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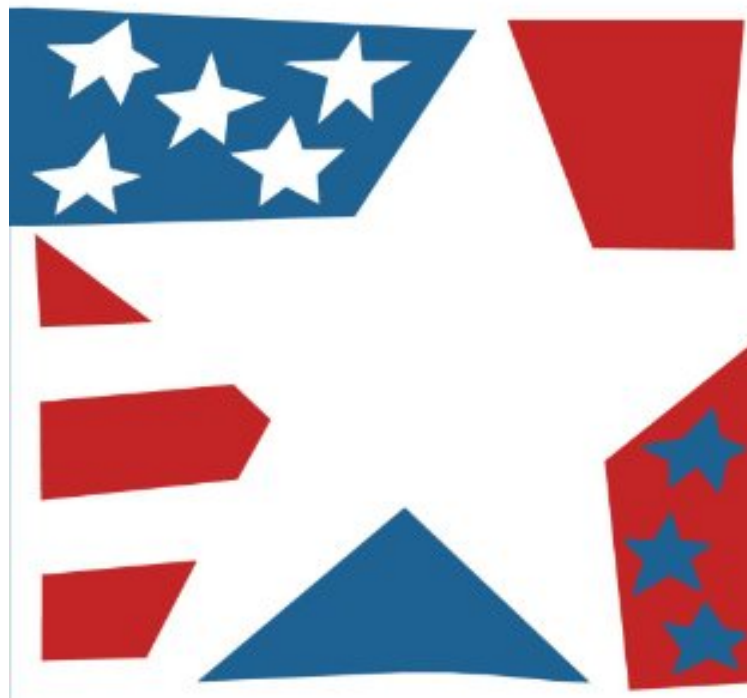
*Merrill Jensen*

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## The Articles of Confederation

An interpretation of the  
social-constitutional history of the  
American Revolution 1774-1781

by Merrill Jensen



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and all praised *The Articles of Confederation: An Interpretation of the Social-Constitutional History of the American Revolution, 1774-1781*:

32 of 32 people found the following review helpful. *A Great History of the First "federal" Constitution* By G. F. Gori  
Merrill Jensen's "The Articles of Confederation" is a great review of a truly neglected form of government. Jensen shatters the Federalists myths of "national government" and the Continental Congress inheriting the powers of the British Parliament. Jensen details the beginnings of the federal union in 1774 with the collapse of the colonial governments and the meeting of the First Continental Congress in September 1774. It is shown how conservatives, primarily merchants, land speculators, and admirers of the British government, fought independence up until the very signing of the Declaration of Independence. Although they supported the colonial cause many were frightened by "republicans" and "democracy". Due to these fears they supported a strong central government similar to Britain. The radicals, Richard Henry Lee, Samuel Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Burke, and John Adams were avid supporters of Independence. The radicals also supported a weak central government dependent on the states for support and were unwilling to embrace a new national government. With some exceptions, most radicals were localist and democrats because they believed that through their state governments self government would function best. The conservatives were fearful of local government and its democratic tendencies. Many were also immersed in land speculation and did not like the participation of the "rabble" in politics. Jensen takes the Articles from the debate in 1776 through ratification in 1781. One interesting aspect is how the eastern delegates, NY, Maryland, Pennsylvania, etc, were willing to cede the western land to Spain just to keep their region powerful at the expense of the farmers and artisans of the west. Men like Daniel St. Thomas Jenifer, John Jay, Samuel Chase, and John Dickenson were more interested in the land claims than the liberty of the western settlers. Thomas Jefferson was the most farsighted concerning the west. He proposed Virginia retain title to her claims to be surrendered to Congress only if the land was made into "free and independent states" He also proposed a radical plan to "give land to those who would settle it" thereby attacking the root of land speculation. Overall the Articles were not a "weak" government, nor were they ineffective as later Federalist propaganda states. They were the embodiment of the American Revolution, revolt against distant centralized authority and the sovereignty of the individual colonies against the centralized power of parliament. Overall a great history. 37 of 37 people found the following review helpful. *A Continuing Debate in American Politics* By Russell E. Saltzman  
I don't suppose one in ten Americans realize there was a first constitution of the United States before there was "the" Constitution of the United States. Merrill Jensen is the definitive historian of that period - up to 1789 when the present Constitution took effect - and this book is one of several of his covering the topic. Reading of this period would do much to remind Americans that the debate over the nature of American government has been going on since 1776. The debate concerns "weak" central government (the Articles of Confederation) vs. "strong" central government (the Constitution). The Federalists (favoring the Constitution) won politically, but their victory did not settle the argument. Any American presidential or congressional election campaign brings out the same themes sounded 200 years ago as the Constitution faced ratification. In any event, Jensen does much to rehabilitate the history of the Confederation, clarify the arguments, and takes care to note the remarkable accomplishments of the Confederation congress. His writing style is very accessible and the book is a quick read. 13 of 14 people found the following review helpful. *Necessary Foundational Information* By Larry L. Burton  
It is true. Not too many Americans are aware that the Founding Fathers called the Articles of Confederation of 1781 our, "first Federal Consti-tution." Mr. Jensen points out that they were the written expression of the political philosophy of the Declaration of Independence. If one understands the concept of local state sovereignty (or independence) as expressed in the Articles, then they will have a much better understanding of the argument between the Federal Government and the Confederate Government (1861-1865) which was only a continuation of the long argument over the nature of the Union of American States. (And, as one reviewer points out, it is an on going argument until this day.) All in all, it is an excellent read; and very pertinent information.

Events surrounding the writing and ratification of the first constitution are recounted and interpreted.

Here is a book which deals with clashes between economic and political factors in the American Revolution as realistically as if its author were dealing with a presidential election. *Social Studies*  
An admirable analysis. It presents, in succinct form, the results of a generation of study of this chapter of our history and summarizes fairly the conclusions of that study. Henry Steele Commager, *New York Times Book*