The Alien and Sedition Acts, passed in 1798, outlawed most forms of spoken and written criticism directed towards the President and other elected officials. Illegal acts included “excit[ing] ...the hatred of the good people of the United States,” and “opposing or resisting any law of the United States.”

**Directions**: In the following excerpts from editorials written about Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, highlight or underline statements which would have been illegal under the Alien and Sedition Acts. Finally, answer the questions at the end of the document.

# In our opinion: Obamacare needs a doctor

by: Desert News Editorial March 6, 2015

It has become common practice in modern politics to label partisan opponents as liars, so much so that the epithet has lost much of its stigma. Politicians, as all of us, are imperfect human beings, and when they’re called upon to speak in front of large crowds on a daily basis, it is inevitable that they will occasionally stumble and get facts wrong. Rivals will too often seize upon such errors and brand them as lies, when in fact they are no such things. Lies, unlike mistakes, are statements made with the intent to deceive.

While accusations of dishonesty are ubiquitous, it is still a rare thing for a president of the United States to knowingly and purposely say things he knows to be untrue. In the past century, two presidents faced the prospect of impeachment, and, in both instances, the central issue was the integrity, or lack thereof, of the president’s word.

Certainly, President Obama would have known that the fallout from a false statement eventually would cause great damage to his administration. This suggests he wasn’t aware of the consequences of his massive new health care plan, which is no less troubling.

As with all government programs that overreach, the Affordable Care Act seeks to dictate behavior. It qualifies as acceptable only those health insurance policies that comply with its own definitions. The act’s requirements inevitably limit market choices and constrain consumer behavior.

President Obama and his administration are now making every effort to qualify his previous false statements and somehow reconcile them with the current reality that stands in stark contrast to them. They would be better off proposing legislative fixes that allow for greater freedom of choice within health care coverage.

The recent ill-conceived government “shutdown” showed that Obamacare isn’t going to disappear any time soon. But that doesn’t mean lawmakers shouldn’t work together to make it more acceptable.

Given the bipartisan fury over the president’s misstatements about one’s ability to keep a preferred plan and doctor, the opportunity for such a bipartisan effort seems ripe.

Bush owes us an apology

by Keith Olbermann Sept. 18, 2006

The President of the United States owes this country an apology.

It will not be offered, of course.

He does not realize its necessity.

There are now none around him who would tell him or could.

The last of them, it appears, was the very man whose letter provoked the President into the conduct, for which the apology is essential.

An apology is this President's only hope of regaining the slightest measure of confidence, of what has been, for nearly two years, a clear majority of his people….

“It's unacceptable to think," he said.

It is never unacceptable to think.

And when a President says thinking is unacceptable, even on one topic, even in the heat of the moment, even in the turning of a phrase extracted from its context, he takes us toward a new and fearful path -- one heretofore the realm of science fiction authors and apocalyptic visionaries.

That flash of lightning freezes at the distant horizon, and we can just make out a world in which authority can actually suggest it has become unacceptable to think.

Thus the lightning flash reveals not merely a President we have already seen, the one who believes he has a monopoly on current truth.

It now shows us a President who has decided that of all our commanders-in-chief, ever, he alone has had the knowledge necessary to alter and re-shape our inalienable rights.

This is a frightening, and a dangerous, delusion, Mr. President….

**Questions**

1) What types of statements did you find in the editorials that would violate the Alien and Sedition Acts?

2) Which editorial was more harsh? Why?

3) Why is it important that journalists and other people have the right to criticize politicians and the government?