful pursuit of the war. To finance the war. As it is, those most devoted to a strong central government are also most devoted to blocking our efforts to succeed against Britain.

Elbridge Gerry

It is no longer about love of country for my fellow New Englanders, but the value of trade, albeit with a declared enemy who would extinguish our liberty at first chance. I know the war is not going well. And while I am opposed to a large standing army, our militias are poorly trained and organized. We are so conflicted in our fears that our needs are severely hampered. And like you, I am also concerned for what will be after this war. Sadly, I sometimes feel I am more now a Republican than an American - and harbour great disdain for the sentiments of many of those men who built this nation.

James Madison

Albeit your devotion to a lack of partisanship has waned, cannot an evenhandedness unfettered by jealous manipulations still guide us to what is right and best for our nation? *(He pauses in obvious consternation)* However incongruous it is that we are both here at this awful moment, it is left to us to reverse this course. To reverse the tendency to Monarchy that Thomas spoke of in his letter to after your return from France.

Elbridge Gerry

It is not so simple. As you said, we were made to suffer The Alien and Sedition laws scribed by one of the most revered of our founders, a true hero of the Revolution. Is that not proof enough of the weakness of the human spirit? *(Elbridge pauses to seek the proper phrase, and then proceeds, unhappy with his choice, but having no other)* The fault is yours, in your belief in the goodness of your beliefs, that good men of good moral character with a love of their country will forever rule. Your Federalist Papers were filled with hopes and dreams and desires - but little observation on the frailties and avarice of men. It is that belief that you carried within you, and which you used as persuasion to bring acceptance of an idea that never has been successful before nor can ever be successful, a utopia, a land ruled merely by the goodness of men's hearts with no truly effective restraints on evil deeds, with nothing to impede an energetic consent to the sweet but false words that would spill softly from the lips of a tyrant. There was never and will never be that utopian society of which you dreamed; that same dream, which tyrants of all past and future ages will use as argument to limit the people's individual liberties with promises for the betterment of the whole. Never has it been and never will it be.

James Madison

Come now Elbridge, have you no small belief, even a hope that a man will somehow rule out of goodness alone?

Elbridge Gerry

It is not the goodness that I fear, but the promise of good things to come by the relinquishment of freedom. I can never forgive you for what you have brought us - a wonderful country, but for so short a time. It is our children's children who will live under the yoke of that President who speaks of goodness and betterment for all - but in his heart is not bound by a love of our republican system. We may see some small aspect of this future tyranny today in many of our leaders, but only when the central government has seized a power that we cannot today dream of, will the danger from the office become clear.

James Madison

Can the outlook truly be so bleak as you render it? No expectation that somehow only men of honour will serve as our leaders, that people will reject men so different from themselves as to not be trusted with the public good? We are after all, are we not, all Americans, and in spite of our differences have we not the same belief in individual liberty?

Elbridge Gerry

Possibly, but I will not accept hope as a political solution. I carry a portion of that letter from Thomas in my wallet, to which its yellow and tattered condition attests:

"I am for preserving to the states the powers not yielded by them to the Union, & to the legislature of the Union it's constitutional share in the division of powers: and I am not for transferring all the powers of the states to the general government, & all those of that government to the Executive branch. I am for a government rigorously frugal & simple, applying all the possible savings of the public revenue to the discharge of the national debt: and not for a multiplication of officers & salaries merely to make partizans, & for increasing, by every device, the public debt, on the principle of it's being a public blessing...."

He ended by saying that - "the first object of my heart is my own country." But, sir that is Thomas - and there are few like him.

Mr. President I know that you have now come to the side that demands the preservation of liberty before all else, but what you have already unleashed will never be tamed. Again, I am humbled by the confidence you have in me, but I fear the time has passed when my advice on the subject you wish to question would be of any value.

Act Two – Scene Six

(The Hitchhiker, dressed in denim and appearing to be an aged hippie walks onto the stage apron from down-stage left. He looks around and eventually crosses the stage and sits down stage right on a log. He drops his pack and starts to roll a joint as he speaks.

The following is said in an improvised manner –)

The Hitchhiker

You know the best graffiti is always written on bathroom walls. During that time I saw on the wall of the men’s bathroom in the Limelight Cafe in Greenwich Village, what would for me come to symbolize the cynicism of the post World War Two 1950’s, someone had written on the wall – “God is alive and well in Argentina.”

Years later in the 60’s, I climbed Mt. Washington, up through Tuckerman’s Ravine, and there in the men’s bathroom in the tourist lounge on top of the mountain, I saw what was for me to come to symbolize the spirit of the 1960’s, In bold letters was scrawled, “Give me Librium or give me meth.”

Well, it was the 60’s. And I miss those times. I miss much of the 50’s. It’s not just nostalgia. While there has been much change for the good since my youth, much of the country has changed in other ways, and sorrowfully much of it not for the better.

(The hitchhiker’s tone and mood change)

I want my country back. I want the country promised to me by my forefathers, those guys in silk and satin with long hair who had the guts to hide out for years from the Red Coat

Cops, just so they could leave me a country resplendent in freedom. I want the country that I learned about, that I was taught about when I went to P.S. 225 in Brooklyn. I was a good student. You can't fool me. I know what I read. I remember what I was taught, And, what we have now is not what I was told I would have once I grew up.

Don't tell me about the realities of adulthood, changing times, adapting to progress and a society in evolution. What we have now is a society mired in scum.

I am that posterity that Madison and all those other guys talked about, ourselves and our posterity. You dig?

You see there really is a great country here. I've hitchhiked across it, and up and down its coasts, diagonalized it by car and jetted into parts of its middle. Most of this godforsaken land is filled with good god-fearing people, you know just decent folk. They work hard. They take pride in their lives.

Well, then, what's wrong? Where's my country? I mean where did it go? Who took it? And, like when did they take it? Where was I when they took it? Where was I when it happened? Did it happen when I wasn't looking? – Did it happen before I was born? Before I grew up?

I really grew up in the late Sixties – the Fifties were only the prep years. It was the Sixties that formed me. And, if I wasn't entirely formed in the crucible of social and political unrest of the late Sixties, if not as politically active as I might have been, - by the early Seventies even I was yelling One two, three, four, we don't want your fucking war and staring down German Shepard police dogs guarding New York City's Armed Forces Recruiting Center in the middle of Times Square, - the same Times Square, which years before, in my 1950's youth, still had the turn of the century facade of the Times Building intact, and it stood there as I watched my big sister yelling for Johnny Ray who was appearing at the Paramount Theatre.

If not, in fact, completely radicalized in the late Sixties, because deep down in my heart I still believed that Barry Goldwater was the man to have been president in '64, if not in full rebellion, my consciousness had been torn apart and rearranged.

You see, the joke is that while everything I learned about America isn't true, those who painted those rosy pictures for me did too good a job for me to want to trade in the canvas of my American Dream for a great car, a blinking stereo, and cocaine sex. You see, I'm gonna get the America I was taught I was going to have. And, damn them try to stop me! You see, there's more of me than there is of them. And, we're grown up. We're not about to get our heads broken at Berkley, our asses shot off at Kent Police State nor arrested in blood at Chicago. I haven't thought about how, We the People are gonna get our country back; but, we're gonna do it! I didn't eat brown rice and stay away from processed foods all these years just to give up now. You know, I don't really know what we're gonna do – why if we have to throw tea into Boston Harbor, we just might do that.

I don't know exactly how. But, we're gonna get it back from them!

End

(Curtain descends)