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## — Who Wrote the Constitution? The Economic Interests of the "Founding Fathers" —

compiled by Bill Bigelow

The following people attended the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Were these individuals broadly representative of the entirety of U.S. society at the time? You decide.

1. **Abraham Baldwin.** He was a lawyer who had gone to Yale, and lived in Georgia at the time of writing. He was wealthy and owned about \$2,500 in bonds he'd bought for about \$300.
2. **Richard Bassett.** He was a lawyer and had inherited a plantation of 6,000 acres. He was one of the wealthiest men in Delaware and owned three homes.
3. **Gunning Bedford.** Lawyer, state attorney general of Delaware. Owned \$2,874 in bonds for which he had paid \$360.
4. **John Blair.** A wealthy Virginian, a lawyer and judge. Owned over \$10,000 worth of bonds and at least 26 slaves.
5. **William Blount.** Very wealthy. By the 1790s he owned almost a million acres in holdings in North Carolina and Tennessee. On his plantation in North Carolina he owned 30 slaves.
6. **David Brearley.** A lawyer and chief justice of New Jersey. Not a wealthy man.
7. **Jacob Broom.** Delaware. Not an especially wealthy man, but he did own two farms and enough money and homes to be a lender.
8. **Pierce Butler.** He was a South Carolina lawyer and plantation owner and owned 143 slaves on two plantations in 1790. At the time of the Convention he owed money.
9. **Daniel Carroll.** Maryland. Owned a large amount of land, much of which became Washington, D.C. Owned 53 slaves, and made most of his money from tobacco.

10. **George Clymer.** A well-to-do Philadelphia merchant. Owned a "thriving import-export business" and ventured occasionally into shipbuilding. Became a substantial banker.
11. **William R. Davie.** A North Carolina lawyer and plantation owner. In 1790 he owned 36 slaves.
12. **Jonathan Dayton.** New Jersey lawyer, son of a wealthy merchant. He speculated extensively in bonds, especially at the time of the Convention. With a syndicate of other wealthy men from New Jersey he bought almost a million acres in Ohio.
13. **John Dickinson.** Delaware. A very wealthy lawyer and "gentleman" farmer.
14. **Oliver Ellsworth.** Connecticut. Acquired a large estate. Landlord, lawyer. Speculated in bonds and made about a 100% profit.
15. **William Few.** Georgia. A lawyer who became "moderately wealthy," though originally he was a small farmer. He came to own about 2,300 acres (slaveholdings unknown) and a small amount of bonds.
16. **Thomas Fitzsimmons.** Wealthy Philadelphia banker and merchant. He apparently had speculated in large amounts of bonds.
17. **Benjamin Franklin.** Pennsylvania. Printer, inventor, diplomat. An old man at the time of the Convention, Franklin had become a wealthy man and was worth about \$150,000 — a lot of money back then.
18. **Elbridge Gerry.** (One of the those who refused to sign the Constitution.) A wealthy Massachusetts merchant. Held more bonds (well over \$50,000) than anyone else at the Convention.
19. **Nicholas Gilman.** New Hampshire. Businessman. Speculated in a substantial amount of bonds.
20. **Nathaniel Gorham.** Massachusetts. Was a privateer and speculator during the Revolutionary War and had made "a tidy fortune."
21. **Alexander Hamilton.** A New York lawyer and financier. "Perpetually in debt." A key supporter and organizer for the Constitution.
22. **William C. Houston.** (Left the Convention after one week because of illness.) Had been a professor and lawyer, held well-paying government jobs. Held no bonds.

