

**Resource Sheet #01**

**Shays' Rebellion Article**

**Shays' Rebellion  
1786-1787**

During the American Revolution, the states and the Continental Congress had borrowed large sums of money from wealthy merchants. After the war, the merchants demanded that they be repaid, but the national government under the Articles of Confederation had no power to raise money. The states had to repay their own debts, and the only way for them to raise the money was to tax their citizens heavily.

Many farmers in the western part of Massachusetts had an especially hard time paying their bills at this time. The Massachusetts farmers, many of whom were war veterans who had never been paid, owed about one-third of their income for state taxes, and the Massachusetts legislature refused to issue paper money as other states had done. Those farmers who could not pay their taxes had their farms taken away by state courts. Court officials then auctioned off the farms and used the money from the sale to pay the taxes. Farmers who could not pay their personal debts were often put into prison.

The farmers asked the Massachusetts legislature to lower taxes and let them pay taxes and other debts with farm produce. They begged the legislature to stop jailing people who could not pay their debts. Instead the legislature listened to merchants and bankers to whom the farmers owed money. It refused to pass laws to help the farmers.

Because they could not get help through legal means, a group of farmers decided they had no choice but to rebel. Their leader was Daniel Shays, a former Revolutionary War captain. In the fall of 1786, Shays led armed farmers in marches outside county courthouses in Springfield, Northampton and other towns in western Massachusetts. The purpose was to keep the courts from meeting. If the courts did not meet, bankers and others to whom farmers owed money could not take away their farms.

In January 1787, Shays' men attacked a Springfield building where they government stored guns. Wealthy merchants from as far away as Baltimore, Maryland paid to raise a militia and the governor of Massachusetts sent the soldiers to fight the rebels. The soldiers shot and killed four men, and soon the rest of Shays' followers fled. Several rebel leaders were caught. The men were brought to trial, found guilty, and sentenced to death. Later the court set them all free, including Shays.

Shays' Rebellion did not succeed. For many, the rebellion symbolized a fatal weakness of the national government under the Articles of Confederation. Because Congress had no power to raise money, it could not help the states pay off their war debts, which forced the states to tax their citizens heavily. Moreover, Congress could not raise a national army without unanimous consent of the states, so it was unable to act in time to assist Massachusetts. The realization of this weakness helped spur the events of the summer of 1787, when the Constitutional Convention that met in Philadelphia wrote a constitution that defined a stronger and more capable federal government.



**Daniel Shays and Job Shattuck, two of the main protest leaders.**

Source: "Daniel Shays and Job Shattuck." Relief Cut On Paper. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. Washington, D.C. Accessed 8/11/14.

<http://npgportraits.si.edu/eMuseumNPG/code/emuseum.asp?rawsearch=ObjectID//is//13020//false//false&newprofile=CAP&newstyle=single>

**Resource Sheet #02**

**Shays' Rebellion Note-taking Sheet**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Purpose for reading: Based on the article, summarize Shays' Rebellion (RS #01) by answering the questions listed below.**

<b>Who</b> was involved in the rebellion?	
<b>What</b> was the problem?	
<b>Where</b> did the rebellion take place?	
<b>When</b> did the rebellion take place?	
<b>Why</b> did the rebellion take place?	
<b>How</b> did Shays' men rebel?	