



Alien and Sedition Acts

Analysis

Aim

How did the federal government grow in power, strength, and size during the early 1800's?



Read the three statements below. Decide if you agree, disagree, or are neutral about each statement. Indicate your position by circling the term that best describes how you feel, and explain your position in the space indicated below.

Statement 1:

Americans should have the right to criticize their government at all times because the First Amendment guarantees a right to free speech with few restrictions.

Agree

Disagree

Neutral

Explain: Why is this your position?

Statement 2:

Immigrants residing in the United States should have the same exact rights as American citizens.

Agree

Disagree

Neutral

Explain: Why is this your position?

Statement 3

During times of war, the government can do whatever is necessary to protect the American people, as they have ultimate power.

Agree

Disagree

Neutral

Explain: Why is this your position?

Historical Context - Alien and Sedition Acts

Directions: Read the historical context in the box below and answer the questions that follow.

As a young nation, America's stance on foreign policy had largely been to adopt and maintain a position of isolationism (a policy of not forming alliances with other nations - see *George Washington's Farewell Address*). When President Washington's ambassadors negotiated a trade agreement with Great Britain in 1794, other nations in the world were surprised - especially France. France felt America owed loyalty to the French, as they had come to the aid of Americans during the revolutionary war against Britain. Additionally, as a result of many lengthy wars with Great Britain and the French Revolution, France was in deep debt and would have benefited from a new trade agreement.

To support their economy, starting in approximately 1795, French navy and French privateers began the practice of impressment: seizing and stealing American trading vessels, their goods, and their sailors. This angered many Americans and left them afraid of France. Hoping to avoid war, President John Adams sent diplomats to France. During the meetings, French representatives known as X, Y, and Z demanded a bribe of \$10 million. They also threatened the United States with the "power and violence of France".

Many Americans feared that war with France was around the corner. According to the 1790 census, there were approximately 11,200 French citizens living in the United States. By 1798, the French Revolution had taken hold in France causing many French citizens to flee to the United States; the number of French citizens living in the United States was estimated to have grown to 25,000. As rumors of French invasion and enemy spies living in the United States spread, fear took hold of the young American nation. In order to calm the fears of American citizens, Congress quickly passed laws in 1798 to make the United States more secure; these were known as the Alien and Sedition Acts. These acts were supported by the Federalist party, who believed in a strong central government to protect the rights of the people. They were not supported by the Republican party, who believed these laws violated the civil rights of Americans and were a sign of the government abusing their power.

[Note: This was adapted from the Constitutional Rights Foundation](#)

Historical Context - Analysis Questions

Close Reading: What was United States foreign policy in the early years?

Close Reading: What did the French begin to do in 1795 that sparked tension between the United States and France?

Analysis: If you were an American citizen living in the United States in 1798, how might you feel about the increasing number of French immigrants living in America during a time of potential war with France?

Close Reading: Which political party supported the Alien & Sedition Acts? Why?

Primary Source Document Analysis

Directions: Read the excerpts below from the Alien & Sedition Acts and answer the analysis questions that follow.

An Act Respecting Alien Enemies (1798):

1	SECTION 1. Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of
2	America in Congress assembled, That whenever there shall be a declared war between the United
3	States and any foreign nation or government, or any invasion...attempted, or threatened against the
4	territory of the United States, by any foreign nation or government...all natives or citizens of the
5	hostile nation or government, being males of the age of fourteen years and upwards, who shall be
6	residing within the United States, and not American citizens, shall be apprehended, restrained,
7	secured and removed, as alien enemies....

- 1) *Close Reading:* Circle true or false under the statement below and explain your thinking.

According to this act, in the year 1799, if the United States were to declare war against France, any male citizens of France older than 14 years living in the United States could be arrested and deported.

True False | Why:

- 2) *Analysis:* Do you think this law violates the civil rights of immigrants living in the United States of America in 1798? Why or why not?
- 3) *Analysis:* How does the *Act Respecting Alien Enemies* expand the powers of the federal government?
- 4) *Analysis:* Do you think that during times of war the government should be granted more power over their citizens? Why or why not?

