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The Alien and Sedition Acts - II

Lead: With war with France imminent and political emotions at a fever pitch, in 1798 the Federalist majority in Congress went after Thomas Jefferson's Republicans. They passed the reprehensible Alien and Sedition Acts.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: When war threatens a democracy, one of the first casualties washed away by the people's anger and fear is rational thought. In World War II perfectly patriotic Japanese Americans were tossed into

concentration camps all over the Western United States in careless disregard for their constitutional rights simply to address the irrational fears of the American public. This is a regularly occurring theme in U.S. History.

It first happened in the 1790s when the Federalists used war fever and the people's anger at France to force through Congress and pressure a reluctant President Adams to sign, first, the Alien Acts which vastly extended the time required for immigrants to achieve citizenship and gave the President the unchecked power to deport unilaterally any foreigner he considered "dangerous." Congress also passed the Sedition Act.

This provided fines and jail sentences for anyone criticizing or saying anything bad about the United States Government, the Congress or the President. Theoretically, the statement, “John Adams is fat,” was a prosecutable offense. Never mind it was the truth.

These measures were transparent in their political intent. French and Irish émigrés were supporters of Thomas Jefferson and the growing Republican party. The Sedition Act was used as a hammer to bludgeon Republican activists and newspaper editors. Twenty-five people were arrested under The Sedition Act. There were fourteen indictments and several served jail time. Next time:

Exorcising the demon, the end of the Alien and Sedition Acts and the end of the Federalists.

**At the University of Richmond,
this is Dan Roberts.**

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