

Short Biographies

James Madison (1751–1836), Federalist

The oldest of 10 children, Madison was born and grew up in Virginia. A great student, he went to the College of New Jersey (now called Princeton University). He returned home, unsure of what to do with his life. As the Revolutionary War came near, he joined the patriot cause. As a young man, he held several elected offices. One was being a member of Congress under the Articles of Confederation. Madison grew frustrated with Congress' lack of power. For example, Congress did not have power to raise taxes to pay the Army. Madison believed that the nation needed a strong central government. At the Constitutional Convention, his ideas were so important that many today consider him the "Father of the Constitution." After the convention, Madison wrote many of the *Federalist Papers* arguing in favor of the Constitution. Madison believed the Constitution would uphold freedom because it created a republic with checks and balances on its power. He did not think a bill of rights was needed. The Constitution had limited power.

Madison favored religious freedom and the separation of church and state.



Before the revolution, he spoke out against people being put in jail for their beliefs. He helped draft Jefferson's Bill for Religious Freedom in Virginia. He worked to defeat Patrick Henry's bill in Virginia that would have given tax money to "teachers of the Christian religion." He thought government should neither support nor oppose religion.

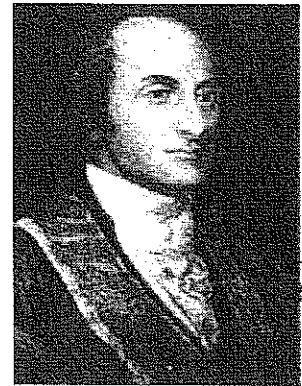
When the Constitution was adopted, Madison was elected to the first Congress. He knew that a bill of rights had been promised. So he wrote one and pushed Congress to pass it. Congress passed most of Madison's proposals. They stand today as the Bill of Rights, the first 10 amendments to the Constitution.

Madison later served as secretary of state and as the fourth U.S. president.

John Jay (1745–1829), Federalist

The sixth of 10 children, Jay was born and raised in New York. As a boy, he was taught by private tutors. Then he went to King's College (now called Columbia University). He started working as a lawyer and did well.

Although he backed the patriot cause, he at first did not favor breaking from England. But once the revolution began, he strongly



supported it. He was elected to the Continental Congress. Sent to Paris, he helped write the peace treaty of 1783, which ended the Revolutionary War. Under the Articles of Confederation, Jay served as Congress' secretary for foreign affairs. In this post, Jay met and negotiated with foreign leaders. He grew frustrated, however, by the limited power given Congress under the Articles of Confederation. He cited many examples of this limited power. One was that Congress had the power to make treaties with other nations, but it didn't have the power to keep the promises it made in the treaties. Another was that Congress had the power to borrow money, but not to raise money to pay back the debt. He believed the United States needed a stronger central government. He did not go to the Constitutional Convention, but he strongly supported the Constitution. He did not think a bill of rights was needed.

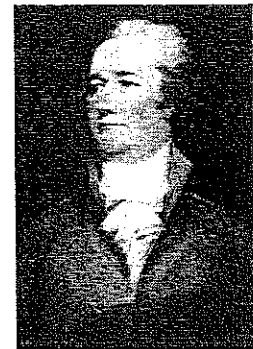
He later served as the first chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court and was elected governor of New York.

Alexander Hamilton (c. 1757–1804), Federalist

Hamilton was born in the West Indies. When he was 8, his father left the family. To help support the family, Hamilton went to work. Four years later, his mother died. He went to live with relatives. His family and friends saw that Hamilton was very smart. They sent him to New Jersey to study. He later entered King's College (now called Columbia University) in New York. When the Revolutionary War broke out, he joined the Army. General George Washington

noticed his bravery and brainpower. He asked him to serve as his aide. When the war ended, Hamilton returned to New York and became a lawyer. He was elected to the Continental Congress. He thought the government created by the Articles of Confederation was too weak. He believed it was causing the country to fall apart. For example, the war had caused the government to go into debt. But the Congress could not pay off the debt because it had no power to tax.

