

CONSTITUTION 101

Module 3: Road to the Convention

3.1 Activity Guide

U.S. CONSTITUTION AND SHAYS' REBELLION

In this activity, you will be introduced to Shays' Rebellion, the weakness of the Articles of Confederation, and how Shays' Rebellion helped lead to the Constitutional Convention.

Read these two excerpts and identify the perspectives expressed by George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. Underline words that help you understand each man's perspective.

George Washington's 1787 letter to Henry Knox:

"[I shall] be extremely anxious to know the issue of the movements of the forces that were assembling, the one to support, the other to oppose the constitutional rights of Massachusetts. – The moment is, indeed, important! – If government shrinks, or is unable to enforce its laws; fresh maneuvers will be displayed by the insurgents – anarchy & confusion must prevail – and everything will be turned topsy/turvey in that State; where it is not probable the mischiefs will terminate."

What is Washington's main idea?

Letter from Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, December 20, 1787:

"I own I am not a friend to a very energetic government. It is always oppressive. The late rebellion in Massachusetts has given more alarm than I think it should have done. Calculate that one rebellion in 13 states in the course of 11 years, is but one for each state in a century & a half. No country should be so long without one. Nor will any degree of power in the hands of government prevent insurrections. . . ."

What is Jefferson's main idea?

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Who do you find more persuasive, and why?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of each view?

Jefferson	Washington
Strengths:	Strengths:
Weaknesses:	Weaknesses:

How might views like those of Washington influence the founders when crafting the U.S. Constitution?

How might views like those of Jefferson influence the founders when crafting the U.S. Constitution?