Make Haste to Wage War

“We must make haste to wage war, or we shall be lost... Something energetic and decisive must be done soon. Congress fiddles while our Rome is burning. America... can interdict [prohibit] France the ocean.”

—Fisher Ames, urging war with France, 1798

The Presidency of John Adams

**Objectives**
- Discuss the reasons for tension between the United States and France.
- Describe the main provisions of the Alien and Sedition acts.
- Explain how controversy arose over states’ rights.

**Reading Skill**
**Identify Analogies** In an analogy, two pairs of items are connected with the same sort of comparison. For example, both pairs might compare synonyms, or words with similar meanings. You must understand the comparison between the first pair in order to complete the comparison between the second pair. Some common types of analogies are cause-effect, antonyms, and synonyms.

**Why It Matters**
John Adams succeeded Washington as President. He struggled to reduce the country’s divisions and to steer a neutral course in foreign policy.

**Troubles With France**
Adams immediately faced a crisis over relations with France. The French were angered by U.S. neutrality in the war between France and Britain. France had hoped for U.S. support. Had not French assistance been the key to success in the American Revolution? Why didn’t Americans show their gratitude by helping the French now?

The Jay Treaty only increased tensions with France. As the French saw it, the treaty put the United States on Britain’s side. France reacted late in 1796 by snubbing a U.S. diplomat. Moreover, the French continued to attack American merchant ships.

The XYZ Affair In 1797, Adams sent a new three-person mission to France. Agents of the French government demanded that the United States pay a bribe of $250,000. The agents also wanted the United States to lend France several million dollars.

The Americans said they would pay “not a sixpence [a coin worth six pennies].” Later, that statement led to the slogan, “Millions for defense, but not one sixpence for tribute [a forced payment].” The bribe attempt was a sensation when it became public. Because the names of the French agents were kept secret, they were called X, Y, and Z. The incident became known as the XYZ Affair.
**War Fever** The XYZ Affair caused an outbreak of war fever in the United States. Many Federalists demanded that Adams ask Congress to declare war on France.

With war fever rising, Adams asked Congress to increase the size of the army and rebuild the navy. It did both, thus enhancing the power of the central government. Adams also convinced Congress to create a separate department of the navy. Between 1798 and 1800, the United States fought an undeclared naval war with France.

Nonetheless, the President and many other Americans opposed a full-scale war. To avoid war, Adams sent a new mission to France. Napoleon Bonaparte, France’s dictator, was busy dealing with war in Europe. In 1800, he agreed to stop seizing American ships.

President Adams had avoided war. But the agreement angered leaders of his own Federalist Party, especially the pro-British Hamilton. This disapproval weakened Adams politically.

Still, Adams was satisfied. He told a friend that he wanted his tombstone to read: “Here lies John Adams, who took upon himself the responsibility of peace with France in the year 1800.”

**Checkpoint** How did Adams settle differences with France?

**The Alien and Sedition Acts**
The war fever deepened the split between Federalists and Republicans. Federalists’ fear of revolutionary France spilled over into a mistrust of immigrants. Federalists suspected them of bringing in dangerous ideas and feared that they would back the Republicans.

**The Five-Headed Monster**

The three American representatives declare, “Cease bawling, Monster! We will not give you sixpence.”

(a) **Explain** What does the five-headed creature want?
(b) **Detect Points of View** What opinion do you think the cartoonist has of the French government? What evidence supports your view?

The XYZ Affair stirred anti-French feeling in the United States. This 1798 cartoon shows a five-headed creature demanding a bribe from the three American representatives (at left).

**Vocabulary Builder**

Use the information below to teach students this section’s high-use words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High-Use Word</th>
<th>Definition and Sample Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>duration, p. 300</td>
<td>n., length of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>provoke, p. 301</td>
<td>n. to cause to anger; to excite; to cause an action</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teach**

**Troubles With France**
p. 298

**Instruction**

- **Vocabulary Builder** Before teaching this section, preteach the High-Use Words duration and provoke using the strategy on TE p. T21.
- **Key Terms** Have students complete the See It–Remember It chart for the Key Terms in this chapter.
- **Read Troubles with France aloud with students, using the Structured Silent Reading strategy (TE, p. T22).**
- **Ask:** What issues caused increased tension in the United States between 1793 and 1797? (the failure of the United States to ally itself with France during the war between France and Britain; Jay’s Treaty)
- **Ask:** Why did the XYZ Affair anger Americans so much? (The United States had approached France to negotiate, and Americans felt that France had responded unfairly.)
- **Ask:** Why do you think the Federalists were angry at Adams for avoiding war with France? (Students may suggest that France’s attack on American merchant ships and the XYZ Affair angered Americans. Also, the Federalists tended to support Britain in that country’s struggles with France.)

**Independent Practice**

Have students begin filling in the study guide for this section.

**Monitor Progress**

As students fill in the Notetaking Study Guide, circulate and make sure individuals understand how Adams dealt with the tensions between the United States and France. Provide assistance as needed.

**Answers**

- **Reading Skill** fevers spread throughout a person’s body, as the desire for war spread throughout the country
- **Checkpoint** He compromised to avoid war.

