The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks launched the United States into a new era of defensive preparedness. The U.S. federal government's first legislative action in October 2001 was the passage of the Unitig and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001 (USA PATRIOT Act). The USA PATRIOT Act introduced a greatly heightened level of government intrusion into many aspects of ordinary life, including library use. When, in the past, authorities called upon the library profession to serve national security interests in these ways, individual librarians and the profession as a whole have experienced an evolving tension between their roles as guardians of public well-being and as protectors of intellectual freedom. This is a fundamental issue, one that reflects upon the profession's view of itself and of its place in American life. Librarians once again face this challenge. An inquiry into the similarities and differences with the past may aid in suggesting a response that is both professionally sound and individually appropriate.