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Police in Crisis

Police officers have a tough job: They must keep their cool when arresting people, when mediating altercations, and even when being shot at. And the only way they can do their job is if they are generally seen as paragons of virtue by the public. Absent that perception of snow-white integrity, police will quickly be seen as the enemy of the people — just as radical leftists such as Black Lives Matter and Antifa desire. In fact, one of the only things holding the thin blue line together is the relationship of trust between police officers and the communities they serve and protect. When that trust is compromised, law and order begins to break down. Once it breaks down, police have two choices: Use brute force to obtain public order, or simply allow bad elements to range virtually at will — much as in how corruption, kidnapping, and murder are commonplace in Mexico and other countries.



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Politicizing Police Actions

Problems occur and police increasingly take on the mantle of “enemy” when police are judged to be unfair, unthinking, cogs in a government wheel that is meant to oppress rather than protect.

Recent events illustrate this very well. The death of George Floyd was used as a pretext by anti-police activists to foment riots in more than 200 cities across all 50 states. And while this appears to be a case of a relative handful of bad cops giving all cops a bad name, the result has been violence, destruction, and a growing death toll — including among its victims civilians and police officers alike.

Other highly publicized — and highly *politicized* — police incidents, such as the deaths of Rayshard Brooks in Atlanta (June 12) and Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky (March 13), and the Kenosha, Wisconsin, shooting of Jacob Blake (August 23), have been used to stoke the fires of anti-police sentiment. The result has been increased erosion of the relationship of trust needed between police and their communities.

In those cases, tensions that already existed because of race-baiters were inflamed through an anti-police propaganda campaign — an unjust campaign. But police are increasingly bringing such animosity upon themselves by enforcing unjust, punitive, unconstitutional, economically disastrous COVID regulations and edicts. If police wish to be one with the people again across the country, they need to stop behaving as if they are mere government stooges, willing to oppress the people at the government’s every whim.



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COVID-19 Orders: Sacrificing Trust

States and cities across the nation have been under lockdown orders — often for months — that were put in place by governors, mayors, and city and county councils in an overreaction to COVID-19, and law-enforcement officers in many of those cities and states have been tasked with enforcing those orders by issuing citations and even making arrests. There even have been citations and arrests in connection with churches that refused to shut down religious services even though they were following social-distancing and mask guidelines.

Police have allowed themselves to be used to strip Americans' God-given, constitutionally protected rights, and such actions naturally create situations where citizens feel betrayed by officers and deputies. *Betrayal and trust are mutually exclusive.*

And if the American people are angry at those who decide they must be caged and controlled to slow COVID's spread (without giving Americans themselves a say in the matter), imagine how much greater their anger will be at those who enforce such injustices. Politicians punt the enforcement of their bans and controls to the men and women who make up the thin (and getting thinner) blue line. Those officers and deputies are then left to handle the fallout when their communities distrust them.

Making matters worse, police departments and sheriff's offices — already burdened with the normal heavy load of *real* police work — have to devote time and other resources to the enforcement of novel regulations, putting on hold enforcing other laws and regulations designed to protect public safety, such as those against rioting and arson.

Police: Sworn to Uphold the Constitution

Once officers are seen as duplicitous, ingenuous, or abusive, they are taking a huge step toward disaffection and anger in a community, meaning their jobs will become increasingly difficult. In the case of COVID enforcement, officers are perceived by a large percentage of the public as not following the law. Rather, they are seen as breaking the laws that American society and individual rights reside upon. For instance, police officers and deputies take an oath to uphold the Constitution and protect the individual rights of the citizens they are sworn to serve. That "Prime Directive" is supposed to stand above all else. It is sacred. It also stands in stark contrast to the enforcement of COVID-19 orders.

This was perhaps best articulated by Officer Greg Anderson of the Port of Seattle Police Department in Washington State. In a Instagram video post on May 5, Anderson expressed his concerns about cops being used as the enforcement arm of tyranny. The caption for the video asks, "Are you doing the right thing?" and states, "Many officers out there are trampling on people's liberties. Ask yourself are you doing the right thing?"

In the viral video — which has been shared and viewed millions of times across several social-media platforms — Anderson says:

As a police officer, I am compelled to make this video. I've been in law enforcement for ten years, and I'm speaking to my peers, other fellow officers, people in any type of law enforcement position.

