



U.S. HISTORY

Shay's Revolt vs. the Whiskey Rebellion EARLY Civil "Wars"

Shay's Revolt

1786-1787:

Shays' Rebellion is the name given to a series of protests in 1786 and 1787 by American farmers against state and local enforcement of tax collections and judgments for debt. Although farmers took up arms in states from New Hampshire to South Carolina, the rebellion was most serious in Western Massachusetts, where bad harvests, economic depression, and high taxes threatened farmers with the loss of their farms. The rebellion took its name from its symbolic leader, Daniel Shays of Massachusetts, a former captain in the Continental army.

The uprising in Massachusetts began in the summer of 1786. The rebels tried to capture the federal arsenal at Springfield and harassed leading merchants, lawyers, and supporters of the state government. The state militia, commanded by Gen. Benjamin Lincoln, crushed the rebels in several engagements in the winter of 1787. Shays and the other principal figures of the rebellion fled first to Rhode Island and then to Vermont.

Although it never seriously threatened the stability of the United States, Shays' Rebellion greatly alarmed politicians throughout the nation. Proponents of constitutional reform at the national level cited the rebellion as justification for revision or replacement of the Articles of Confederation, and Shays' Rebellion figured prominently in the debates over the framing and ratification of the Constitution.

[SOURCE: A&E Television Networks, LLC. *Shay's Rebellion*. N.p. 1996-2014. Web. 18 Jan. 2014. < <http://www.history.com/topics/shays-rebellion> >.]

The Whiskey Rebellion

1794:

The Whiskey Rebellion of August 1794 was the product of growing discontentment, which had been expressed as early as 1791, of grain farmers who resented a federal tax imposed on their distillery products. As growers threatened federal tax collectors with physical harm, Washington at first tried to prosecute the resisters in the court system. In 1794, however, 6,000 men angry at the tax gathered at a field near Pittsburgh, Western Pennsylvania and, with fake guillotines at the ready, challenged Washington and the federal government to disperse them.

In response, Washington issued a public proclamation on August 7, giving his former Revolutionary War aide-de-camp and current Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton the power to organize troops to put down the rebellion. In his letter to Lee on August 26, Washington noted that the general populace considered the insurrection with "universal indignation and abhorrence" and said that he otherwise would not have authorized such a heavy-handed response. Washington knew that the

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nation, having only recently violently overthrown the tyrannical English king, was in a delicate state and did not want to appear as an equally despotic president. He waited to see if the insurgents would back down; they did not.

According to biographer Joseph Ellis in *His Excellency*, George Washington, the aging president mounted his horse on September 30 to lead a force of 13,000--larger than any American army amassed in one place during the Revolution--to quell the uprising. (The act of mounting his war horse was brief and largely symbolic; Washington made most of the journey by carriage.) Lee joined Washington and the army on its march to Pennsylvania. This was the first and only time a sitting American president ever led troops into battle. Washington abandoned the procession early, however, leaving Alexander Hamilton, the true mastermind of the military response to the insurrection, in charge of the final approach to Pittsburgh.

The rioters dispersed in the presence of the federal troops and bloodshed was averted. In the aftermath, Washington reported to Congress that although he had agonized about the decision and intended to uphold the constitutional right to protest unfair tax laws, the insurrection had to be put down or the survival of the young democracy would have been in peril. Congress applauded his decision, but Washington's former Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, who was in temporary retirement at his Monticello estate, viewed Washington's decision to call out troops against fellow citizens as a dire threat to republican ideals and an abuse of presidential power. The uprising highlighted a growing division in early American politics which, by the end of Washington's second term, pitted rural, agricultural interests, led by future Presidents Jefferson and James Madison, against the pro-industrial urban interests, represented by Hamilton and John Adams, and gave rise to the two-party political system.

[SOURCE: A&E Television Networks, LLC. *George Washington Writes to Henry Lee*. N.p. 1996-2014. Web. 18 Jan. 2014.
< <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/george-washington-writes-to-henry-lee> >.]

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CHART	Shay's Revolt	Whiskey Rebellion
WHERE did the revolt take place?		
What was the CAUSE(s) of each of the revolts?		
Describe the type of people who lead or were involved in each revolt		
What was the form of GOVERNMENT when each revolt took place?		
HOW did each revolt end? [Be specific - tell not only how, but who was involved and ending each and how they went about stopping the rebels]		
What were the RESULTS of each of the revolts?		

“...Government is set at defiance, the contest being whether a small proportion of the United States shall dictate to the whole Union, and, at the expense of those who desire peace, indulge a desperate ambition.”

George Washington, *Proclamation of Militia Service*, 1794

