



## COVID-19 Tested Our Commitment to Freedom. Three Years Later, We're Still Failing.

The remedy is worse than the disease.—*Francis Bacon*

The government never cedes power willingly.

Neither should we.

If the COVID-19 debacle taught us one thing it is that, as Justice Neil Gorsuch acknowledged, "[Rule by indefinite emergency edict risks leaving all of us with a shell of a democracy](#) and civil liberties just as hollow."



John Whitehead

Unfortunately, we still haven't learned.

We're still allowing ourselves to be fully distracted by circus politics and a constant barrage of bad news screaming for attention.

Three years after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which gave world governments (including our own) a convenient excuse for expanding their powers, abusing their authority, and further oppressing their constituents, there's something being concocted in the dens of power.

The danger of martial law persists.

Any government so willing to weaponize one national crisis after another in order to expand its powers and justify all manner of government tyranny in the so-called name of national security will not hesitate to override the Constitution and lock down the nation again.

You'd better get ready, because that so-called crisis could be anything: civil unrest, national emergencies, "unforeseen economic collapse, loss of functioning political and legal order, purposeful domestic resistance or insurgency, pervasive public health emergencies, and catastrophic natural and human disasters."

COVID-19 was a test to see how quickly the populace would march in lockstep with the government's dictates, no questions asked, and how little resistance the citizenry would offer up to the government's power grabs when made in the name of national security.

"We the people" failed that test spectacularly.

Characterized by Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch as "[the greatest intrusions on civil liberties in the peacetime history of this country](#)," the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic constituted a massively intrusive, coercive and authoritarian assault on the right of individual sovereignty over one's life, self and private property.

In a statement attached to the Supreme Court's [ruling in Arizona v. Mayorkas](#), a case that challenged whether the government could continue to use its pandemic powers even after declaring the public



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health emergency over, Gorsuch provided a [catalog](#) of the many ways in which the government used COVID-19 to massively overreach its authority and suppress civil liberties:

[Executive officials across the country issued emergency decrees on a breathtaking scale.](#)

Governors and local leaders imposed lockdown orders forcing people to remain in their homes. They shuttered businesses and schools, public and private. They closed churches even as they allowed casinos and other favored businesses to carry on. They threatened violators not just with civil penalties but with criminal sanctions too. They surveilled church parking lots, recorded license plates, and issued notices warning that attendance at even outdoor services satisfying all state social-distancing and hygiene requirements could amount to criminal conduct. They divided cities and neighborhoods into color-coded zones, forced individuals to fight for their freedoms in court on emergency timetables, and then changed their color-coded schemes when defeat in court seemed imminent.

Truly, the government's (federal and state) handling of the COVID-19 pandemic delivered a knockout blow to our civil liberties, empowering the police state to flex its powers by way of a bevy of lockdowns, mandates, restrictions, contact tracing programs, heightened surveillance, censorship, overcriminalization, etc.

What started off as an experiment in social distancing in order to flatten the curve of an unknown virus (and not overwhelm the nation's hospitals or expose the most vulnerable to unavoidable loss of life scenarios) quickly became strongly worded suggestions for citizens to voluntarily stay at home and strong-armed house [arrest orders](#) with penalties in place for non-compliance.

Every day brought a drastic [new set of restrictions](#) by government bodies (most have been delivered by way of executive orders) at the local, state and federal level that were eager to flex their muscles for the so-called "good" of the populace.

There was talk of [mass testing](#) for COVID-19 antibodies, screening checkpoints, mass surveillance in order to carry out contact tracing, [immunity passports](#) to allow those who have recovered from the virus to move around more freely, [snitch tip lines](#) for reporting "rule breakers" to the authorities, and heavy fines and jail time for those who dared to venture out without a mask, congregate in worship without the government's blessing, or re-open their businesses without the government's say-so.

It was even suggested that government officials should mandate mass vaccinations and "[ensure that people without proof of vaccination would not be allowed, well, anywhere.](#)"

Those tactics were already being used abroad.

