



CIVICS IN REAL LIFE

Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how "We the People" interact with the government and each other. Let's help each other expand our civic literacy.

September 11th Anniversary

“Good evening. Tonight, I can report to the American people and to the world that the United States has conducted an operation that killed Osama bin Laden, the leader of al Qaeda, and a terrorist who’s responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent men, women, and children.”

With those words, on May 2, 2011, President Barack Obama announced that the United States military had killed the man behind the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. A generation later, we remember the anniversary of the most significant terrorist attack of the 21st century to happen on U.S. soil. How does this event impact the way we as Americans live our lives, and our values and principles as a nation?



The events of [September 11th, 2001](#), instigated by [extremist Islamic terrorists](#), led to the deaths of 2,977 people and the destruction of the iconic [World Trade Center](#) in the heart of New York City. As a nation, the United States responded swiftly, invading the country of Afghanistan, overthrowing the Taliban government, and spending years in an effort to weaken al-Qaeda and find the mastermind behind the attacks, Osama bin Laden. The United States spent 20 years in Afghanistan, ultimately [withdrawing](#) from the country in August 2021.

While the US was engaging in military action on the ground, the federal government worked to ensure that a [hijacking like that](#) on 9/11 could never happen again. The most significant effort in this was the passage in October 2001 of the [USA PATRIOT Act](#), an acronym for The **U**niting and **S**trengthening **A**merica by **P**roviding **A**ppropriate **T**ools **R**equired to **I**ntercept and **O**bsturb **T**errorism **A**ct. This legislation placed a heavy emphasis on domestic surveillance capabilities. A year later, the [Department of Homeland Security](#) (DHS) was created.

The [Patriot Act](#) and the Department of Homeland Security are perhaps the most visible and present legacy of the events of 9/11. To prevent another terror attack like that of 9/11, the Patriot Act expanded the ability of all levels of law enforcement to engage in [searches and surveillance](#). This limits the scope of the Fourth Amendment and its ‘[probable cause](#)’ requirement when investigating potential threats to national security. Everything from phone calls routed overseas to financial transactions over a specific amount are now subject to scrutiny that exists because of the events of September 11th, 2001.

The [Department of Homeland Security](#) houses the [Transportation Security Administration](#) (TSA), [US Citizenship and Immigration Services](#) (USCIS), and other agencies that monitor and protect our border, ports, and airports, as well as immigration to and travel to and within the country. It is the TSA, under the leadership of the DHS, that requires passengers to remove their shoes and confirm their identification before boarding an airplane. The DHS also maintains a ‘[no-fly list](#)’ of individuals who are restricted from airline travel for national security reasons.



While the passage of the Patriot Act and the creation of the Department of Homeland Security [sought to reassure](#) a worried American public and strengthen our national pursuit of peace and justice, [some have argued](#) that both the Patriot Act and the DHS weaken the freedoms and principles we hold dear as a nation, sacrificing some liberty for a sense of security. It cannot be doubted, however, that our lives and our nation were changed that day on 9/11/01, and it remains important to remember those values we cherish as a nation as [we work to remember](#) those who lost their lives.

To Think and To Do: In the wiretapping case of [Olmstead v. United States](#) (1928), Justice Louis Brandeis wrote in his [dissenting opinion](#), “*Experience should teach us to be most on our guard to protect liberty when the government’s purposes [are well intended]. Men born to freedom are naturally alert to repel invasion of their liberty by evil-minded rulers. The greatest dangers to liberty [proceed in gradual, subtle ways] by men in [pursuit of a cause], well-meaning but without understanding.*”

How do Justice Brandeis’ words relate to the liberties and security debate highlighted by the events of September 11, 2001?

LEARN MORE about 9/11 and its impact

- [The Names on the Memorial](#), from PBS
- [9/11: As Events Unfold](#) (Potential Triggering Images/Audio), from the Transportation Security Administration
- [Patriot Day](#), from the US Army



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