

Letter from George Washington to Alexander Hamilton, September 7, 1792

The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745- 1799. John C. Fitzpatrick, Editor.--vol. 32 Mount Vernon, September 7, 1792.

Sir:

The last post brought me your letter of the 1st instant, with the enclosures respecting the disorderly conduct of the Inhabitants of the Western Survey of the District of Pennsylvania, in opposing the execution of what is called the Excise Law; and of the insults which have been offered by some of them to the Officers who have been appointed to collect the duties on distilled spirits agreeably thereto.

Such conduct in any of the Citizens of the United States, under any circumstances that can well be conceived, would be exceedingly reprehensible; but when it comes from a part of the Community for whose protection the money arising from the Tax was principally designed, it is truly unaccountable, and the spirit of it much to be regretted.

The preliminary steps taken by you in ordering the Supervisor of the District to repair to the Survey where these disorders prevail, with a view to ascertain in person "the true state of the Survey; to collect evidences respecting the violences that have been committed, in order to a prosecution of the offenders... are prudent and proper, and I earnestly wish they may have the desired effect. But if, notwithstanding, opposition is still given to the due execution of the Law, I have no hesitation in declaring, if the evidence of it is clear and unequivocal, that I shall, however reluctantly I exercise them, exert all the legal powers with which the Executive is invested, to check so daring and unwarrantable a spirit. It is my duty to see the Laws executed: to permit them to be trampled upon with impunity would be repugnant to it; nor can the Government longer remain a passive spectator of the contempt with which they are treated. Forbearance, under a hope that the Inhabitants of that Survey would recover from the delirium and folly into which they were plunged, seems to have had no other effect than to increase the disorder.

Questions

1. Why does Washington believe it is important for the government to act?
2. Why is Washington so surprised that the uprising came from Pennsylvanian farmers?
3. According to Washington, what are the consequences of taking no action?
4. When referring to the Whiskey Rebellion in his dairies, Washington said, "we may bid adieu to all government in this Country, except Mob and Club Govt." What do you think he meant by this statement?
5. In Washington's view, once a law is passed by the Congress what is the responsibility of citizens?