Rights Under Pressure

Constitutional principles in the postwar era

USH.C.1.1.A "Summarize the fundamental principles of the United States of America's constitutional republic and how events of the post-war era affected the Constitution's balance of the public good with the protection of individual rights."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two constitutional protections, circle two public goals, and number the postwar examples that show how officials balanced those goals with individual rights.

Who Does the Constitution Protect?

1. After World War II, Americans debated how far government should go to protect the nation and serve its people. In a constitutional republic, voters choose representatives, but those officials must obey a written Constitution. Congress makes laws, the president carries them out, and courts decide whether government actions follow the Constitution. This separation of powers helps prevent any one branch from ruling alone. Federalism divides power between national and state governments, while the Bill of Rights protects freedoms such as speech.

2. During the early Cold War, fear of Soviet spying led federal officials to investigate suspected communist ties. Senator Joseph McCarthy's hearings made public accusations that sometimes lacked solid evidence. Investigations could help protect national security, a public good, but suspicion also cost some people jobs and damaged reputations. When officials treated unpopular views as proof of disloyalty, the pressure to silence speech clashed with First Amendment protections. The conflict showed why government efforts to keep people safe must still respect individual rights.

3. The struggle to end school segregation tested a different balance. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in Brown v. Board of Education that state-required segregation in public schools violated the Fourteenth Amendment's promise of equal protection. Some states resisted. In 1957, President Eisenhower sent federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas, to enforce court-ordered integration at Central High School. State control of schools could not justify denying students equal rights. Here, federal action served the public good by protecting individual rights, rather than limiting them.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How do elected representatives and separation of powers limit government authority?

2. What public goal drove Cold War investigations, and what right could those investigations threaten?

3. How did Brown and the events at Little Rock change the balance between state control and individual rights?

4. Compare the federal government's role in the two postwar conflicts. When did its actions risk limiting rights, and when did they protect rights?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A town proposes banning all public meetings after a threat of violence. In four or five sentences, recommend a more limited response that addresses safety and protects rights. Name one constitutional principle and use one postwar example from the passage to support your plan.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.1.1.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two constitutional protections, circle two public goals, and number the postwar examples that show how officials balanced those goals with individual rights. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How do elected representatives and separation of powers limit government authority?	**Voters choose representatives who must obey the Constitution, and separate branches prevent one branch from ruling alone.**
2	What public goal drove Cold War investigations, and what right could those investigations threaten?	**Officials sought national security, but treating unpopular views as disloyalty threatened freedom of speech.**
3	How did Brown and the events at Little Rock change the balance between state control and individual rights?	**The Court held that states could not require segregated public schools, and federal troops enforced integration. Equal protection took priority over state control of schools.**
4	Compare the federal government's role in the two postwar conflicts. When did its actions risk limiting rights, and when did they protect rights?	**Cold War investigations risked limiting speech in the name of security. At Little Rock, federal action protected students' equal rights by enforcing integration.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The town should protect meeting sites and respond to specific threats instead of banning every meeting. The First Amendment protects speech and assembly, even when officials are concerned about safety. During the Cold War, efforts to protect national security threatened speech when officials treated unpopular views as disloyalty. A response aimed at actual threats would serve public safety without silencing everyone.

Accept other specific safety measures that leave lawful meetings possible. Responses should connect a constitutional protection to the Cold War example and explain the proposed balance.