When the Constitutional Convention was held, Hamilton went as a delegate from New York. Hamilton believed the United States should have a very strong central government. He thought the president and senators should be elected for life. He wanted the president to select state governors. He thought Congress should make all the laws for the country. The delegates ignored his ideas.



Hamilton would have liked a stronger central government than the one created by the Constitution. But he liked the Constitution much better than the Articles of Confederation. When he returned to New York, he started writing newspaper articles in favor of the Constitution. He got James Madison and John Jay to help him. These articles became the *Federalist Papers*.

Hamilton went on to be the first secretary of the treasury under President Washington. He was killed in a duel in 1804.

Patrick Henry (1736–1799), Anti-Federalist

Henry was born in Virginia and was home schooled. As a young man, he struggled. Twice he opened stores, but he lost money and went out of



business. He tried farming, but made no money. He decided to study law and started a practice. At this, he succeeded. He was a great speaker and could rouse people to his side.

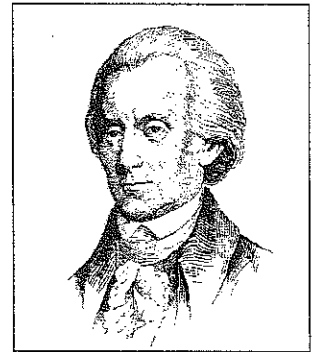
Drawn to the patriot cause, he was elected to the Virginia colonial legislature. Later, he went to Congress. He made many speeches that made him famous. After a speech denouncing the king, some legislators yelled, "Treason!" Henry shouted back, "If *this* be treason, make the most of it!" When the Revolutionary War began, he made a speech that ended with the now famous words, "I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death." He was elected governor of Virginia during and after the war.

Henry was invited to the Constitutional Convention, but did not go. He spoke out strongly against the Constitution. He said it created too strong a central government. He stated that the best government was one that was close to the people and that could listen to them. He declared that the Constitution would take away the power of the states and the rights of the people. He was outraged that it did not have a bill of rights.

Richard Henry Lee (1732–1794), Anti-Federalist

Born in Virginia to a rich family, Lee was home schooled. Then he was sent to school in England. After returning home, he was elected to the Virginia legislature. He spoke out against slavery. Then as British rule grew harsher, he spoke out against British abuses. He opposed the Stamp Act and Townshend Acts. As war drew near, he became a leader in Congress favoring independence. He retired from Congress due to ill health. But after he recovered, he returned to elected office.

He was a member of Congress under the Articles of Confederation. He helped pass the Northwest Ordinance, one of the most important things done by the Confederation Congress. The Northwest Ordinance set up a system for governing the Northwest Territory. This land eventually became the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin and part of the state of Minnesota. The ordinance outlined how parts of the territory could become states.



Lee opposed the Constitution. He thought the Confederation Congress worked. He did not want another strong government. He had opposed British abuses. He feared another strong government would also misrule. He thought it was a disaster that the Constitution did not have a bill of rights.

George Mason (1725–1792), Anti-Federalist

Mason was in born in Virginia into a family of rich landholders. His father died when he was 10. His uncle took over as his guardian and taught him law. When he grew up, he became one of the richest planters in Virginia.



Elected to the colonial Virginia legislature in 1759, he grew active in the patriot cause. When Virginia drew up its state constitution in 1776, Mason drafted its Declaration of Rights. The beginning of this declaration influenced the Declaration of Independence (“That all men are by

nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights . . . namely, the enjoyment of life and liberty, with the means of acquiring . . . property, and pursuing . . . happiness and safety.”) The declaration's list of rights influenced the Bill of Rights.

Mason went to the Constitutional Convention. He believed the government was not working under the Articles of Confederation. He spoke for a long time explaining what he wanted in a new government. He wanted a swift end to the slave trade. He wanted a more democratic Congress. And most of all, he demanded a bill of rights. When the delegates failed to include a bill of rights, Mason refused to sign the Constitution. He believed the Constitution would lead to either a monarchy or the rule by a select few.