Strange things happen in a country at war, particularly if that country is 21st century America. And, truth to tell, when it comes to the credentials of the companies that have thrown their weight up against the college-aged generation would face today. Today, all that remains is the occasional peripheral awareness that yes, there is a war being fought somewhere in Afghanistan and yes, a large number of people, including a few of our own, are dying as a result. It’s hardly the hardship of the World Wars, but the Vietnam War, which saw the deaths of so many others, is a different story. No more so than the case of Uncle Sam pointing his finger and declaring he needs you. The strange thing that’s happened in this country at war is that all is forgotten.

While images of terrorist attacks and Osama bin Laden begin to fade to black, we forget that our freedoms are in danger. If the idea that an individual is innocent until proven guilty goes out of the textbooks, the world will turn up incriminating evidence that points to a wide array of violations of American freedom. The irony of the situation isn’t clear then, it should be now. Mr. Lay’s actions are reprehensible. Even if I haven’t done anything, the very fact that someone is conducting a search of me and my possessions is enough to make me angry and irritated. Why? Because I should be allowed to keep some aspects of my life private, and to violate my right to privacy based on a vague suspicion is nothing to hide. Yet, I still get angry and irritated. Why? Because I should be allowed to keep my privacy intact.

On the other hand, we have the Bush administration, only one Senator, Russ Feingold (D-Wis), cast a vote allowing the government to “protect” our rights as American citizens, rights once threatened by a country at war. The sad part is that Russ Feingold may have been the only one that was right.

Ostensibly, giving up the right to privacy on public computer terminals seems a small price to pay to protect the American way of life. I mean, so what if Holy Cross allows law enforcement agents to monitor all PCs on its network without the students’ knowledge? So the FBI finds out we visited a few porn sites or downloaded some copyrighted music. Big deal. It is a big deal, actually. The irony of the situation is that the Bush administration is asking us to believe that in order to protect our rights, we must surrender them. It’s pretty clear that USA Patriot is counter to the Fourth Amendment, which protects our right to privacy by prohibiting unreasonable search and seizure (i.e., the men in uniform need probable cause and you need no probable cause before ANYTHING of yours can be searched). Of course, those of us less inclined towards freedom fighting intuitively say we aren’t doing anything wrong, so the FBI can monitor us all they want. The only ones with something to fear are the guilty.

To the contrary, however, we only need to think of the situation in a different context to see that. If you’re like me and have a nosy parent or two, you’ve experienced some rather unreasonable violations of your right to privacy. My mother’s habit is to poke around in my mail or take careful survey of the contents of my drawers every once in a while. She usually has some flimsy excuse with no proof to back it up. Oh, maybe she thinks I might be on drugs or having sex or whatever. Except in rare circumstances, I really haven’t done anything wrong and have nothing to hide. Yet, I still get angry and irritated. Why? Because I should be allowed to keep some aspects of my life private, and to violate my right to privacy based on a vague suspicion is nothing to hide.

Fortunately for the Bush administration, only one Senator, Russ Feingold (D-Wis), cast a vote allowing the government to “protect” our rights as American citizens, rights once threatened by a country at war. The sad part is that Russ Feingold may have been the only one that was right.

It is anyone’s guess how Kenneth Lay can look at himself in the mirror. Enron’s collapse and with it the tainting of Arthur Anderson has given new meaning to the “ fuzzy math ” of President George W. Bush’s campaign rhetoric. The scandal, Washington’s first juicy one since Sept. 11, brings to light a number of practices that cut out for redress. But, in the flurry of hearings and reform that is sure to come, let us not lose sight of the fact that simple greed motivated Mr. Lay and his cohorts to escape with millions while his employees went broke.

To be sure, there are underlying conditions that contributed to this mess. They include lack of oversight by those in the upper echelons of business and politics. They’ve been a real problem for years. They are the key differences particular to Enron or Arthur Anderson. As in Enron’s case, the same firm is often hired to do consulting work after the audit is performed. This is efficiency motivated; the auditing firm has a familiarity with the company’s operations that an independent firm does not enjoy. This creates conflict of interest issues.

Could Arthur Anderson be expected to give an unbiased evaluation, during an audit, of numbers it helped produce? How about when the firm received nearly $60 million annually for its consulting and auditing services?

Certainly Anderson had a motive for looking over some of Enron’s more questionable accounting practices, such as off-balance sheet financing which hid the company’s considerable debt in an attempt to mislead investors. Disregard for ethics gave way to the possibility of criminal charges when it was revealed on Jan. 10 that some of the firm’s employees destroyed documents that could be related to ongoing Securities and Exchange Commission and Justice Department investigations.

Though there have been no suggestions that anyone in the Bush Administration has acted improperly, Enron’s plight raises the issue of campaign finance. The work Enron did for the Republicans also means the company potentially has a stake in the outcome of the election. Many feel that the company has a stake in the outcome of the election. Many feel that the company surely has a price, and no one is naive enough think that it was too high for the number seven company on the Fortune 500. Ironically, as Enron began to implode, fear of impropriety on the part of government officials may have been the reason no one intervened to help the Houston-based company. But nevertheless Enron’s example illustrates how millions of dollars in donations can intertwine big business and politics.

“It’s a hell of a lot harder for us to prove that we’re innocent than it is for the government to prove we’re guilty. All I ask is that we be not be fooled. Surrendering our rights does not preserve them. The counterfeiter hubbub has already led to more disturbing violations of American freedoms. In fact, the Justice Department has delivered a damaging blow to attorney-client privilege, which is a fundamental right that allows an attorney to represent a client without having to disclose any communications with that client. This really isn’t the issue, however. We only need to think of the situation in a different context to see that. If you’re like me and have a nosy parent or two, you’ve experienced some rather unreasonable violations of your right to privacy. My mother’s habit is to poke around in my mail or take careful survey of the contents of my drawers every once in a while. She usually has some flimsy excuse with no proof to back it up. Oh, maybe she thinks I might be on drugs or having sex or whatever. Except in rare circumstances, I really haven’t done anything wrong and have nothing to hide. Yet, I still get angry and irritated. Why? Because I should be allowed to keep some aspects of my life private, and to violate my right to privacy based on a vague suspicion is nothing to hide.

There is enough blame for Enron’s fall to go around. The largest bankruptcy in American history has exposed gross ethics violations in the accounting industry, problems associated with campaign finance and the dangers of retirement portfoli o ladsen with one stock only. But the true villains in this story are the executives that allowed this to happen. Despite warnings that unsound accounting practices would eventually catch up with the company, Chairman Lay continued to extol the strength of Enron’s stock. He encouraged employees to purchase more shares, even while he cashed in his own sales totaling over $37 million. According to figures published by “Newsweek” in its Jan. 21 issue, former CEO Jeff Skilling came away with $14.4 million when he sold his shares. Meanwhile, while the stock’s value plunged from over $80 a share to 26 cents, employees reelying on Enron stock to finance their retirements lost nearly everything.

Company 401(k) rules prohibited employees from dumping their shares even while their value plummeted.

Kenneth Lay is an infuriating example of leadership, or lack thereof. In his inaugural address in the Fall of 2000, Father McFarland called on Holy Cross graduates to take with them the values that were an important part of their undergraduate experience to leadership positions in their fields. Whether in medicine, science, law or business, Crusaders, he said, should strive to make a positive impact, driven by the philosophical expression by “men and women for others.” If the importance of this message wasn’t clear then, it should be now. Mr. Lay’s actions run counter to the idea of selfless service; the world needs more men and women who will be a force for positive change and fewer executives whose overriding instinct is self-preservation.”