

## Daniel Gray: A Proclamation of Shaysite Grievances (1786)

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*In the mid-1780s western Massachusetts farmers, many of whom had supported the Revolution through military service, found their pursuit of happiness challenged by the fiscal policies of the state. Anxiety and anger boiled into direct action in the summer of 1786 after the state legislature voted for more taxes but did not reform the states monetary policy. The legislature's lack of responsiveness to the westerners' problems and requests reflected the political power of the eastern mercantile and creditor interests, but it may also have been due to an earlier lack of strong, direct participation in government by the westerners. The farmers set out to rectify that. Farmers who had already suffered through foreclosure on their lands due to their inability to pay taxes were joined by those who faced ruin because of the new taxes. Under such leaders as Daniel Shays, who had been a captain in the Continental Army, the farmers formed their own political committees (chaired by such compatriots as Daniel Gray) and armed forces. They closed courts while opening their own conventions in the counties, for they wanted to make sure that their grievances were not only heard but acted upon. Governor James Bowdoin certainly did react, but not in the way they wanted: he first suspended habeas corpus and then called out an army.*

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From George R. Minot, *The History of the Insurrection in Massachusetts in 1786 and of the Rebellion Consequent Thereon* (1788; New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), pp. 82-83.

### Shays's Rebellion 1786

1. An ADDRESS to the People of the several towns in the county of Hampshire, now at arms. GENTLEMEN, We have thought proper to inform you of some of the principal causes of the late risings of the people, and also of their present movement, viz.

1st. The present expensive mode of collecting debts, which by reason of the great scarcity of cash, will of necessity fill our gaols with unhappy debtors, and thereby a reputable body of people rendered incapable of being serviceable either to themselves or the community.

2d. The monies raised by impost and excise being appropriated to discharge the interest of governmental securities, and not the foreign debt, when these securities are not subject to taxation.

3d. A suspension of the writ of Habeas Corpus, by which those persons who have stepped forth to assert and maintain the rights of the people, are liable to be taken and conveyed even to the most distant part of the Commonwealth, and thereby subjected to an unjust punishment.

4th. The unlimited power granted to Justices of the Peace and Sheriffs, Deputy Sheriffs, and Constables, by the Riot Act, indemnifying them to the prosecution thereof; when perhaps, wholly actuated from a principle of revenge, hatred, and envy.

Furthermore, Be assured, that this body, now at arms, despise the idea of being instigated by British emissaries, which is so strenuously propagated by the enemies of our liberties: And also wish the most proper and speedy measures may be taken, to discharge both our foreign and domestick debt. Per Order, DANIEL GRAY, Chairman of the Committee.

### Review Questions

1. How did this address serve as an assurance that the rebels were not enemies of the people or the Revolution?
2. Did the rebels perceive their cause to be a matter of rights or economics?
3. Did the reasons the rebels presented justify rebellion?
4. How did the rebels' grievances indicate a breakdown in the newly constituted political processes? How did they indicate an erosion in social and political deference?