

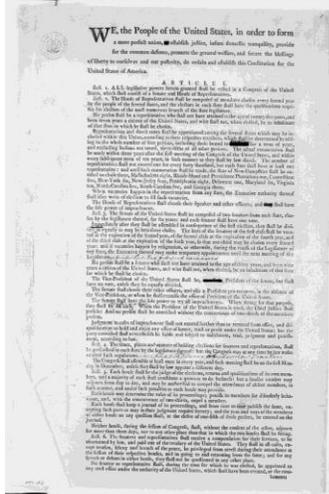
National History Day Topic: Shay's Rebellion and the US Constitution

Guiding Historical Question: How did the events of Shay's Rebellion contribute to efforts to replace the Articles of Confederations with a new constitution for the United States of America?

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Primary Source #1



Title: [Constitution, Printed, with Marginal Notes by George Washington, September 12, 1787 \(page 1\)](#)

George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799. American Memory. Library of Congress. October 2011.

Introduction

From 1777 to 1789 the United States of America were governed according to the Articles of Confederation. Even at the time they were created there were many among the Founding Fathers who felt that the Articles did not grant the federal government sufficient power to effectively manage the new nation. Others, however, feared a central government government so much, and had sufficient faith in the ability of state governments to maintain order, that they were content with a weak in ineffective federal government.

As the years went on, however, the failings of the Articles of Confederation became more and more apparent. States struggled to raise money to pay debts. In New England the burden fell heavily on cash-poor farmers who lacked the resources to generate the currency their creditors demanded. When the courts began seizing land to pay debts, farmers reacted by gathering together in mobs to prevent the courts from holding hearings. Eventually the courts handed down indictments of the ringleaders, and the resulting outcry lead to armed rebellion. Lead by Daniel Shays, the rebels marched to Springfield, MA, and attempted to seize the federal armory there. A hastily assembled militia came out to meet them, a few shots were fired, and the rebellion was over.

Despite the seeming ease with which the rebels were defeated the rebellion caused great consternation around the country as numerous powerful (and wealthy) individuals came to realize that the various state governments lacked the power to confront widespread rebellion, and that the federal government was too weak and too far away. As a result of Shay's Rebellion many were thus convinced that a stronger government was necessary to deal with both the issues that caused the revolt and to deal with future revolts should any occur. Thus, Shay's Rebellion was the final catalyst that set the country on course towards the Constitutional Convention.

Additional Sources	
<p>Primary Sources</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. [Proclamation by the State of Pennsylvania offering reward for Daniel Shays and 3 other rebellion ringleaders. Signed by Benjamin Franklin] Date: May 19, 1787 3. The looking glass for 1787. A house divided against itself cannot stand. Mat. chap. 13th verse 26 Creator: Doolittle, Amos Date: 1787 4. "The Source of the Evil is the Nature of the Government" Letter from Henry Knox to George Washington December 17, 1786 5. Benjamin Franklin's Proposed Plan of Confederation, 1775 Benjamin Franklin. Plan for a Confederation July 21, 1775 	<p>Secondary Sources</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hamilton, Alexander & Madison, James The Federalist Papers #9 and #10 deal specifically with the proposed constitution's ability to deal with the threat of insurrection. 2. Library of Congress Road to the Constitution Online Exhibit. Covers the ideas and issues the lead to the creation of the Consitution with links to additional primary sources. This exhibit ties Shay's Rebellion into the larger picture of American History.