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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2005 Volume III: War and Civil Liberties

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## **Postmodernism and the Flexibility of the Constitution**

Guide for Curriculum Unit 05.03.08, published September 2005

by Jeff Joyce

This unit is designed for the study of American history in the Advanced Placement class and uses the tenets of postmodern philosophy as a means for exploring varying perspectives on civil liberties as they relate to national security. The College Board tests students on the Advanced Placement exam as to their ability to be young practitioners of the discipline of history. It is at this point that I think postmodernism has a role to play. Postmodernists view language as a rhetorical tool that can be manipulated to confront any conventional form of truth, as it is always open to interpretation. The very foundation of this nation is built, in some respect, on this principle.

Using these ideas the unit is designed to accomplish a couple of important goals. First, we want to help students learn about information and interpretation in American History. My students and I can explore and understand that civil liberties are given meaning by the context in which they exist; moreover, no laws or set of rules have meaning in and of themselves, but rather are interpreted in a way that gives them meaning. Next we can use this proposition to help construct substantive essays using sound argumentative writing techniques. The College Board exam is broken into three parts, two of which hinge on superior writing skill. Once students understand that proper social studies essays require both appropriate information to substantiate an argument and the ability to communicate that argument clearly they will be better prepared to tackle the challenges of the AP US History exam.

(Developed for AP U.S. History and Social Studies, grade 11; recommended for AP U.S. History and Social Studies, grades 10-12)

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