The Alien And Sedition Acts: Result Of Conflict Between The Federalists And The Democratic-Republicans

The 1790s were full of conflict between the Federalists, who are in favor a strong federal government, and the Democratic-Republicans, who are against a strong federal government. The two parties quarreled long enough eventually leading to the creation of The Alien and Sedition Acts and ultimately defining the role of the people in the new republic. That role is defined in two different ways from the book according to Terri Halperin. Halperin claims that the groups had prolonging troubles deciding on what constitutes a citizen as seen in the revision of the Naturalization Act, and how strong the federal government should be as seen in the Whiskey Rebellion.

When it came to deciding what constitutes an American citizen, the Democratic-Republicans wanted a more inclusive and shorter residence, and the Federalists were in favor of a stricter and longer residence. In the revision of the Naturalization Act, both parties were trying to protect the nation from different dangers that each party had identified on their own. They both agreed that aliens posed danger, but how each party defined that danger was different. Albert Gallatin was a Swiss-born Pennsylvania Democratic-Republican who was going to be seated in the US Senate. The Federalist party said that he did not meet Pennsylvania's citizenship requirements. He argued that since he participated in the American Revolution, he qualified for residency. Eventually, the Pennsylvania legislature elected Gallatin and considered him a citizen. Democratic-Republicans concluded that, "…Federalists were willing to take advantage of the ambiguous citizenship laws and poor record-keeping to deny their opponents offices" (Halperin, pg. 33). After the case, the law increased residency from a previous two years to five years, but Federalists continued to doubt whether or not a naturalized American could hold office. Consequently, Democratic-Republicans continued to be suspicious of Federalist behavior in any future naturalization debates and both parties continued to disagree about what constitutes a citizen.

Building upon the already hateful parties, Alexander Hamilton, who is a Federalist, pushed for the federal government to take over the debt accumulated after the American Revolution. To do so, he imposed a tax on whiskey to prevent further financial difficulty, which ultimately evoked immediate failure and protest of the new tax. The Whiskey Rebellion was one of the largest armed uprisings and, "… was at its heart about defining legitimate opposition to government policies" (Halperin, pg. 20). The rebellion showed that the citizens could voice their oppositions to the law in ways that the Federalists would not approve of and also raised questions to how much power the federal government should have. The Federalists believed that American citizens were to support the government through obedience to the laws while Democratic-Republicans supported the people in expressing their opinion. After the continued protests, the federal government used force to suppress resistance, which was one of the first times in history. The Whiskey Rebellion represented the distinction between the two parties' idea of governmental power and how the people should act.

Efforts such as these are examples of why the Alien and Sedition Acts were created. Four laws were created to restrict the activities of foreign residents in America. The most controversial law was the Sedition Act. The act aimed at anyone who spoke out against Adams or the Federalist-

dominated federal government, “The Sedition Acts infringed upon the rights of speech, but, as many opponents argued, the laws also posed at threat to the other rights listen in the amendment- particularly the rights to petition and assembly and ultimately the right to free elections” (Halperin, pg. 7).” The laws provided an illustration of the parties’ different views of the people’s roles in the new republic. Many people opposed the four laws including Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, other Democratic-Republicans.

The Alien and Sedition Acts fueled debates over the rights that should be afforded to political opposition parties and displayed the struggle of creating a federal government pleasing enough to all parties. Throughout the book, Terri Halperin discusses many ways the two parties showed their colliding opinions about the peoples’ role in the new republic. The revision of the Naturalization Act is an example of the debate over citizenship. The Whiskey Rebellion is an example of several judgements of the power of the federal government and what the people can do if they seem to disagree. The cases of the revision of the Naturalization Act and the Whiskey Rebellion helped lead to the creation of the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 and showed how the roles of the people in the new society can be differentiated.