**Lessons from the past**

Americans turned on their televisions to see a Republican president confess that there were dangers facing the nation. He did not attempt to understate the situation: the United States was threatened. In spite of the threat aimed at our cities and towns, he did not recommend that America prepare for a military conflict. They need not be hyped, he said, but men and women should exercise vigilance in the face of increased risks. Though this scenario may strike a familiar chord with Americans who today know that there is the ever-present possibility of terrorist attack, the message delivered by the commander-in-chief did not come with the same emotional hooks of Cold War and the drama about nuclear attack. Indeed, the president described above is Dwight Eisenhower and the decade was the 1950s. Today, the words that Eisenhower spoke would be equally appropriate from the mouth of President George W. Bush. A theme central to the study of history is that it sometimes repeats itself. The challenges that America faces today, both at home and abroad, echo the nation’s post-war experience.

After World War II, America dealt with the Communist presence at home in an unfortunate way. Leaders blacklisted suspected sympathizers, and thousands were dragged before loyalty courts and Congressional hearings. So like Joseph McCarthy, an American who would defend the country pursued their quarry with a dangerous over-zealousness. Government officials will do well to remember a time in the nation’s not so distant past when those who would defend the country pursued their quarry with a dangerous over-zealousness.

No one suggests that John Ashcroft is a McCarthy-like character. The attorney general and the Department of Justice are tasked with a difficult job: to protect the United States and its citizens from foreign and domestic threats. Since Sept. 11, they have detained thousands in connection with suspected terrorist plots. Who can say which detentions have been warranted by the available evidence and which were the result of someone reporting his Middle Eastern neighbor to the FBI simply because she keeps her head covered in customary fashion? This is not to say that the post-Sept. 11 climate is exactly like post-war America. Clearly, there are men in this country now who are both willing and capable of carrying out a devastating attack on America. The authorities are right to pursue these individuals with vigor. But government officials will do well to remember a time in the nation’s not so distant past when those who would defend the country pursued their quarry with a dangerous over-zealousness.

Today, Americans should also recall the lessons learned in foreign relations during the Cold War. President Kennedy began U.S. involvement in Vietnam by initially supporting the South Vietnamese army. From a handful of advisors, America’s involvement ballooned to a full-scale military theater in just a few years. On Jan. 31, 2002, American Marines began advising Philippine military forces on how best to combat Islamic extremist terrorist cells in the southern part of the country. Even though the Viet Cong and the extremists in the Philippines do not share ideologies, they do have something in common. Both groups embodied what the United States was vehemently against, Communism during the Cold War and violent extremism post-Sept. 11. Mistakes made during the Vietnam War should be re-examined as American troops head back into the jungle.

History is studied precisely to avoid the errors of the past. America’s situation during the Cold War, when the country perceived a constant threat in the Soviet Union, is strikingly similar to the conditions faced presently by the nation. So similar, in fact, that today history has perhaps a unique opportunity to act as a teacher.

**Letter from the Editor**

On Friday, Feb.8, 2002, the Worcester Daily Times hosted the Worcester Women’s Forum and presented Eve Ensler’s, The Vagina Monologues. (A book compiled of interviews from women of different races and ages sharing their experiences and testimonies. This book is part of the movement for V-day, to Stop the Violence Against Women.)

Sponsored by Women’s Forum of Holy Cross
Tuesday Feb.12, 2002 & Wednesday Feb.13, 2002
Tickets: $5 w/ student ID & $7 w/out
**All proceeds go to Abby’s House of Worcester & 10% to Women of Afghanistan.**