

was polemical in origin but extraordinarily impressive in terms of its display of a developing capacity for political analysis. Among the most penetrating efforts to define the political and constitutional relationship between Britain and the colonies in the years before Independence were *Considerations on the Propriety of Imposing Taxes in the Colonies. . . by Act of Parliament** (Annapolis, 1765) by Marylander Daniel Dulany (1722–97), *An Enquiry into the Rights of the Colonies** (Williamsburg, 1766) by Virginian Richard Bland (1710–76), *Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer** (Philadelphia, 1768) by John Dickinson (1732–1808), *Considerations on the Nature and Extent of the Legislative Authority of the British Parliament** (Philadelphia, 1774) by the Scottish immigrant to Pennsylvania James Wilson (1742–98), *A Summary View of the Rights of British America** (Williamsburg, 1774) by the young Virginian Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), and *Common Sense** (Philadelphia, 1776) by the recent English immigrant Thomas Paine.

Other issues raised by or in the wake of Independence produced a similarly large volume of political discourse. The Massachusetts lawyer John Adams (1735–1826) contributed two of the most significant works to the discussion of the problem of forming new constitutions: *Thoughts on Government** (Philadelphia, 1776) and the massive and learned *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America** (Philadelphia, 1787). The lively tradition of American political writing that grew out of the Revolution reached its culmination with *The Federalist** (New York, 1788), a brilliant explication of the Constitution of 1787 by Alexander Hamilton (1757–1804), John Jay (1745–1829), and James Madison (1752–1836) that has remained the most profound American contribution to the literature of political thought. But American writing in these years was by no means limited to constitutional issues. Works by two Pennsylvania Quakers, John Woolman (1720–72), *Works** (Philadelphia, 1774) and Anthony Benezet (1713–84), *Serious Considerations on . . . War, . . . Slavery, . . . and the Nature and Bad Effects of Spirituous Liquors** (Philadelphia, 1778), were important contributions to the growing international debate over slavery, while the writings of the Baptist clergyman Isaac Backus (1724–1806), especially his *Policy, as Well as Honesty, Forbids the Use of Secular Force in Religious Affairs** (Boston, 1779) was a powerful plea for the separation of church and state.

Long before the Revolutionary era had supplied Americans with such a stimulating arena for displaying their broad talents for analyzing constitutional and political issues, however, they had begun to try to understand and to describe who they were and what they were

doing in America through the medium of secular histories. All of the works that treated the British American experience as a whole during the colonial period—John Oldmixon (1673–1742), *The British Empire in America** (London, 1708); Sir William Keith (1680–1749), *History of the British Plantations in America** (London, 1738), which was never completed; and Edmund Burke (1729–1797), *An Account of the European Settlements in America** (London, 1757)—were written by Britons. The only exception was William Douglass (c. 1700–1752), *Summary, Historical and Political, of the First Planting, Progressive Improvements, and Present State of the British Settlements in North America** (Boston, 1749–51), which was the work of a Scottish immigrant to Boston.

Already during the first half of the century, several writers had begun to produce quite serious and sophisticated histories of individual colonies. These included especially Robert Beverley (c. 1673–1722), *The History and Present State of Virginia** (London, 1705); Daniel Neal (1678–1743), *History of New England** (London, 1720); and William Stith (1689–1755), *History of the First Discovery and Settlement of Virginia** (Williamsburg, 1747). The decades after 1750 witnessed the proliferation of such histories. William Smith (1728–93), *History of the Province of New-York** (London, 1757); Samuel Smith (1720–76), *History of the Colony of Nava-Caesaria, or New Jersey* (Burlington, 1765); Thomas Hutchinson (1711–80), *History of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay** (London, 1760–68); Edward Long (1734–1813), *History of Jamaica** (London, 1774); Alexander Hewatt (1745–1829), *An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia** (London, 1779); and Jeremy Belknap (1744–98), *The History of New Hampshire* (Philadelphia, 1784) were all excellent examples of this genre. Except for Neal, all of these writers were either natives or residents of the colonies about which they wrote. After the Revolution, this tradition was carried on by David Ramsay (1749–1815), *History of the Revolution in South Carolina** (Trenton, 1785), while William Gordon (1728–1807), *The History of the Rise, Progress and Establishment of the Independence of the United States of America** (London, 1788) was the first attempt at a history of the new nation.

If civil histories were one way Americans sought to come to terms with their new societies, descriptive accounts were another. For Europeans, some of the most interesting analyses of America were natural histories of specific areas, such as Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753), *Natural History of Jamaica** (London, 1707–25); John Lawson (d. 1712), *New Voyage to Carolina** (London, 1709); Mark Catesby (1679–1749), *Natural History of Carolina** (London, 1731–43); and