The Whiskey Rebellion **1**

Angered by the federal government’s new excise tax that was imposed onwhiskey in 1791, farmers in the western counties of Pennsylvania engaged in a series of attacks on tax collectors.

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The *tariff* effectively eliminated the farmers’ profits from the sale of an important cash crop, and it became the lightning rod for a wide variety of *grievances* by the farmers against the federal government. **2, 3**

While citizens in the east did not find it difficult to abide by the concept that individual states were to follow the rules of the country, people west of the mountains were less accepting of decisions made by the central government. **4**

The rebel farmers continued their attacks, rioting in river towns and roughing up tax collectors until the so-called "insurrection" flared into the open in July of 1794 when a federal marshal was tarred and feathered in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. Almost at the same time, several hundred men attacked the residence of the regional inspector, burning his home, barn and several outbuildings. Pittsburgh was another scene of disorder by enraged mobs. **5**

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On August 7, 1794, President Washington issued a proclamation, calling out the militia and ordering the *disgruntled* westerners to return to their homes. Washington's order mobilized an army of approximately 13,000. Washington himself, in a show of presidential authority, set out at the head of the troops to *suppress* the uprising. **6**

This was the first use of the Militia Law of 1792, setting a precedent for the use of the militia to "execute the laws of the union, (and) suppress insurrections," asserting the right of the national government to enforce order in one state with troops raised in other states. Even more importantly, it was the first test of power of the new federal government, establishing its authority and showing it could deal with disputes within individual states. In the end, a dozen or so men were arrested, sent to Philadelphia to trial, and released after being pardoned by Washington. **7**