

GEORGE WASHINGTON

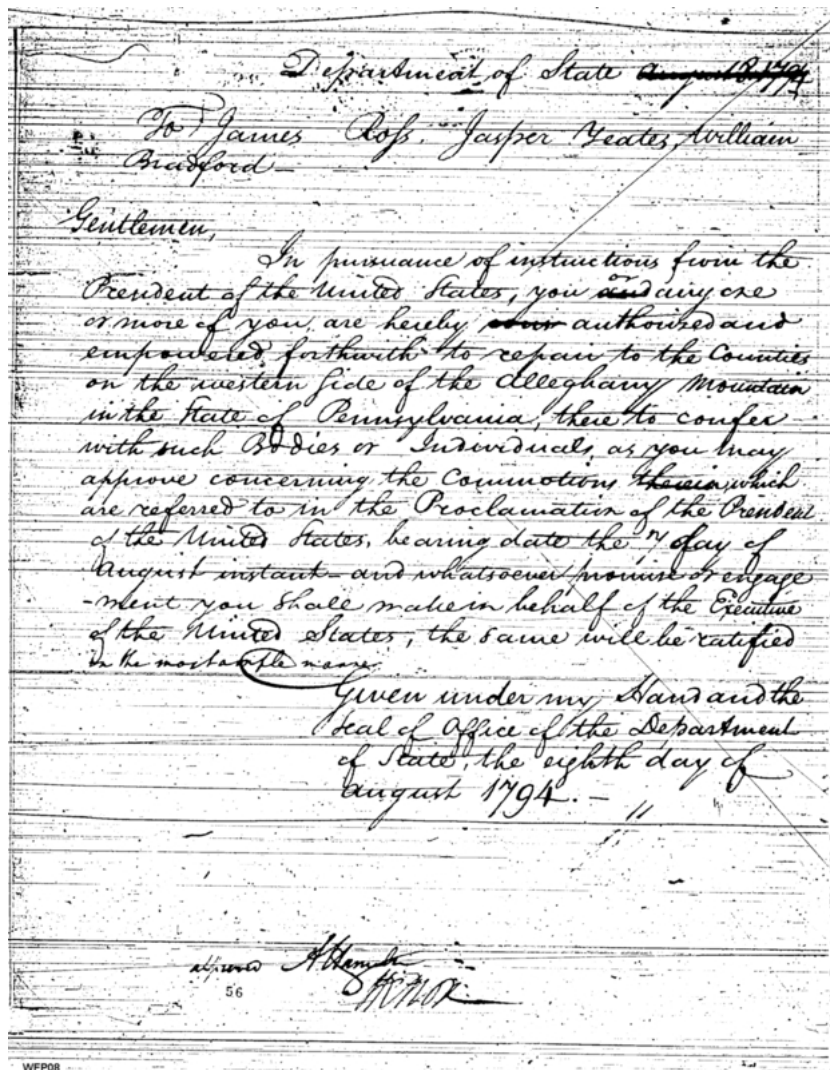
A P R E S I D E N T ' S V I S I O N

PRIMARY SOURCE WORKSHEET

LETTER TO JAMES ROSS, JASPER YEATES, AND WILLIAM BRADFORD, AUGUST 8, 1794.

Library of Congress: Pennsylvania Whiskey Rebellion Collection.

In 1791, under the direction of Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, Congress enacted a tax on liquor. The tax was intended not only to assert federal authority, but also to pay for a portion of the national debt incurred by the Revolutionary War. In western Pennsylvania, frontier farmers who distilled whiskey mainly for personal use became disgruntled. They challenged federal authority through attacks on federal tax collectors. Washington enlisted Ross, Yeates, and Bradford to take necessary measures to quell the uprising.



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TRANSCRIPTION

APPOINTMENT OF UNITED STATES COMMISSIONERS.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE, August 8, 1794.

Gentlemen,

In pursuance of instructions from the President of the United States, you, or any one or more of you, are hereby authorized and empowered, forthwith, to repair to the counties on the western side of the Allegheny mountain, in the State of Pennsylvania, there to confer with such bodies or individuals as you may approve, concerning the commotions, which are referred to in the proclamation of the President of the United States, bearing date the 7th day of August instant, and whatsoever promise or engagement you shall make in behalf of the Executive of the United States, the same will be ratified in the most ample manner. Given under my hand and the seal of office of the Department of State, the eighth day of August, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-four. {SEAL}

EDMUND RANDOLPH, Secretary of State.

To JAMES ROSS, JASPER YEATES, WILLIAM BRADFORD.

QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. Who is the author of the letter? When did he write the letter?
2. To whom did he write the letter?
3. What does the letter authorize?
4. What political issue caused the “commotions” referred to in the letter?
5. The federal government sent men into western Pennsylvania to calm the disturbance. Why is this action significant? Explain.
6. Why did this letter originate in the Department of State and not the Department of War?
7. What actions might the author anticipate from the letter’s recipients?
8. What does the letter tell you about the balance of federal and state power during the nation’s early years? Be specific.

ACTIVITIES

Use your textbook and other print and online resources to complete the following activities.

1. You are a distiller in western Pennsylvania and are being taxed for whiskey production. Write a letter to the President arguing whether or not you think the federal government is treating you fairly.
2. Alexander Hamilton, a Federalist, advocated the use of military force to enforce the laws of the nation. Using your textbook and other reliable print and online resources, research Thomas Jefferson’s view on the government’s actions during the Whiskey Rebellion. What did Jefferson believe was the government’s proper course of action? What does the Whiskey Rebellion tell us about the political situation in the United States during this time?
3. Read the legislative act that authorized this letter on the Library of Congress website. Describe the actions that the 1794 act authorizes. Contrast the 1794 act with the letter.

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