consciousness of the young Republic as any Trumbull history painting does about white elite thought. African American art from the slavery period is harder to recover. But one can get glimpses.  *Mulberry* (c. 1800), a painting of a South Carolina plantation house by Thomas Coram (1757–1811), shows slave quarters in the foreground. Their design is African, particularly their sharply pitched thatched roofs. Black New Englander John Bush decorated Revolutionary army powder horns to express his sense of the struggle with Britain. It is possible that a black artist produced *The Old Plantation* (c. 1800), which features a black celebration and relegates the great house to the distant background.

The most notable early folk artist was Edward Hicks (1780–1849) of Pennsylvania, a Quaker who pondered incessantly on America’s place upon the earth. Hicks drew much of his inspiration from one of West’s history canvases, *William Penn’s Treaty with the Indians* (1772). He reproduced it as one element in his oft-repeated *The Peaceable Kingdom* (c. 1833 and other dates), which also drew on the biblical image of the lion lying down with the lamb (Isaiah 11:6). In these and in his secular landscapes, such as *The House of David Twining in 1787* (c. 1846), Hicks portrayed the early United States as an essentially good society.

**BELLES LETTRES**

Viewed against these achievements, literary output seems thinner. The creation of the United States saw a great burst of political thought, whose high point was *The Federalist* (1787–1788). The French migrant Michel-Guillaume Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur (1735–1813) used his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782) to present an ever-darkening picture of a New World poisoned by racism, slavery, and war. Overcoming a long-standing taboo, a few Americans began to dabble in fiction, most notably Hugh Henry Brackenridge (1748–1816) and Charles Brockden Brown (1771–1810). They pointed toward the large achievement of James Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851), whose output reached deeply into American history and culture. Among early dramatists was Mercy Otis Warren (1728–1814), who also produced a history of the Revolution. Her fellow New Englander, Judith Sargent Murray (1751–1820), developed many of the same ideas about women’s civic rights as the more famous Englishwoman, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797).

The enslaved poet Phillis Wheatley (c. 1753–1784) found wide readership. So did the intensely partisan Jeffersonian Philip Freneau (1752–1832). Among other poets were the “Connecticut Wits,” who poked fun at what they regarded as American pretence. Washington Irving (1783–1859) followed their caustic example. But one of the wits, Joel Barlow (1754–1812), exemplified American writers’ early republican dilemma. Struggling hard, he produced a triumphant American epic, *The Vision of Columbus* (1787). Widely read in its time, it later was virtually forgotten. Not until Walt Whitman (1819–1892) began to compose *Leaves of Grass* (1855) did an American poet find a voice and a style fully suited to his subject.

See also Architectural Styles; Fiction; Painting.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


Edward Countryman

**ARTICLES OF CONFEDERATION**

The Articles of Confederation were the first U.S. constitution, ratified in 1781. The Articles were a pragmatic compromise born of necessity in the American Revolution (1775–1783) and were in effect until replaced by a new constitution in 1789.

The Articles’ principal purpose was to create a formal, limited authority for the wartime central government that at first was conducted informally by the Continental Congress. By July 1776, prior to the Articles, Congress had authorized the colonists to replace their British-created governments with new governments established “under the authority of the people”; appointed George Washington as the Continental Army’s commanding general; provided for army staff appointments; and authorized the issuance of currency to raise war funds.
The Articles gave the United States exclusive power to conduct national military and foreign policy. They also established the relationship between the states and the central Confederation government. The Articles gave Congress power to appropriate funds for the “common defence or general welfare.” They granted Congress power to make commercial treaties and gave it judicial powers in capture disputes, all disputes between states, and certain private interstate land disputes. States retained virtually all authority in domestic policy. The Confederation government was conducted by a unicameral Congress without a separate executive or judicial branch.

Under the Articles, the United States had limited successes. Congress managed the Revolutionary War, including the creation of foreign alliances and the financing of the costly conflict, subsequent peace and commercial treaty negotiations with Great Britain and other European governments, and the beginning of land distribution from the national domain. In 1787 Congress created the first major U.S. territory, the Northwest Territory. Nevertheless, by 1787 many Americans had concluded that the Articles contained profound flaws.

Although confederation proposals had been made as early as 1775 by Benjamin Franklin and others, Congress was unwilling to consider confederation until after it had adopted its resolution declaring American independence on 2 July 1776. The Articles were not adopted by Congress until 15 November 1777 because war pressures and fundamental disagreements prevented completion of the document until it became apparent that completion would assist the United States in obtaining an alliance with France and in controlling wartime inflation.

