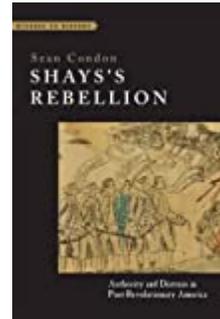




Sean Condon. *Shays's Rebellion: Authority and Distress in Post-revolutionary America.* Witness to History Series. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015. 176 pp. \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4214-1743-1; \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-4214-1742-4.



Reviewed by Paul D. Newman (University of Pittsburgh-Johnstown)

Published on H-SHEAR (December, 2015)

Commissioned by Robert P. Murray (Mercy College)

One Historian's Rebel Is Another's Regulator

With *Shays's Rebellion: Authority and Distress in Post-revolutionary America*, Sean Condon presents Johns Hopkins University Press's twelfth installment of the Witness to History series. Launched nearly a decade ago, the series seeks to present "brief evocative accounts of signal events in American history ... emphasizing narrative ... in a format suitable for undergraduate course adoptions." [1] Condon succeeds by writing an engaging narrative in straightforward prose that builds excitement as it chronicles the revolutionary events in post-revolutionary Massachusetts.

Condon's narrative is free from historiographical discussion or argument, though a brief bibliographic essay ends the book. There are five chapters, bookended by a prologue that portrays the Worcester Court closing in September 1786 and an epilogue that considers the event's impact on the U.S. Constitutional Convention and Massachusetts's ratifying convention in 1787. The book uses primary and secondary sources familiar to any scholar of the event: petitions; the correspondence of Governor James Bowdoin, General Benjamin Lincoln,

and General William Shepard; depositions and records of the trials; newspaper accounts; and the works of Robert J. Taylor, David P. Szatmary, Robert A. Freer, Leonard L. Richards, and other prominent scholars of early national Massachusetts history. In terms of the materials used and ground covered, there is nothing new here, but Condon's interpretation merits close attention. Among the book-length manuscripts (dissertations too) specific to Shays's Rebellion, this one is the most sympathetic to the Bowdoin administration in terms of its legislative agenda, its military suppression of the rebellion, and its prosecutions (and executions) for treason. Condon seems to be building on work performed in shorter essays by Richard Buel Jr. and William A. Pencak. [2]

Condon recognizes the "rebels" as "regulators" and explains the depth of the tradition of "regulation movements" in England and the American colonies. He emphasizes that the resistance movement specifically, and continually, referred to itself as a "regulation," and the resisters referred to themselves as "regulators." The regulators demanded debt relief, paper currency, in-kind ten-