**George Washington and the Whiskey Rebellion**

The Constitution, ratified in 1789, created a strong central government. To support federal power to enforce the law, Congress passed the Militia Law of 1792. This law allowed Congress to raise a militia to “execute the laws of the union, (and) suppress insurrections.”

It was the late 18th century and the national government was cash-strapped. In order to raise money, Congress passed a 25% excise (sales) tax on liquor. Anger about the tax was widespread along the frontier from Pennsylvania to Georgia. Many Americans along the frontier resented the tax from a distant legislature. There were outbreaks of opposition. In rural areas where no one was willing to serve as tax collector, the taxes went unpaid.

By July of 1794, the tension had reached a breaking point. Tax collectors were harassed, tarred and feathered; one’s home was burned. In Western Pennsylvania, the rebellion was intense. Reports told that six thousand people were camped outside Pittsburgh threatening to march on the town.

Washington believed he had to act. He and his cabinet members met with Pennsylvania officials. They decided to present evidence of the violence to Associate Justice of the Supreme Court James Wilson. After reviewing the evidence, Wilson certified that the situation could not be controlled by civil authorities alone. A military response could proceed.

On August 7, Washington issued a proclamation commanding all “insurgents” to “disperse and retire peaceably to their respective abodes.” He cited his authority under the 1792 Militia Act. But the rebellion continued. September 25, 1794, he issued another Proclamation which read in part,

“… I, George Washington, President of the United States, in obedience to that high and irresistible duty consigned to me by the Constitution ‘to take care that the laws be faithfully executed,’ … do hereby declare and make known that… a militia…force which…is adequate to the exigency is already is motion…”

Washington recruited militia members from Pennsylvania as well as nearby Maryland and New Jersey. In total, there were almost 13,000 men—about as many as had served in the entire Continental Army that defeated the British. Washington personally led the troops into Bedford—the first and only time a sitting US President has led troops into the field.

By the end of November, more than 150 people had been arrested; most were later freed due to lack of evidence. Two were convicted of treason, but Washington later pardoned them. Washington’s strong response to the Whiskey Rebellion became, as future-President James Madison put it, “a lesson to every part of the Union against disobedience to the laws.”

**The Alien and Sedition Acts**

No protesting the government? No immigrants allowed in? No freedom of the press. Lawmakers jailed? Is this the story of the Soviet Union during the Cold War?

No. It describes the United States in 1798 after the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts.

The strong steps that Adams took in response to the French foreign threat also included severe repression of domestic protest. A series of laws known collectively as the ALIEN AND SEDITION ACTS were passed by the Federalist Congress in 1798 and signed into law by President Adams. These laws included new powers to DEPORT foreigners as well as making it harder for new IMMIGRANTS to vote. Previously a new immigrant would have to reside in the United States for five years before becoming eligible to vote, but a new law raised this to 14 years.

Charles Willson Peale was one of the great artists of early America. Here, John Adams is captured by Peale's paintbrush.

Clearly, the Federalists saw foreigners as a deep threat to American security. As one Federalist in Congress declared, there was no need to "invite hordes of Wild Irishmen, nor the turbulent and disorderly of all the world, to come here with a basic view to distract our tranquillity." Not coincidentally, non-English ethnic groups had been among the core supporters of the Democratic-Republicans in 1796.

The most controversial of the new laws permitting strong government control over individual actions was the SEDITION ACT. In essence, this Act prohibited public opposition to the government. Fines and imprisonment could be used against those who "write, print, utter, or publish . . . any false, scandalous and malicious writing" against the government.

Under the terms of this law over 20 Republican newspaper editors were arrested and some were imprisoned. The most dramatic victim of the law was REPRESENTATIVE MATTHEW LYON of Vermont. His letter that criticized President Adams' "unbounded thirst for ridiculous pomp, foolish adulation, and self-avarice" caused him to be imprisoned. While Federalists sent Lyon to prison for his opinions, his constituents reelected him to Congress even from his jail cell.  
A fight in Congress! This image appeared in Harper's New Monthly Magazine nearly a century after the incident between Lyon and Griswold with the poetic caption: "He in a trice struck Griswold thrice / Upon his head enraged, Sir; / Who seized the tongs to ease his wrongs, / And Griswold thus engaged, Sir."

The Sedition Act clearly violated individual protections under the first amendment of the Constitution; however, the practice of "JUDICIAL REVIEW," whereby the Supreme Court considers the constitutionality of laws was not yet well developed. Furthermore, the justices were all strong Federalists. As a result, Madison and Jefferson directed their opposition to the new laws to state legislatures. The Virginia and Kentucky legislatures passed resolutions declaring the federal laws invalid within their states. The bold challenge to the federal government offered by this strong states' rights position seemed to point toward imminent armed conflict within the United States.

Enormous changes had occurred in the explosive decade of the 1790s. Federalists in government now viewed the persistence of their party as the equivalent of the survival of the republic. This led them to enact and enforce harsh laws. Madison, who had been the chief architect of a strong central government in the Constitution, now was wary of national authority. He actually helped the KENTUCKY LEGISLATURE to reject federal law. By placing states’ rights above those of the federal government, Kentucky and Virginia had established a precedent that would be used to justify the secession of southern states in the Civil War.

**The Whiskey Rebellion**

1. What kind of tax did the federal government pass in order to raise money?

2. Why were many Americans along the frontier opposed to paying the new taxes?

3. How did Washington involve other branches and levels of government in his decision to deal with the rebels?

4. How did protestors or tax rebels react to Washington’s warning to, “disperse and retire peaceably to their respective abodes.”?

5. The Constitution gives the President the responsibility to “make sure” that laws are “faithfully executed” and makes him the commander in chief of the military. In this situation, how did Washington fulfill his role as “enforcer of the laws” and “Commander in Chief”?

**Washington’s Farewell Address**

**The XYZ affair**

1. Why were the French attacking American ships out at sea?

2. Who was XYZ?

3. What do X, Y and Z ask for in exchange for France promising to leave American ships alone?

4. Do you think that France would be doing this to any other more established and mature nation? Why or why not?

5. How did many Americans (including former President George Washington) react to the France’s demands?

6. In the end how did President John Adams solve this situation?

7. What did this event show the world?

**The Alien and Sedition Acts (ASA)**

1. What did the ASA allow President Adams to do immigrants?
2. Why were Adams and Federalist congress targeting immigrants?

3. What did the ASA allow the President to do to people (newspaper writers) who printed critical or negative statements about the President?

4. We know that silencing people is a violation of their freedom of speech rights, but why couldn’t the Supreme Court do anything about this law at that time? (2 reasons)

5. Since the Supreme Court could not do anything, how did Thomas Jefferson and James Madison try to oppose this law?