

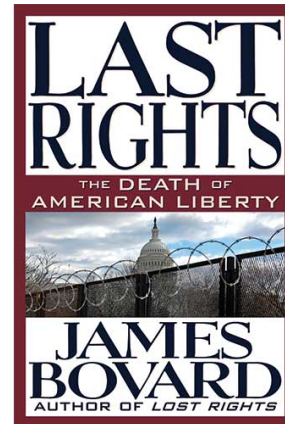


Written by [Laurence M. Vance](#) on August 6, 2024

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The Death of American Liberty

The clever title of investigative journalist James Bovard's newest book, *Last Rights: The Death of American Liberty* (hereafter *Last Rights*), is intended to bring to mind two things: the last rites administered to a Christian who is near death, and Bovard's earlier book *Lost Rights: The Destruction of American Liberty* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), which received the Free Press Association's Mencken Award for Book of the Year in 1995.



Bovard is a senior fellow at the Libertarian Institute and a member of the *USA Today* Board of Contributors. He is a frequent contributor to the *New York Post*, and has written for *The Hill*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Future of Freedom* journal, and *The American Conservative* magazine. In between *Lost Rights* and *Last Rights*, Bovard authored a number of other books, including *Freedom in Chains: The Rise of the State and the Demise of the Citizen* (1999), *Feeling Your Pain: The Explosion and Abuse of Government Power in the Clinton-Gore Years* (2000), *Terrorism and Tyranny: Trampling Freedom, Justice, and Peace to Rid the World of Evil* (2003), and *The Bush Betrayal* (2004). In all of his works, Bovard's focus is on government corruption, incompetence, failures, outrages, and abuses of power. He is nonpartisan, and skewers Democratic and Republican politicians and administrations alike, from the Clinton era through the age of Trump. His writings have been publicly denounced by assorted government bureaucrats in numerous departments and agencies of the federal government, including the FBI, the DEA, and the TSA.

Last Rights contains 15 chapters, each of which can be read independently. The first chapter serves as the book's introduction and the last chapter the conclusion. The intervening chapters are each divided into sections and have a conclusion. The book concludes with endnotes, an index, acknowledgments, a complete list of books by the author, and some information about the Libertarian Institute, a relatively new organization that has already published several other books, and whose senior fellows include such luminaries as Thomas Woods and Ted Galen Carpenter.

Bovard has been called the most exhaustive researcher in the country, and his 58 pages of endnotes from an eclectic variety of sources confirm this. Although he chronicles a serious subject — the loss of rights and liberties of Americans at the hands of their federal, state, and local governments — Bovard blends gravity with comic relief.

Chapter 2, "Seizure Fever," is one of the most disturbing chapters in the book. Because "police can almost always find a pretext to pull someone over," billions of dollars in cash have been seized from tens of thousands of American travelers "with no criminal charges in the vast majority of cases." He concludes that "the notion that government must have unlimited power to punish anyone suspected of a crime is the same dogma that has propelled tyranny for thousands of years."

In chapter 3, "The War on Gun Owners," Bovard documents the contempt that politicians have for gun owners — and not just Democratic politicians, as Trump's support for "red flag" laws and a federal ban

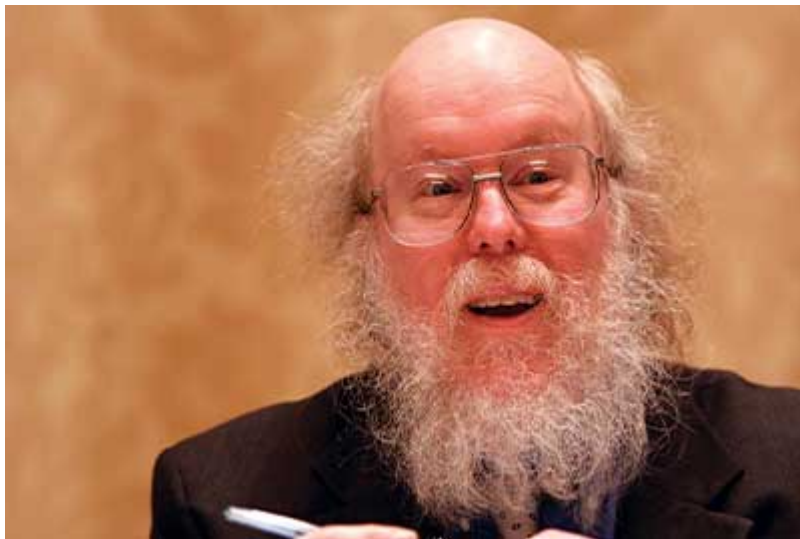


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on “bump stocks” shows. (Thankfully, the Supreme Court recently overturned Trump’s bump-stock ban.) Bovard’s explanation of how “‘assault weapon’ is a political concoction rather than a specific type of firearm” is especially important. He concludes that “private firearm ownership is the last best check on tyranny.”