I've seen officers nationwide enforcing tyrannical orders against the people, and I'm hoping it's a minority of officers, but I'm not sure anymore because every time I turn on the television, I look to the Internet, I'm seeing people arrested or cited for going to church, traveling on the roadways, for going



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surfing, opening their business, going to the park with their families or doing nails out of their own house, using their own house as their place of business and having undercover agents go there and arrest them and charge them with what? With a crime? I don't know what crime people are committing by doing nails in their own house.

We are seeing this more and more and more, and we need to start looking at ourselves as officers and thinking is what I am doing right? I want to remind you regardless of where you stand on the coronavirus, we don't have the authority to do those things — to do those things to people. Just because a mayor or a governor tells you otherwise. I don't care if it's your sergeant or chief of police. We don't get to violate someone's constitutional rights because someone in our chain of command tells us otherwise. It's not how this country works. Those are *de facto* arrests. We are violating people's rights and taking money from them or — even worse — arresting them and depriving them of their freedom when they are exercising their constitutional rights. So let's talk about that. Let's read something right here, the Declaration of Independence.

Before looking at the rest of Anderson's post, perhaps a bit of context would be good. Anderson states that even if "a mayor or a governor" or "your sergeant or chief of police" tells a police officer or deputy to enforce an order that violates someone's constitutionally protected rights, it is not all right to do it. Two good illustrations of that concept would be the oppression of Jews under the Third Reich and the oppression of blacks under Jim Crow.

To paraphrase Anderson's question: Would a cop who understood and took seriously his oath to uphold the Constitution have arrested Jews and sent them off to concentration camps just because it was the law and he was told by government officials, his sergeant, or chief to "enforce the law" no matter what? Would he have arrested Rosa Parks for refusing to give up her seat to a white person just because it was "the law" and he was ordered to enforce it? No. Such a police officer would have done exactly what Anderson did: refuse to enforce the "law" and encourage his fellow officers to do the same.

To further compound the situation, it should be noted that the tyrannical COVID-19 directives are — at least in most places — *not* laws, but executive orders or ordinances. Handed down by mayors, governors, or city and county councils, they were not passed as laws by legislatures. But police were still ordered to enforce them. And while most police officers and deputies are men and women of integrity and honor and there are many Greg Andersons out there, cops caught between the rock of unconstitutional directives and the hard place of a lack of adequate training about the Constitution are simply "following orders" and enforcing those directives.

It appears that some things are missing from police academy training. Very little — *if any* — time is spent teaching the Constitution and the rights it protects. Very little — *if any* — time is spent on critical thinking. Both of these things are required for law-enforcement officers to properly do the very important job of serving and protecting. In the absence of those things, it is easy to slide into enforcing orders that trample on the rights of the people.

Anderson addresses that in his Instagram post. After reading the text of the Declaration of Independence, he talks about the American principle that the power of government is derived from the consent of the governed:

Our power and any governmental official's power is derived from the people, okay? We don't hold power over our citizens. It's contradictory to everything our country stands for. This is what I am



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seeing: First Amendment rights — telling people they can't go to church, freedom of religion. Telling people they can't protest, freedom of assembly. Fourth Amendment violations — illegal traffic stops to check for papers. What are you the Gestapo? Is this 1930s Nazi Germany? You don't get to stop people unless you have reasonable suspicion or probable cause that they have committed a crime. And I know people that have personally been stopped saying we want to see papers saying you're essential.

Just Following Orders

Anderson's point comparing enforcement of COVID-19 directives to Nazi Germany is not merely hypothetical, either. Just days before he posted his Instagram video, police in Meridian, Idaho, arrested a mother at a public park during a "playdate protest." Setting aside any opinions on the wisdom (or lack thereof) on the part of the mothers who held that protest, the one thing that really stands out from that arrest is a statement made by one of the officers on the scene. Captured in a mobile phone video posted on YouTube, the officer is asked by a woman who is off camera, "So just kind of person to person, do you think that it makes sense to close the park down when people are going to the grocery store — they're touching everything?" The officer responds, "That's not for me to say, ma'am. I'm a law-enforcement officer; I'm not a government official or a law maker," as if the only direction police officers have comes from politicians.

