

# Rule of Law in Times of Crisis

*“Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety”*  
Benjamin Franklin

## Objective

Students will learn about historical incidents in which the rule of law may have been undermined in response to perceived threats to society.

## Procedure

1. Put Benjamin Franklin’s quote **“Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety”** on the board. Lead a class discussion on what students think this means. Introduce the class to the assertion that when Americans have thought their security was threatened, they have sometimes responded by changing or bypassing existing laws and legal procedures and moving to restrict individual rights and freedoms in the interest of enhancing national security and public safety.
2. Divide the class into groups. Assign each group one of these times/incidents:
  - a. Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798
  - b. Suspension of habeas corpus during the Civil War
  - c. Response to antiwar protestors during World War I
  - d. Red Scare after World War I
  - e. Internment of West Coast Japanese Americans during World War II
  - f. Second Red Scare and the McCarthy Era
  - g. Antiwar protests during the Vietnam War
3. Provide basic reference works for each incident so that groups may conduct research to determine whether, and to what extent, civil liberties and freedoms were restricted during each event. If restrictions occurred, was there an effort to expand freedoms later?
4. Conduct a hearing during which each group presents its findings.
5. Finally, as a class, discuss what your research suggests about the rule of law in U.S. history.