In Italy, the unvaccinated were [banned from restaurants, bars and public transportation](#), and faced suspensions from work and monthly fines. Similarly, France banned the unvaccinated from most public venues.

In Austria, anyone who had not complied with the vaccine mandate faced [fines up to \\$4100](#). Police were to be [authorized to carry out routine checks](#) and demand proof of vaccination, with [penalties of as much as \\$685](#) for failure to do so.

In China, which adopted a zero tolerance, "zero COVID" strategy, whole cities—some with populations in the tens of millions—were [forced into home lockdowns](#) for weeks on end, resulting in mass shortages of food and household supplies. Reports surfaced of residents "[trading cigarettes for cabbage](#),"



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[dishwashing liquid for apples and sanitary pads for a small pile of vegetables](#). One resident traded a Nintendo Switch console for a packet of instant noodles and two steamed buns.”

For those unfortunate enough to contract COVID-19, China constructed “[quarantine camps](#)” throughout the country: massive complexes boasting thousands of small, metal boxes containing little more than a bed and a toilet. Detainees—including children, pregnant women and the elderly—were reportedly ordered to leave their homes in the middle of the night, [transported to the quarantine camps in buses](#) and held in isolation.

If this last scenario sounds chillingly familiar, it should.

Eighty years ago, another authoritarian regime established [more than 44,000 quarantine camps for those perceived as “enemies of the state”](#): racially inferior, politically unacceptable or simply noncompliant.

While the majority of those imprisoned in the Nazi concentration camps, forced labor camps, incarceration sites and ghettos were Jews, there were [also](#) Polish nationals, gypsies, Russians, political dissidents, resistance fighters, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and homosexuals.

Culturally, we have become so fixated on the mass murders of Jewish prisoners by the Nazis that we overlook the fact that the purpose of these concentration camps was initially intended to “[incarcerate and intimidate the leaders of political, social, and cultural movements](#) that the Nazis perceived to be a threat to the survival of the regime.”

How do you get from there to here, from Auschwitz concentration camps to COVID quarantine centers?

You don’t have to be a conspiracy theorist to connect the dots.

You just have to recognize the truth in the warning: power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

This is about what happens when good, generally decent people—distracted by manufactured crises, polarizing politics, and fighting that divides the populace into warring “us vs. them” camps—fail to take note of the looming danger that threatens to wipe freedom from the map and place us all in chains.

It’s about what happens when any government is empowered to adopt a comply-or-suffer-the-consequences mindset that is enforced through mandates, lockdowns, penalties, detention centers, martial law, and a disregard for the rights of the individual.

This is the slippery slope: a government empowered to restrict movements, limit individual liberty, and isolate “undesirables” to prevent the spread of a disease is a government that has the power to lock down a country, label whole segments of the population a danger to national security, and force those undesirables—a.k.a. extremists, dissidents, troublemakers, etc.—into isolation so they don’t contaminate the rest of the populace.

The slippery slope begins with propaganda campaigns about the public good being more important than individual liberty, and it ends with lockdowns and concentration camps.

As I make clear in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) and in its fictional counterpart [The Erik Blair Diaries](#), the danger signs are everywhere.

COVID-19 was merely one crisis in a long series of crises that the government has shamelessly exploited in order to justify its power grabs and acclimate the citizenry to a state of martial law disguised as emergency powers.



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Everything I have warned about for years—government overreach, invasive surveillance, martial law, abuse of powers, militarized police, weaponized technology used to track and control the citizenry, and so on—has become part of the government’s arsenal of terrifying lockdown powers should the need arise.

What we should be bracing for is: what comes next?

#### ABOUT JOHN & NISHA WHITEHEAD:

*Constitutional attorney and author John W. Whitehead is founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. His latest books [The Erik Blair Diaries](#) and [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) are available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Whitehead can be contacted at [johnw@rutherford.org](mailto:johnw@rutherford.org). Nisha Whitehead is the Executive Director of The Rutherford Institute. Information about The Rutherford Institute is available at [www.rutherford.org](http://www.rutherford.org).*



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