The woman then reiterates that she is asking the question to him from one person to another. He replies, "I have my personal opinions and I've got to keep those to myself when I'm on duty. My job is to enforce the law." The woman then asks the pivotal question: "Do you think there is a limit at which you decide within yourself, 'I can't get on board with this — like, I can't agree with what our government and our elected leaders are telling us?'" His response could have been uttered by the cop who arrested Rosa Parks or the Nazi officers and officials who were tried at Nuremberg. He answered, "When I put on the badge and put on the uniform, I have to take a lot of my beliefs — personal beliefs and things — and I've got to set those aside and I've got to enforce the law, whether I agree with that law or not."

The "just following orders" defense is not just wrong, it is dangerous. It is dangerous for society and for police officers who depend on the relationship of trust with those in their communities. And to put in the for-what-it's-worth column, that sorry defense failed every Nazi who tried it at Nuremberg.

And from a merely practical point of view, it creates a climate where the lives and limbs of police officers are put at greater risk.

Anderson addressed that in his post, saying:

What really has been p*ssing me off lately is these officers who have been going out here and enforcing these tyrannical orders. They're putting my job and my safety at risk because you're widening the gap between public trust and law enforcement officers. Look at what's happened to law enforcement in the last ten years. Less and less public trust and more often than not that's the result of isolated incidents blown out of proportion. They're not isolated anymore. They're happening every single day.

Our power that we hold as law enforcement officers is nothing more than a facade. It's a badge and a gun. If you haven't lived in anarchy, if you haven't seen combat, things can be stripped from people in a heartbeat, and that's what I'm afraid of. I'm afraid these actions are going to awake a sleeping giant,



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i.e., the American people. They are going to be put in a position where they won't have their rights trampled anymore, and us as law enforcement officers, we will have our ability to enforce the law stripped from us in about ten minutes. I think what is going to happen is we're going to see bloodshed in the streets. I don't want to see bloodshed in the streets on either side of this coin.

Anderson was originally praised by his command for his video. The next day, he was ordered to take it down. He refused and was suspended. He was told again to take it down or he would be fired. Anderson again refused, since he stood by what he said in the video. In a subsequent video, Anderson said he was told by his chief, "Greg, if you openly defy your governor, you can't be a police officer in the state of Washington." Anderson refused one final time to delete the video and was fired on May 14 — nine days after posting the video and receiving the praise of his command.

Even given that outcome, this much is certain: Anderson was — and is *still* — correct. Widening the gap between law enforcement and the people they serve is a bad idea. The death of George Floyd — caused (or at least helped along) by a police officer who should have been weeded out — is one of those "isolated incidents" Anderson mentioned. And whether it is being "blown out of proportion" or not, the reaction to it certainly is. The system is working in this case: All four officers involved were fired and charged with crimes related to Floyd's death. Derek Chauvin's wife has left him and filed for divorce. He has been charged with second-degree murder and other crimes and will be tried in a criminal court. Those responsible will pay what they owe. But because of the breakdown in trust between law enforcement and the people — for which COVID-19 regulations are at least partly responsible — all of America is paying what it does not owe. Moving forward, America's cities need more Greg Andersons and fewer Derek Chauvins. Proper vetting, training, and ongoing education about policing to protect rights is the only way to make sure we get that.

Getting Involved

To that end, American citizens should join or form Support Your Local Police (SYLP) committees and work to show police in their communities that the relationship of trust works both ways and rests on the principle of good policing. The mission statement of an SYLP committee is to support your local police, *and keep them independent*. That means independent from federal or even state control. If the Port of Seattle Police Department had enjoyed that independence, Anderson's video would have continued to enjoy the praise of his command and could have been used to build bridges to the community, instead of allowing politicians to continue burning those bridges.

American patriots have a great opportunity right now. By showing support for local police at a time when they are taking such a beating, SYLP committees can help educate them about keeping their oaths of office even — and perhaps *especially* — during times of crisis. SYLP committees can also work *with* local police to educate state lawmakers about the correct principles of policing. Because COVID-19 is not the first — and will not be the last — crisis. Whatever comes next, America will need local, independent police to help her through it. For that to happen, [America needs more citizens involved in SYLP committees](#).

For information about joining or forming an SYLP committee in your area, visit www.jbs.org/sylnp.

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