In chapter 4, “Licensed to Kill,” Bovard tackles a painful subject that many conservatives have turned a blind eye to. “Politicians and judges have turned police into a privileged class with a license to oppress other Americans.” The militarization of local police by the Pentagon has helped to “bring out the worst in many law enforcement agencies” and resulted in more than 50,000 SWAT raids per year. Bovard concludes that “as long as cops have pretexts to harass and assail millions of peaceful Americans every day, outrages will continue.”



Author James Bovard (GageSkidmore)

In chapter 5, “COVID Crackdown Catastrophes,” Bovard chronicles the outrages committed by federal, state, and local governments during the “pandemic” and the “obliterating” of individual liberty by politicians. He concludes that, “in the long run, people have more to fear from politicians than from viruses.”

In chapter 6, “Schools Gone Wild,” Bovard makes the case that “public schools are increasingly coercive and abusive of both students and parents.” Not only have public schools failed to educate children, they have indoctrinated them with “woke” curricula. He concludes that “the best solution is to enable as many children as possible to exit government schools as soon as possible.”

In chapter 8, “Subsidies and Subjugation,” Bovard takes on subsidies for mortgages, rent, farmers, food, and education. He notes how government cash subsidies “have almost always been accompanied by varying measures of control and surveillance.” Government aid to home buyers “produced one of the biggest paternalist catastrophes of this century” — the housing-market crash of 2008. Through the Section 8 program, the Department of Housing and Urban Development “now covers the rent for more than two million households nationwide.” Via food stamps, student breakfasts and lunches, and “an array of other subsidies,” the federal government is “now feeding more than 100 million people.” The result has been “a disastrous recipe for America,” with higher rates of obesity for recipients of federal food aid. Federal student-loan policies “have helped turn young people into a debtor class perpetually clamoring for relief.”



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In chapter 9, “Dominate, Intimidate, Control,” Bovard writes about one of his favorite topics: the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). He believes that “nothing has changed more radically for average Americans since 9/11 than air travel.” He considers the TSA to be “one of the most intrusive and inept federal agencies,” which “treats most Americans like suicide-bombers-in-waiting.” The TSA, which “has never caught a real terrorist,” has spent billions of dollars on equipment that is “ineffective, unreliable or too expensive to operate,” and has “failed to detect 95% of the weapons and mock bombs smuggled past them by testers.” Bovard concludes that, “rather than making Americans safe from terrorists, TSA makes them prey to federal agents.”

In other chapters, Bovard writes about government surveillance, government secrecy, and government censorship. There are also whole chapters on the IRS (“Taxation and Tyranny”) and the FBI (“American Gestapo Run Amok”).

It is clear from the many examples that Bovard provides in *Last Rights* that asset-forfeiture laws, money-laundering laws, unlawful searches and seizures, and police militarization are driven in large part by the war on drugs. Regardless of how one personally feels about marijuana and harder drugs, not only has the federal war on drugs hastened the destruction of Americans’ rights and liberties, it is also blatantly unconstitutional. The powers delegated to the national government are, as James Madison said, “few and defined”; everything else is reserved to the states. Unfortunately, as Bovard also makes abundantly clear, it is not just the federal government that has destroyed our rights and liberties — state and local governments have also been destructive.

Although the situation appears grim, the American people can still rescue and restore their rights and liberties. Bovard believes that “liberty is invaluable regardless of how many politicians seek to destroy it or how many fools fail to cherish it.” *Last Rights* is his wake-up call to the American people. He reminds us that “the American republic was forged by individuals who vanquished the most powerful empire in the world,” and says that American “citizens must cease tolerating regimes that increasingly shackle and defraud them.” The resistance of the American people to the Covid tyranny imposed on them by government at all levels is a shining example of the regaining of some of our lost rights and liberties, but many more need to be restored. As Bovard writes in his last sentence, “Vast bounties of liberty are waiting to be harvested.”



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