

# Shays rebellion the making of an agrarian insurrection history essay



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Shays Rebellion is repeatedly dismissed in the history books as an out-of-the-way incident following the American Revolution. Occasionally, its grudgingly given praise for spurring the Constitution Convention. In this proportionate book, David P. Szatmary dedicate the instance and study essential to categorize Shays Rebellion as the chronological watershed it truly is. Shays Rebellion indicates more than inexpensively depressed New England farmers waging war on creditors; it distinct the beginning of the end of the American subsistence farmer. This alteration in an accepted way of life was at least as hurting as the birth of the novel United States. The rebellion consequential from this friction in turn exposed how fruitless the Articles of Confederation were in dealing with a disaster that could demolish the country. Szatmary links the state's government's weakness to the foundation by using newspaper and editorial accounts of the day to offer a well-rounded view of an unseen milestone.

Marion Starkey's, " A Little Rebellion", is a fine read, but the animal protein and potatoes are in the book, " Shay's Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection", by Mr. David P. Szatmary.

In Mr. Szatmary's book, government promotion of commercial interests over and overcome of the majority, independent " yeoman" farmers, was an objective lesson. It has also proven to be a harbinger of things to come.

Now that the amount of survival farmers is slight, it has turn out to be easier in this worldwide economy of wage-earners, to subvert feelings of independence plus assert control. What is to keep the superiority of our leaders in check, as when Washington National Airport was renamed as a

monument to Ronald Reagan, memorializing his overpower of the Air Traffic Controllers?

This book comprises of 178 pages in total. Shays' Rebellion has been a theme of historical debate for almost two hundred years. In 1788, a year after the rebellion had ended, George Richards Minot wrote *The History of the Insurrections in Massachusetts*. Qualified in Boston as a lawyer, Minot served as clerk of the Massachusetts House during the revolution and personally disapproves of Shaysite activity, calling for the penalty of leading rebels. "Daniel Shays's decapitation," he recommended on June 9, 1787, "would have dissolved a general tie, or prevented [the rebels] engrafting their quite a few oppositions upon his: and so deliver their opinions harmless speculations." Minot carried his anti- Shaysism into his *History*, calling the dilemma an "unfortunate rebellion" and castigating "those deluded citizens who were concerned in the insurrections or rebellion." Concern for foreign judgment, though, moderated Minot's pro-government bias in his *History*. Writing at least partly "to preserve the reputation of my country" in opposition to European criticism, Minot sought to keep away from the impression of fundamental differences involving competing groups in Shays' Rebellion. Through such an approach, he wrote, many misconceived ideas, tending to the discredit of the country, may be unconcerned; and the public status vindicated; as the reasons which guides to the late national difficulty, when correctly understood, make active as an apology for them; and the method in which these difficulties were covered up, does value to the government, and presents the strongest marks of reflection and understanding in the people. As a consequence, his treatment of the

insurrection became an only moderately pro-government study. As historian David Ramsey contended after its publication, the History had “ the air of impartiality.” Nineteenth-century historians, not as troubled as Minot about European opinion, reflected the nationalism of their day and came out strongly against the insurgents. “ When the materials of the rebellion are taken into consideration,” Josiah Holland, the founder and editor of Scribner’s Monthly, wrote in his History of Western Massachusetts (1855), “ their entire lack of moral power, their utter cowardice, their boastings and their threatening, their insolence and malice, their out-rages and robberies—apology for them stammers with awkward qualifications and justification stumbles with the weight it carries.” For Holland, the Shaysite troubles “ taught a lesson, and let that lesson be remembered: That the rebellion of a people against a government established by themselves is not justifiable, even in an extreme case, and can only result in dishonor to the state, and calamity and disgrace to those who participate in it.”

John Fiske, writing in 1888, similarly deprecated “ the delicious naiveté” of the “ craze for paper

money” and concluded that the Massachusetts “ rebels had behaved shamefully.” Andrew McLaughlin in 1905 assessed the Shaysites even more harshly than Fiske, calling them “ the

vicious, the restless, the ignorant, the foolish,” who “ were advocating measures which if given free opportunity for development would have undermined government and liberty

together.”

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As the application of scientific methods to American history became more prevalent during the early twentieth century, some historians tried to correct the unbalanced treatment of Shays' Rebellion. Jonathan Smith, for example, felt that previous narratives were, " for the most part, strongly colored with the opinions of those actively engaged in its suppression, and also of the conservative classes, who had no sympathy with the movement." He consequently sought to present " an impartial examination of the facts." Joseph P. Warren also attempted to deal with the Shaysites impartially: " Many conservative and influential persons believed that the insurgents desired to overthrow the state government, and to establish some purely democratic or even communistic system in its place. The present writer believes that this interpretation of the aims of the rebellion was unjust to most of the participants."

On the other side were the conservative groups, the professional classes and the commercial classes along the seaboard." The farmers attacked the debtor courts, he concluded, due to " economic discontent and social inequality." Robert East similarly placed the blame for the Massachusetts insurrection upon " the conservative fiscal and social policies which were pursued in that state after 1780." Millard Hansen also saw the uprising as a reaction of " impoverished" farmers in the " Populist Party" against the social program of the " Massachusetts conservatives." Some historians viewed conservative government policies in terms of class. Richard B. Morris believed that such " tension as had existed between classes and sections

was in considerable measure suspended during the military conflict” but resurfaced after the Revolution as the state elites consolidated their power.

To Morris, Shays’ Rebellion represented an example of postwar class conflict. Sidney Kaplan hinted at the same interpretation, contending that many prominent government supporters during the uprising “ were class conscious.” In his *Western Massachusetts in the Revolution*, Robert Taylor argued that “ Shays’ Rebellion separated the citizens of Massachusetts into two class-conscious groups—debtors and creditors.”