



Shays's Rebellion: Authority and Distress in Post-Revolutionary America (Witness to History)

By Sean Condon

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Throughout the late summer and fall of 1786, farmers in central and western Massachusetts organized themselves into armed groups to protest against established authority and aggressive creditors. Calling themselves "regulators" or the "voice of the people," these crowds attempted to pressure the state government to lower taxes and provide relief to debtors by using some of the same methods employed against British authority a decade earlier. From the perspective of men of wealth and station, these farmers threatened the foundations of society: property rights and their protection in courts and legislature.

In this concise and compelling account of the uprising that came to be known as Shays's Rebellion, Sean Condon describes the economic difficulties facing both private citizens and public officials in newly independent Massachusetts. He explains the state government policy that precipitated the farmers' revolt, details the machinery of tax and debt collection in the 1780s, and provides readers with a vivid example of how the establishment of a republican form of government shifted the boundaries of dissent and organized protest.

Underscoring both the fragility and the resilience of government authority in the nascent republic, the uprising and its aftermath had repercussions far beyond western Massachusetts; ultimately, it shaped the framing and ratification of the U.S. Constitution, which in turn ushered in a new, stronger, and property-friendly federal government. A masterful telling of a complicated story, *Shays's Rebellion* is aimed at scholars and students of American history.

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Editorial Review

Review

The deepest account of the rebellion I have read, the book keeps a strong narrative line and grows in drama as it proceeds. Undergraduates should cherish this work. Riveting.

(Barry Levy, University of Massachusetts–Amherst, author of *Town Born: The Political Economy of New England from Its Founding to the Revolution*)

Condon succeeds by writing an engaging narrative in straightforward prose that builds excitement as it chronicles the revolutionary events in post-revolutionary Massachusetts... This brief but powerful book will be an ideal addition to undergraduate courses on the Revolution and early national era, and could accompany a survey of early American history for first-year college students as well.

(*H-SHEAR*)

... [Condon] does provide extensive primary source quotations that will help readers better understand the rebellion and the period. This book should be added to the library collections of community colleges, four-year institutions, and high schools.

(*Choice*)

About the Author

Sean Condon is an associate professor and chair of the history department at Merrimack College.

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