**Reading Political Cartoons** (a) money from the Americans (b) The cartoonist has a negative view of the French government; he drew the country as a monster.
The Alien and Sedition Acts

States’ Rights

Instruction

- Read The Alien and Sedition Acts aloud with students.
- Have students complete the worksheet "Debating the Alien Act." Ask them to compare and contrast how each party viewed the power of the federal government. (Federalists—strong federal government; Republicans—limited power of federal government)

Independent Practice

Have students continue filling in the study guide for this section.

Monitor Progress

- As students fill in the Notetaking Study Guide, circulate and make sure students understand the Alien and Sedition acts and their consequences. Provide assistance as needed.
- Tell students to fill in the last column of the Reading Readiness Guide. Probe for what they learned that confirms or invalidates each statement.
- Have students go back to their Word Knowledge Rating Form. Rerate their word knowledge and complete the last column with a definition or example.

Answers

Detect Points of View

- States could nullify laws if they disliked them.

Checkpoint

- They limited immigration and free speech.

New Life for a Debate

Passage of the Alien and Sedition acts renewed the debate over federal versus state power. Jefferson and Madison wrote the Kentucky and Virginia resolutions in defense of states’ rights. Critical Thinking: Detect Points of View. According to defenders of states’ rights in 1798, what could states do if they disliked a federal law?

Arguments for States’ Rights

- The federal government derives its power from rights given to it by the states.
- Because the states created the United States, individual states have the power to nullify a federal law.

Arguments for Federal Power

- The federal government derives its power from rights given to it by the American people.
- States have no power to nullify federal laws.
- States cannot revoke federal powers set forth in the Constitution.

Trouble on the Horizon

Within 25 years of the Alien and Sedition acts, people in New England and South Carolina would threaten to leave the Union because they either disagreed with American foreign policy or opposed laws passed by Congress.

Federalist leaders decided that to restore order at home they must destroy their political opponents. Congress passed a group of laws in 1798 aimed at immigrants. Another 1798 law targeted Republicans.

The laws directed at immigrants were the Alien Act. An alien is an outsider or someone from another country. The Alien Act increased the duration from 5 to 14 years that a person had to live in the United States to become a citizen. The President gained the power to deport or imprison any alien he considered dangerous.

The law targeting Republicans was the Sedition Act. Sedition is activity designed to overthrow a government. The Sedition Act probably was the harshest law limiting free speech ever passed in the United States. It made it a crime for anyone to write or say anything insulting or anything false about the President, Congress, or the government in general. During 1798 and 1799, ten people were convicted under the act. Most were Republican editors and printers.

Checkpoint

What did the Alien and Sedition acts do?

States’ Rights

The Republicans denounced the Alien and Sedition acts. They charged that the Sedition Act violated the Constitution, especially the First Amendment, which guarantees freedom of speech.

However, the Republicans faced a problem opposing the law. At the time, it was not clearly established that the Supreme Court had the power to strike down a law as unconstitutional. Because of this, the Republicans expressed their opposition through the state legislatures.
Republicans James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, both Virginians, led the campaign. Madison wrote a resolution attacking the Alien and Sedition acts. It was passed by the Virginia legislature. Jefferson wrote a similar resolution that was passed by the Kentucky legislature. Together, the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions stated that the Alien and Sedition acts were unconstitutional. They declared that states had the right to declare laws passed by Congress to be unconstitutional.

No other states supported Virginia and Kentucky, so the two resolutions had little immediate impact. As for the Alien and Sedition acts, they were not in force for long. The law that gave the President the power to imprison or deport dangerous aliens expired after two years. The Sedition Act expired in 1801. The waiting period for immigrants to become citizens was restored to five years in 1802.

However, over the long term the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions were far more important than the laws that provoked them. The resolutions claimed that states could nullify—deprive of legal force—a law passed by Congress. The resolutions also boosted the idea of states’ rights. This is the idea that the union binding “these United States” is an agreement between the states and that they therefore can overrule federal law. In decades to come, a number of states would refuse to obey certain federal laws. States’ rights would become the rallying cry for southern defenders of slavery.

**Check Your Progress**

1. What problem did President Adams face abroad?
2. How did Adams resolve this problem?
3. Why did the Federalist Congress pass the Alien and Sedition acts?
4. What did the resolutions claim that states could do?
5. What was the waiting period for immigrants to become citizens before 1802?

**Reading Skill**

3. Identify Analogies: Explain the analogy in this sentence: As the call for war heated up, John Adams tried to be the nation’s firefighter.

**Key Terms**

6. Why did Republicans want to nullify the Alien and Sedition acts?
7. How can states’ rights be used to oppose federal laws?

**Writing**

8. Use Internet or library resources to research the life of John Adams. List the principal events in his life. Then, describe the personality traits he displayed as President of the United States. Write a thesis statement that could be used to introduce a biographical essay about Adams.

**Checkpoint**

Why did the issue of states’ rights arise at this time?

**Looking Back and Ahead**

You have read how the United States got up and running under its first two Presidents. The next chapter deals with the next two Presidents, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, and the challenges they faced.