

After the French Revolution, an intense political conflict developed in the United States. Members of the Federalist Party feared France because the French king was beheaded in their revolution. Federalists preferred England as an ally. Members of the opposing Republican Party preferred France as an ally. (It is not associated with today's Republican Party.)

In 1796, John Adams, a Federalist, was elected president. Thomas Jefferson, a Republican, became vice president. In those days, the presidential candidate who won second place became vice president. It did not matter if he was from a different political party. (Under those rules, Donald Trump would be president today, and Hillary Clinton would be vice president!)

In 1797, French officials tried to bribe U.S. diplomats. Federalists considered this an outrage. The Federalist-controlled Congress decided to suppress French influence in U.S. politics. In June and July 1798, Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts.

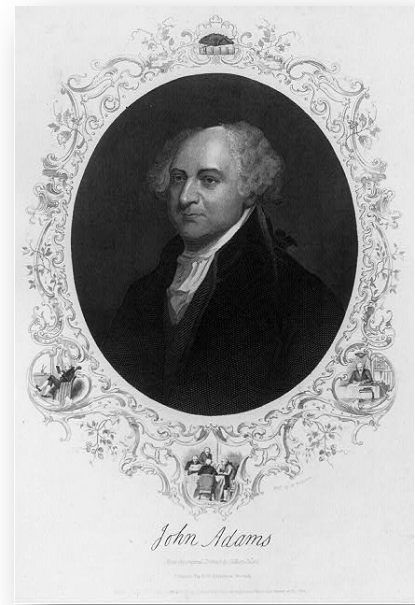
The Alien Acts included a new law that made it harder for immigrants to become citizens. Another new law authorized the president to deport any non-citizen (immigrant) he suspected of plotting against the government.

The Sedition Act restricted freedoms of assembly, speech, and the press. *Sedition* means any act that stirs up rebellion against the government. The new law outlawed protest against laws and acts of the president. It also made it illegal to express “any false, scandalous and malicious writing” against Congress or the president.*

The new law punished anyone with “bad intent” who criticized Congress or the president. The punishment was up to two years in prison. Therefore, the government had the power to *cancel* newspapers, or restrict what they could publish, by threatening criminal prosecution against writers and publishers.

During Adams's presidency, 20 Republican newspaper editors were arrested for what they published. Some were imprisoned.

John Adams lost the 1800 election to Thomas Jefferson. The Sedition Act was no longer used for censorship. But neither it nor the Alien Acts have ever been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.



*The Republican vice president, Thomas Jefferson, was not protected from criticism by the Sedition Act. Therefore, sedition against him was okay under the law ~~against him~~, but not against the Federalist Congress and the Federalist president.