

Handout G: The History of Civil Liberty Laws

Policy Name	Historical Context	Civil Liberties Affected
The Sedition Act (1798)	Many government officials feared a possible war with France. The aftermath of the French Revolution had spread to the United States and there was talk of secession from or overthrow of the government. Some states, led by Democratic-Republicans, refused to enforce federal laws. Citizens began to speak out against the government, and the Sedition Act made it illegal to make false statements about or defame the government or to assist or encourage seditious acts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Freedom of speech• Freedom of the press• Right to due process of law• Right to jury trials• Right against cruel and unusual punishment
The Alien Act (1798)	Similar to the reasons for the Sedition Act, many government officials believed that it was French sympathizers who were making the false statements about the government, and, therefore, immigrants could not become citizens for fourteen years instead of five and the President had the authority to imprison or deport aliens who were considered dangerous.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Freedom of speech• Freedom of the press• Right to due process of law• Right to jury trials• Right against cruel and unusual punishment• Right against illegal search and seizure
The Espionage Act (1917)	The Act was passed during World War I to make false statements about the military, interfere with military forces, promote the success of enemies, or cause disloyalty in the military. The government feared that German immigrants would spy on the U.S. government and return that information to Germany.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Freedom of speech• Freedom of the press• Right to due process of law• Right to jury trials• Right against cruel and unusual punishment
Executive Order 9066 (1942)	Due to a fear of Japan after the attack on Pearl Harbor and the entrance of the United States into World War II in Europe, the Roosevelt administration ordered the placement of Japanese people to internment camps. Some Italians, Germans, and Jews were also interned. The camps were under the authority of the Secretary of War.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Right to due process of law• Right to jury trials• Right against cruel and unusual punishment• Right against illegal search and seizure• Private property rights