23. **William Houstoun.** A wealthy Georgia plantation owner. He owned slaves, though how many is not known, and a great deal of land.
24. **Jared Ingersoll.** A Philadelphia lawyer, graduated from Yale. Owned no bonds, but "was a man of considerable wealth."
25. **Daniel of St. Thomas Jenifer.** Owned 20 slaves and was "well known for the parties he gave at his beautiful plantation" in Maryland. It's unknown how many slaves he owned on another of his plantations. He "was possessed of unusual wealth."
26. **William Samuel Johnson.** The son of a wealthy Connecticut clergyman and inherited a great deal of money. He studied law at Yale. Shortly before the Convention he lost most of his wealth.
27. **Rufus King.** A Massachusetts lawyer, educated at Harvard, he invested thousands of dollars in bonds. He was also a bank director.
28. **John Langdon.** Grew rich during the Revolutionary War as a shipbuilder, privateer and supplier of food to the troops. He owned "a fortune." Also became a banker and owned a large amount of bonds.
29. **John Lansing, Jr.** Walked out of the Convention after six weeks, strongly opposed the Constitution. He was an incredibly rich man, had a successful law practice in Albany, New York, and owned tens of thousands of acres of land.
30. **William Livingston.** First governor of New Jersey. Owned no bonds, but had a "solid legal practice" and was "fairly wealthy" by the time he died.
31. **James Madison.** Called "the father of the Constitution," Madison, of Virginia, was not terribly wealthy. He owned a 560-acre plantation and nine slaves. However, Madison did come from a very wealthy slaveowning plantation family.
32. **Alexander Martin.** North Carolina lawyer and plantation owner. Owned 47 slaves.
33. **Luther Martin.** Opposed the Constitution. As a child lived in near poverty. Became a wealthy lawyer and later Maryland attorney general. Owned six "house slaves."
34. **George Mason.** Also opposed the Constitution. Mason was a wealthy Virginian. He owned tens of thousands of acres, about 300 slaves and many thousands of dollars in other property.
35. **James McClurg.** Son of a wealthy Virginia doctor. Owned some land and slaves, and thousands of dollars worth of bonds.

36. **James McHenry.** An extremely wealthy Maryland doctor.
- 37, **John Francis Mercer.** Opposed the Constitution. He was a Maryland lawyer and owned six slaves. He also owned bonds.
38. **Thomas Mifflin.** Wealthy Pennsylvania merchant, also owned bank shares.
39. **Gouverneur Morris.** Came from a wealthy New York family, he became a successful lawyer and merchant. He had become "quite a wealthy man."
40. **Robert Morris.** Known as the "Great Man," he was "the real financial giant of the period." One of the richest and most powerful men in the United States. Banker, merchant, land owner, bond owner, at the time of the Convention he controlled about \$2 million worth of property. However, because of losses in land speculation, he died in poverty.
41. **William Paterson.** Not a wealthy man, but his New Jersey law practice "brought him a good income."
42. **William Pierce.** A bankrupt Georgia merchant, involved in the rice trade. Had to leave the Convention early because his finances were such a mess.
43. **Charles Cotesworth Pinckney.** A South Carolina lawyer and plantation owner. In 1790 he owned 70 slaves, down from the 200 slaves he'd owned before his property was taken away by the British in 1780.
44. **Charles Pinckney.** Cousin of Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, was also a lawyer and plantation owner. In 1790 he had a good income and 111 slaves.
45. **Edmund Randolph.** A member of "one of the leading families of Virginia." Owned at least 16 slaves and several hundred acres of land. Also owned several thousand dollars in bonds.
46. **George Read.** A Delaware lawyer with "a moderate income," he owned some bank shares and some public bonds. However, he did live in a mansion and own slaves.
47. **John Rutledge.** At the time of the Revolution, he was the richest lawyer in South Carolina. He owned 14 pieces of land, including five plantations. As of 1790, he owned 243 slaves.
48. **Roger Sherman.** Almost went to debtors prison as a result of his losses during the Revolution. In his earlier years, he had been a lawyer, storeowner, and farmer. According to his biographer he "always lived in a comfortable manner, and his property was gradually increasing."

49. **Richard Dobbs Spaight.** North Carolina plantation owner and politician. Owned 71 slaves.

50. **Caleb Strong.** A prosperous country lawyer from Massachusetts. Most of his personal property was invested in public debt.

51. **George Washington.** Probably the richest man in the United States. In Virginia alone he owned over 35,000 acres and thousands more all over the country: New York, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Maryland, etc. He was a large slaveowner, but the exact figure is not known. He also was involved in banking and was a large money lender.

52. **Hugh Williamson.** A North Carolina doctor and businessman. Speculated in western lands and owned some public debt, but most of his money came from his medical practice.

53. **James Wilson.** A wealthy Pennsylvania lawyer. Owned bank stocks and was a director of the Bank of North America.

54. **George Wythe.** Freed "most of his slaves" when the Revolutionary War began. He was a lawyer and a judge in Virginia. In 1788, he owned some public debt and three slaves.

55. **Robert Yates.** A lawyer and a judge of the New York Supreme Court, he "lived modestly" and "died poor." He left the Constitutional Convention early, and opposed the Constitution.

**Sources:** Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: The Free Press, 1941); and Forrest McDonald, *We The People: The Economic Origins of the Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958.)

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