

2020: The Year the Tree of Liberty Was Torched

[2020: The Year the Tree of Liberty Was Torched](#)

by [John W. Whitehead](#), [The Rutherford Institute](#)

December 28, 2020

“The people are unaware. They’re not educated to realize that they have power. The system is so geared that everyone believes the government will fix everything. [We are the government.](#)”—John Lennon

No doubt about it: 2020—a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad year for freedom—was the culmination of a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad decade for freedom.

Government corruption, tyranny, and abuse coupled with a Big Brother-knows-best mindset and the COVID-19 pandemic propelled us at warp speed towards a full-blown police state in which nationwide lockdowns, egregious surveillance, roadside strip searches, police shootings of unarmed citizens, censorship, retaliatory arrests, the criminalization of lawful activities, warmongering, indefinite detentions, SWAT team raids, asset forfeiture, police brutality, profit-driven prisons, and pay-to-play politicians were accepted as the norm.

Here’s just a small sampling of the laundry list of abuses—cruel, brutal, immoral, unconstitutional and unacceptable—that have been heaped upon us by the government over the past two decades and in the past year, in particular.

The government failed to protect our lives, liberty and happiness. The predators of the police state wreaked havoc on

our freedoms, our communities, and our lives. The government didn't listen to the citizenry, refused to abide by the Constitution, and treated the citizenry as a source of funding and little else. Police officers shot unarmed citizens and their household pets. Government agents—including local police—were armed to the teeth and encouraged to act like soldiers on a battlefield. Bloated government agencies were allowed to fleece taxpayers. Government technicians spied on our emails and phone calls. And government contractors made a killing by waging endless wars abroad.

The American President became more imperial. Although the Constitution invests the President with very specific, limited powers, in recent years, American presidents (Trump, Obama, Bush, Clinton, etc.) claimed the power to completely and almost unilaterally alter the landscape of this country for good or for ill. The powers that have been amassed by each successive president through the negligence of Congress and the courts—powers which add up to a toolbox of terror for an imperial ruler—empower whoever occupies the Oval Office to act as a dictator, above the law and beyond any real accountability. The presidency itself has become an imperial one with permanent powers.

Militarized police became a power unto themselves, 911 calls turned deadly, and traffic stops took a turn for the worse. Lacking in transparency and accountability, protected by the courts and legislators, and rife with misconduct, America's police forces continued to be a menace to the citizenry and the rule of law. Despite concerns about the government's steady transformation of local police into a standing military army, local police agencies acquired even more weaponry, training and equipment suited for the battlefield. Police officers were also given free range to pull anyone over for a variety of reasons and subject them to forced cavity searches, forced colonoscopies, forced blood draws, forced breath-alcohol tests, forced DNA extractions,

forced eye scans, forced inclusion in biometric databases.

The courts failed to uphold justice. With every ruling handed down, it becomes more apparent that we live in an age of hollow justice, with government courts more concerned with protecting government agents than upholding the rights of “we the people.” This is true at all levels of the judiciary, but especially so in the highest court of the land, the U.S. Supreme Court, which is seemingly more concerned with establishing order and protecting government agents than with upholding the rights enshrined in the Constitution. A review of critical court rulings over the past two decades, including some ominous ones by the U.S. Supreme Court, reveals a startling and steady trend towards pro-police state rulings by an institution concerned more with establishing order and protecting the ruling class and government agents than with upholding the rights enshrined in the Constitution.

COVID-19 allowed the Emergency State to expand its powers. What started out as an apparent effort to prevent a novel coronavirus from sickening the nation (and the world) became yet another means by which world governments (including our own) could expand their powers, abuse their authority, and further oppress their constituents. While COVID-19 took a significant toll on the nation emotionally, physically, and economically, it also allowed the government to trample our rights in the so-called name of national security, with talk of mass testing for COVID-19 antibodies, screening checkpoints, contact tracing, immunity passports, forced vaccinations, snitch tip lines and onerous lockdowns.

The Surveillance State rendered Americans vulnerable to threats from government spies, police, hackers and power failures. Thanks to the government’s ongoing efforts to build massive databases using emerging surveillance, DNA and biometrics technologies, Americans have become sitting ducks for hackers and government spies alike. [Billions of people have been affected by data breaches and cyberattacks.](#) On a

daily basis, Americans have been made to relinquish the most intimate details of who we are—our biological makeup, our genetic blueprints, and our biometrics (facial characteristics and structure, fingerprints, iris scans, etc.)—in order to [navigate an increasingly technologically-enabled world](#).

America became a red flag nation. Red flag laws, specifically, and pre-crime laws generally push us that much closer towards a suspect society where everyone is potentially guilty of some crime or another and must be preemptively rendered harmless. Where many Americans go wrong is in naively assuming that you have to be doing something illegal or harmful in order to be flagged and targeted for some form of intervention or detention. In fact, all you need to do these days to end up on a government watch list or be subjected to heightened scrutiny is [use certain trigger words](#) (like cloud, pork and pirates), surf the internet, communicate using a cell phone, [limp or stutter](#), [drive a car](#), stay at a hotel, attend a political rally, [express yourself on social media](#), [appear mentally ill](#), serve in the [military](#), [disagree with a law enforcement official](#), [call in sick to work](#), purchase materials at a hardware store, take flying or boating lessons, [appear suspicious](#), appear confused or nervous, fidget or whistle or smell bad, be seen in public waving a toy gun or anything remotely resembling a gun (such as a water nozzle or a remote control or a walking cane), [stare at a police officer](#), question government authority, [appear to be pro-gun or pro-freedom](#), or generally live in the United States. Be warned: once you get on such a government watch list—whether it's a terrorist watch list, a mental health watch list, a dissident watch list, or a red flag gun watch list—there's no clear-cut way to get off, whether or not you should actually be on there.

