

The Alien and Sedition Acts

Many Democratic-Republicans continued to sympathize with France. Federalists, angered by their stand, called them “democrats, mobocrats, and all other kinds of rats.”

In 1798, the Federalist-controlled Congress passed four laws known together as the **Alien and Sedition Acts**. These laws were said to protect the United States, but the Federalists intended them to crush opposition to war. One, the Alien Enemies Act, authorized the president to detain and deport subjects of a hostile nation in time of war. The most controversial was the Sedition Act, which forbade anyone from publishing or voicing criticism of the federal government. In effect, this cancelled basic protections of freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

The two main Democratic-Republican leaders, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, viewed these acts as a misuse of the government’s power. Attacking the problem at the state level, they wrote resolutions passed by the Kentucky legislature in 1798 and in

Virginia in 1799. Known as the **Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions**, these documents argued that the Alien and Sedition Acts were unconstitutional. They stated that the federal government could not pass these acts because they interfered with state government. Madison and Jefferson pressured Congress to repeal the Alien and Sedition Acts. Congress did not, although it allowed the acts to expire within a few years.

The Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions did not have the force of national law, but they supported the idea that states could challenge the federal government. This idea would grow to have a tremendous impact on American history later in the 1800s.

READING CHECK Analyzing How did the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions support the rights of states?

SUMMARY AND PREVIEW Political parties formed to reflect different viewpoints. In the next chapter you will read about Thomas Jefferson’s presidency.