**The Dickinson Plan**

On 22 July 1776 Congress began debate on a 12 July proposal reported after a month of deliberation by a committee chaired by John Dickinson of Pennsylvania, whose other members included Roger Sherman of Connecticut and Samuel Adams of Massachusetts. That proposal, commonly known as the Dickinson plan, reflected the committee's views on a draft apparently prepared by Dickinson, a wealthy lawyer trained in England. Dickinson's draft, which granted Congress broad powers in military and foreign affairs, would also have limited state powers in important areas. For example, the draft protected both religious dissenters' rights and existing commercial rights and privileges against state interference and provided that Congress could raise troops without local participation.

Dickinson's proposals on religious dissenters and raising troops were rejected in committee. The panel's proposal nevertheless contained important limits on state powers. Its motives for this approach are uncertain but may have been mixed. Some delegates may have sought to eliminate as many sources of discord within and between the states as possible in order to strengthen the war effort, while others may have wanted to limit state interference in existing social and economic relations.

After debate by the full Congress, a revised version of the Dickinson proposal was ordered to be printed for the delegates on 20 August 1776. This draft omitted all limits on state power over commercial rights (later partially restored). There was no agreement among the delegates on several other essential provisions. Although the Articles were debated sporadically by Congress over the next year, little progress was made. Completion of the Articles became urgent only after the U.S. military victory at Saratoga, New York, on 17 October 1777, which made alliance with France a realistic possibility, in turn requiring a government that possessed formal legal authority to enter such an alliance.

**Major Disputed Issues**

The four most heavily disputed issues concerning the Articles were the structure of congressional representation, the method for allocating national expenses to the states (that is, taxation), control over western lands claimed by states, and the relationship between state and Confederation powers. Debate on these issues was complicated by threats from delegates that unless their position was accepted, their states would not join the Confederation.

The Dickinson plan had proposed that each state would receive one vote in Congress. Large states, however, vigorously sought proportional representation based on wealth or population, but the "one-vote rule" was adopted, largely because failure to adopt it might have resulted in certain states rejecting the Confederation.

Debate over the taxation formula was similarly heated. During a 30 July 1776 debate on a motion by Samuel Chase of Maryland to exclude slaves from the taxation allocation formula, strenuously opposed by John Adams of Massachusetts and James Wilson of Pennsylvania, a southern delegate threatened that if slaves were not treated as property, "there is an end" to confederation. Congress agreed instead to use the value of land and improvements in
allocating taxation, an impracticable system palatable to slaveholding states.

The compromises on representation and taxation reflected the leadership of statesmen from different regions. They included Richard Henry Lee of Virginia and John Adams, who recognized that compromises, even regarding important principles, were necessary to enable wartime national unity.

The Dickinson plan had proposed giving Congress the authority to fix the boundaries of states, some of which had vast western land claims extending to the “South Sea,” and to dispose of lands in the national domain. These proposals were anathema to states like Virginia that had large claims, but were vociferously supported by “landless” states such as Maryland on revenue and growth grounds. The Articles denied Congress power to limit state land claims. (However, continued controversy later led several states to make large land cessions to the United States.)

Congress also debated the boundaries of state sovereignty. Thomas Burke of North Carolina attacked the Dickinson plan as an infringement on state autonomy. Burke successfully added a provision to the Articles preserving state sovereignty and retaining for the states every power not “expressly delegated to the United States.”

Once these issues were resolved, congressional adoption followed quickly. By July 1778, after Congress had defeated thirty-six state-proposed amendments, most states agreed to ratify. Through January 1779, all but Maryland had done so; Maryland made it unanimous in 1781.

GOVERNMENT UNDER THE CONFEDERATION
For much of the period from 1781 to 1789, economic conditions in the United States were poor: prices and real wages were falling; there was a seriously adverse trade balance; indebtedness was growing; and related civil unrest, such as Shays’s Rebellion of 1786–1787, was emerging. The Confederation government was unable to compel either the states or Great Britain to comply fully with the peace treaty of 1783. Congress could not effectively resolve interstate territorial disputes, such as those arising in Pennsylvania and from a separatist movement in Vermont. In 1784 Spain closed the Mississippi to American navigation, and in 1786 Congress disagreed along sectional lines over the U.S. foreign policy response. Americans increasingly questioned whether the Confederation’s limited government could successfully meet the growing country’s domestic and foreign policy problems.