The cost of policing the globe drove the nation deeper into debt. [America's war spending has already bankrupted the nation](#) to the tune of more than \$20 trillion dollars. Policing

the globe and waging endless wars abroad hasn't made America—or the rest of the world—any safer, but it has made the military industrial complex rich at taxpayer expense. The U.S. military reportedly has more than *1.3 million* men and women on active duty, with [more than 200,000 of them stationed overseas](#) in nearly every country in the world. Yet America's military forces aren't being deployed abroad to protect our freedoms here at home. Rather, they're being used to guard oil fields, build foreign infrastructure and protect the financial interests of the corporate elite. In fact, the United States military spends about [\\$81 billion a year just to protect oil supplies around the world](#). This is how a military empire occupies the globe. Meanwhile, America's infrastructure is falling apart.

Free speech was dealt one knock-out punch after another. [Protest laws](#), free speech zones, bubble zones, trespass zones, anti-bullying legislation, zero tolerance policies, hate crime laws, shadow banning on the Internet, and a host of other legalistic maladies dreamed up by politicians and prosecutors (and championed by those who want to suppress speech with which they might disagree) conspired to corrode our core freedoms, purportedly for our own good. On paper—at least according to the U.S. Constitution—we are technically free to speak. In reality, however, we are only as free to speak as a government official—or corporate entities such as Facebook, Google or YouTube—may allow. The reasons for such [censorship](#) varied widely from political correctness, so-called safety concerns and bullying to national security and hate crimes but the end result remained the same: the complete eradication of free speech.

The Deep State took over. The American system of representative government has been overthrown by the Deep State—a.k.a. the police state a.k.a. the military/corporate industrial complex—a profit-driven, militaristic corporate state bent on total control and global domination through the

imposition of martial law here at home and by fomenting wars abroad. The “government of the people, by the people, for the people” has perished. In its place is a shadow government, a corporatized, militarized, entrenched bureaucracy that is fully operational and staffed by unelected officials who are, in essence, running the country and calling the shots in Washington DC, no matter who sits in the White House. Mind you, by “government,” I’m not referring to the highly partisan, two-party bureaucracy of the Republicans and Democrats. Rather, I’m referring to “government” with a capital “G,” the entrenched Deep State that is unaffected by elections, unaltered by populist movements, and has set itself beyond the reach of the law. This is the hidden face of a government that has no respect for the freedom of its citizenry. This [shadow government](#), which “[operates according to its own compass heading regardless of who is formally in power](#),” makes a mockery of elections and the entire concept of a representative government.

The takeaway: Everything the founders of this country feared has come to dominate in modern America. “We the people” have been saddled with a government that is no longer friendly to freedom and is working overtime to trample the Constitution underfoot and render the citizenry powerless in the face of the government’s power grabs, corruption and abusive tactics.

So how do you balance the scales of justice at a time when Americans are being tasered, tear-gassed, pepper-sprayed, hit with batons, shot with rubber bullets and real bullets, blasted with sound cannons, [detained in cages and kennels](#), sicced by police dogs, arrested and jailed for challenging the government’s excesses, abuses and power-grabs, and then locked down and stripped of any semblance of personal freedom?

No matter who sits in the White House, politics won’t fix a system that is broken beyond repair.

For that matter, protests and populist movements also haven’t

done much to push back against an authoritarian regime that is deaf to our cries, dumb to our troubles, blind to our needs, and accountable to no one.

So how do you not only push back against the government's bureaucracy, corruption and cruelty but also launch a counterrevolution aimed at reclaiming control over the government using nonviolent means?

You start by changing the rules and engaging in some (nonviolent) guerilla tactics.

Take your cue from the Tenth Amendment and nullify everything the government does that flies in the face of the principles on which this nation was founded. If there is any means left to us for thwarting the government in its relentless march towards outright dictatorship, it may rest with the power of juries and local governments to invalidate governmental laws, tactics and policies that are illegitimate, egregious or blatantly unconstitutional.

In an age in which government officials accused of wrongdoing—police officers, elected officials, etc.—are treated with general leniency, while the average citizen is prosecuted to the full extent of the law, nullification is a powerful reminder that, as the Constitution tells us, “we the people” are the government.

For too long we've allowed our so-called “representatives” to call the shots. Now it's time to restore the citizenry to their rightful place in the republic: as the masters, not the servants.

Nullification is one way of doing so.

America was meant to be primarily a system of local governments, which is a far cry from the colossal federal bureaucracy we have today. Yet if our freedoms are to be restored, understanding what is transpiring practically in

your own backyard—in one's home, neighborhood, school district, town council—and taking action at that local level must be the starting point.

Responding to unmet local needs and reacting to injustices is what grassroots activism is all about. Attend local city council meetings, speak up at town hall meetings, organize protests and letter-writing campaigns, employ “militant nonviolent resistance” and civil disobedience, which Martin Luther King Jr. used to great effect through the use of sit-ins, boycotts and marches.

The power to change things for the better rests with us, not the politicians.

As long as we continue to allow callousness, cruelty, meanness, immorality, ignorance, hatred, intolerance, racism, militarism, materialism, meanness and injustice—magnified by an echo chamber of nasty tweets and government-sanctioned brutality—to trump justice, fairness and equality, there can be no hope of prevailing against the police state.

We could transform this nation if only Americans would work together to harness the power of their discontent and push back against the government's overreach, excesses and abuse.

As I make clear in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#), the police state is marching forward, more powerful than ever.

If there is to be any hope for freedom in 2021, it rests with “we the people.”

cover image credit [Alexandra_Koch](#) / pixabay