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U.S. History and Government ~ Miss Cummings Constitutional Foundations

**Shays’ Rebellion: America’s First Civil War**

THE HISTORY CHANNEL® PRESENTS: 10 DAYS THAT UNEXPECTEDLY CHANGED AMERICA™

Though the American Revolution boldly established the formation of a new nation, how it would be organized and governed was a work in progress. In the wake of the Revolution, the Articles of Confederation set out guidelines for the federal government. Yet this loose authority and the lack of a single national leader left the nation vulnerable to faction and uprising. Meanwhile, many citizens who had risked their lives defeating the British were struggling under the weight of high taxes and the demand for cash currency as payment for goods and services. These citizens argued that they were being subjected to the same conditions the Revolution was fought to overturn. One of those disenchanted veterans was Daniel Shays, a Massachusetts farmer and former Continental Army captain. Facing the loss of his own farm, Shays organized a rebel army of over 1,000 followers which stormed a Springfield debtor’s court and arsenal, determined to attack and overthrow the government in Boston.

The drama of the Shays’ Rebellion is vividly captured in this one hour documentary. Though the rebellion was ultimately unsuccessful, it had profound results that changed America forever. In the wake of the Shays’ rebellion, the states moved quickly to hold a Constitutional Convention that eventually led to the drafting of the Constitution and later, the Bill of Rights. In many ways, it was Shays Rebellion that persuaded General George Washington, who had retired after the war, to return to politics and accept the crucial role of the nation’s first president. This program would be an excellent addition to course units on the Revolutionary era, revealing the tenuous nature of the republic during its chaotic and formative early years.

**Comprehension Questions:**

1. *Daniel Shays felt that he had the right to be protected from debt and decline. Why did he believe the government was obligated to provide this protection?*
2. *Do you think it was significant that Daniel Shays was a Revolutionary war veteran? Discuss.*
3. *What were the major complaints of Shays and his followers? What do you think they saw as the goals of the rebellion? Did these goals change over time?*
4. *Why was Shays’ Rebellion considered to be the United States’ first civil war?*
5. *Americans soon learned after the war that the Articles of Confederation were too weak. How did Shays’ Rebellion reveal these weaknesses?*
6. *What role did Shays’ Rebellion play in the creation of the Constitution? If Shays’ Rebellion had been a peaceful protest, do you feel it would have had the same impact? Explain.*
7. *What was the Riot Act? Why was it significant?*
8. *What punishment did Shays and the lead rebels receive for their actions? Do you think their treatment was just? Discuss.*