

11.6 The Presidency of John Adams

When the framers of the Constitution created the Electoral College, they imagined that the electors would simply choose the two best leaders for president and vice president. That was how the nation's first two presidential elections worked. By the third election in 1796, however, it was clear that political parties had become part of the election process.

The Republicans backed Thomas Jefferson for president that year. His support came mainly from farmers in the South and the West. The Federalists supported John Adams, who appealed to lawyers, merchants, shipowners, and businesspeople in the North. When the electoral votes were counted, John Adams was elected president by just three votes. Jefferson came in second, making him vice president. The nation's new top two leaders were political enemies from opposing parties.

The Alien and Sedition Acts At first, President Adams tried to work closely with Jefferson. "Party violence," he found, made such efforts "useless." Meanwhile, Federalists in Congress passed four controversial laws known as the Alien and Sedition Acts. They argued that these laws were needed to protect the country from troublemakers like Citizen Genet. In fact, the real purpose of the Alien and Sedition Acts was to make life difficult for the Federalists' rivals, the Republicans.

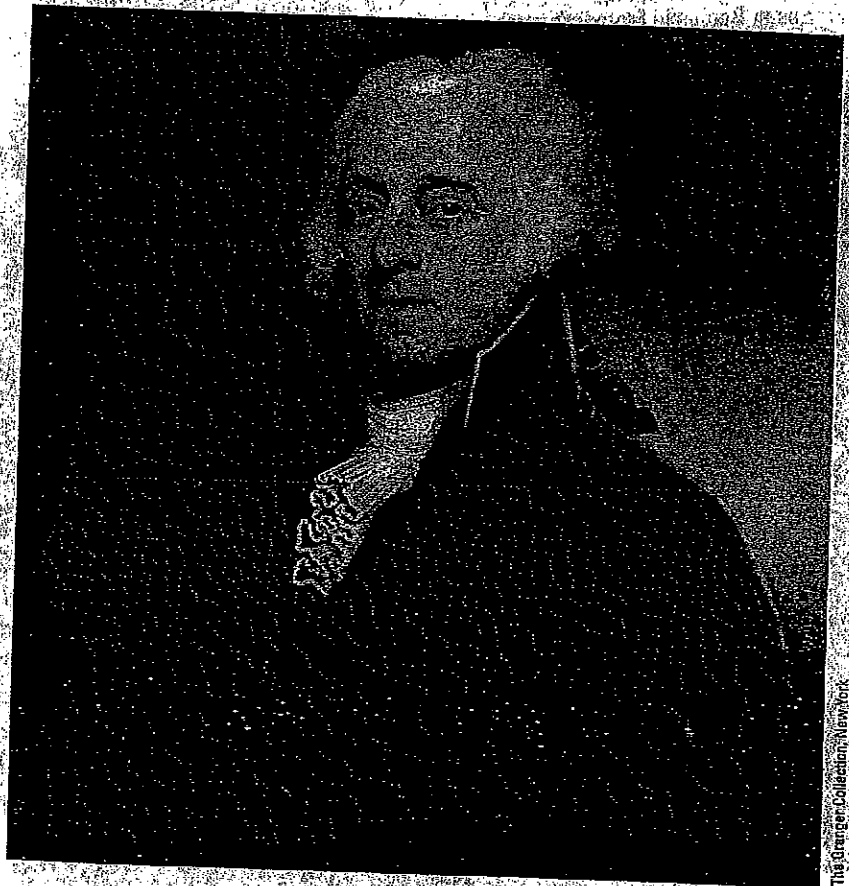
Three of the laws, the Alien Acts, were aimed at **aliens** (noncitizens). The first lengthened the time it took for an immigrant to become a citizen with the right to vote—from 5 to 14 years. Since most immigrants voted Republican, Jefferson saw this law as an attack on his party. The other two Alien Acts allowed the president to either jail or deport (expel) aliens who were suspected of stirring up trouble. Although these laws were never enforced, they did frighten a number of French spies and rabble-rousers into leaving the country.

The Sedition Act made **sedition**—encouraging rebellion against the government—a crime. Its definition of *sedition* included "printing, writing, or speaking in a scandalous or malicious [hateful] way against the government... Congress... or the President." Hamilton approved of this law, believing that it would punish only those who published vicious lies intended to destroy the government.

aliens: people who have come from other countries and are not yet citizens

sedition the crime of encouraging rebellion against the government.

John Adams, a Federalist, was elected the second president of the United States by the slim margin of 71 votes to 68 votes in the Electoral College. Thomas Jefferson, a Democratic-Republican, became the vice president.



to refuse to recognize a federal law. This action by a state is called *nullification*.

states' rights All rights kept by the states under the Constitution. Supporters of states' rights sometimes argued that states were not obliged to honor federal laws that they believed violated the Constitution.

In this cartoon, the devil and the British lion encourage a Federalist editor, represented by the hedgehog, to cross out important phrases from America's great documents. Liberty weeps at Benjamin Franklin's tomb.



Instead, the Sedition Act was used to punish Republican newspaper editors who delighted in insulting Adams. One, for example, called him "old, querulous [whiny], bald, blind, crippled, toothless Adams." Twenty-five people were arrested under the new law. Ten of them were convicted of printing seditious opinions.

The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions Republicans viewed the Sedition Act as an attack on the rights of free speech and free press. Since the federal government was enforcing the act, they looked to the states to protect these precious freedoms.

Jefferson and Madison drew up a set of resolutions, or statements, opposing the Alien and Sedition Acts and sent them to state legislatures for approval. They argued that Congress had gone beyond the Constitution in passing these acts. States, therefore, had a duty to **nullify** the laws—that is, to declare them to be without legal force.

Only two states, Virginia and Kentucky, adopted the resolutions. The arguments put forward in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions were based on the **states' rights** theory of the Constitution. This theory holds that the states created the Constitution. In doing so, they gave up certain rights. Rights not specifically given to the federal government remained with the states. Of these, one of the most important is the right to judge whether the federal government is using its powers properly.

When no other states approved the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions, the protest died. The states' rights theory, however, was not forgotten. It would be raised and tested again in the years ahead.

The New National Capital

In the fall of 1800, the federal government moved to the city of Washington in the District of Columbia. Most of the government's buildings were still under construction. President Adams' wife, Abigail, described the new "President's House" as a "castle" in which "not one room or chamber is finished." She used the large East Room for hanging laundry, as it was not fit for anything else.

After years of wandering from city to city, the national government finally had a permanent home.

The Granger Collection, New York

Name _____ Period _____ Date _____

Read the handout provided in class and then complete the following to the best of your ability. REMEMBER, THESE NOTES ARE WHAT YOU USE TO PREPARE FOR TESTS. If you complete this inaccurately you will likely not succeed on your test.

The Presidency of John Adams (The Alien and Sedition Acts)

- 1- Define Alien-
- 2- Define Sedition-
- 3- What was the "real purpose" of the Alien and Sedition Acts?
- 4- Summarize what the Alien Acts required (2 things)
- 5- Summarize what the Sedition Act required-
- 6- How was the Sedition Act used by the Federalists who controlled the government?
- 7- What Amendments of the Bill of Rights were being challenged by the Alien and Sedition Acts and how?

The Presidency of John Adams (The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions)

8- Define Nullify-

9- Define States' Rights-

10- Why did Thomas Jefferson ask states to *Nullify* the Alien and Sedition Acts?

11- Summarize the main ideas contained in the sub-section **The Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions-**