In 1787 progress occurred on one important front. Congress adopted the Northwest Ordinance, which permitted the creation of new states in ceded lands north of the Ohio River (the Northwest Territory) and provided that slavery would be prohibited in the Territory.

By 1787, however, advocates of a stronger central government felt that the Confederation had very important weaknesses and needed fundamental reform. They argued that it lacked essential powers, such as those over taxation and interstate commerce, and was unable to pay its debts, including those owed to its war veterans. It could act only through the states and therefore could not enforce its laws or judicial decisions directly against individuals; nor, as a practical matter, could it do so against disobedient states. Many of its most essential decisions could be made only with the consent of nine states. Its Articles could be amended only with the unanimous consent of the states, and thus important amendments proposed during the 1780s to strengthen congressional powers over taxation and commerce failed despite widespread support. Finally, it had no ability to prevent abuse of economic, judicial, or other state powers that had interstate impact or to protect states against domestic violence.

THE ARTICLES IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT
Many of the Articles’ flaws stemmed from their creation as a unifying measure to address the urgent necessities of wartime government. The Articles reflected a desire on the part of some to limit centralized government that arose both from colonial experience with Great Britain and from the belief that liberty and political power were inherent enemies. At the same time, however, as a pragmatic wartime compromise that sought a broad consensus and resolved only those issues requiring immediate resolution, the Articles provide only a limited insight into contemporary Americans’ evolving views of freedom and government.

The Articles nevertheless serve as an exceptionally useful benchmark for understanding the fundamental changes in American government later made by the Constitution’s establishment of national, majority control of areas such as federal taxation, commerce, and military appropriations, its creation of a federal separation of powers, and its authorization of enforcement of federal laws directly against individuals under a powerful regime of federal law supremacy, while at the same time preserving a significant constitutional role for the states.
ASYLUMS

The first dictionary definition of “asylum” is “an institution for the care of people, especially those with physical or mental impairments, who require organized supervision or assistance”; the second is “a place offering protection and safety; a shelter.” The first meaning highlights control, confinement, and supervision (under the rubric of “care”); the second is a synonym for “refuge,” connoting freedom and security. The founders of American almshouses, lunatic asylums, and orphanages all faced the problem of how to justify the confinement of the impaired and the destitute with the ideals of freedom and equality that underpinned the Revolution and the birth of the new nation.

ALMSHOUSES FOR THE POOR
Poverty was not uncommon in the colonies and the new nation. Many theologians in the eighteenth century believed that poverty, like mental illness, was simply a part of God’s design; thus most of the needy were cared for in community households, where they were not stigmatized as a “problem” population. However, vagabonds or the “wandering poor” were made ineligible for all kinds of relief and were “warned out” of town, as the towns’ responsibility for poverty extended only to the community within a town’s boundaries.

A few communities did establish separate institutions to serve the needy. Many cities, primarily in the North, built almshouses throughout the eighteenth century. The earliest almshouses were often minimally renovated farmhouses. Residents, who wore no distinguishing clothing, had undergone some personal crisis or illness, or had faced insurmountable difficulties as a result of periodic wars, economic fluctuations, and especially the turn-of-the-century transition to commercialized agriculture and early industrialization. Women consistently far outnumbered men: the special burdens associated with single motherhood accompanied by the paucity of economic opportunities for women made them especially vulnerable to all of the other social forces that induced downward mobility.

By the Jacksonian period, the almshouse had gained a dominant position in public policy toward the poor. In 1821 and 1824, Massachusetts and New York conducted formal studies of the causes of poverty and the condition of the poor; both studies recommended a formal network of almshouses where work, especially farm labor, would be compulsory. (A number of almshouses dating back to the late eighteenth century had made this a requirement of residency.) Other states followed suit: approximately sixty new almshouses were constructed from 1820 to 1840, and dozens of existing ones were refurbished and expanded. In keeping with the reform movements that led to the construction of penitentiaries and insane asylums, proponents of these new institutions stressed that poverty was not a divinely ordained condition, and that individuals were, under the right social conditions, perfectible. Accordingly, each of these institutions emphasized discipline, order, and cultural reprogramming that led inmates away from the slothful and vicious behavior (with drink at the top of the list) thought to be responsible for their degraded condition.

INSANE ASYLUMS
Throughout most of the eighteenth century, the mentally ill who could not be cared for at home were often housed in almshouses or jails and were sometimes chained in attics or cellars if they became un-