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## Has the American Dream Become the American Nightmare?

By John W. Whitehead  
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“Most Germans, so far as I could see, did not seem to mind that their personal freedom had been taken away, that so much of their splendid culture was being destroyed and replaced with a mindless barbarism, or that their life and work were being regimented to a degree never before experienced even by a people accustomed for generations to a great deal of regimentation ... On the whole, people did not seem to feel that they were being cowed and held down by an unscrupulous tyranny. On the contrary, they appeared to support it with genuine enthusiasm.”

— William L. Shirer, *The Nightmare Years 1930-40*

For too long now, the American people have allowed themselves to be persuaded that the government's job is to take care of us: to feed us, clothe us, house us, educate us, raise our children, heal our infirmities, manage our finances, protect us from our enemies, guard us against all dangers (real and imaginary), and provide for our every need.

Where Americans go wrong is in failing to recognize that there's *always* a catch to such devil's bargains purportedly carried out for the good of all society.

You want free education for your children? The government can take care of it. In exchange for free public schools, however, your children will be molded and indoctrinated into compliant, obedient citizens who reflect the government's values rather than your own.

You want free health care? The government can take care of that, too. In exchange, your medical decisions—how you live and die—will ultimately be determined by corporations to whom you are little more than a line item impacting their profit and loss margins.

You want to be insulated from all things that might cause offense? That's not a problem for the government. Its thought police will use hate crime laws to criminalize speech, thought and actions that may be politically incorrect.

You want a guarantee of safety? Sure, but your local police will also have to be militarized and trained in battlefield tactics, your communities and communications will be subjected to round-the-clock surveillance, and you—the citizenry—will be treated as suspects and enemy combatants.

You want to root out domestic extremism and terrorism? That's just fine. But in the process of identifying and targeting terrorists, the government will have the power to label anyone who disagrees with its policies as an extremist/terrorist and subject them to indefinite detentions.

Are you starting to get the picture?

This is the terrible price—the loss of our freedoms and the enslavement of future generations—that must eventually be paid for the goods and services rendered by a government whose priorities are the acquisition of ever-more power, control and money.

As the old adage warns: “A government big enough to give you everything you want is a government big enough to take away everything that you have.”

Unfortunately, we've been on the receiving end of the government's taxpayer-funded handouts—and its deceptively well-intended dictates—for so long that many Americans have forgotten what it is to think for themselves, provide for themselves, and govern themselves.

Indeed, this age of entitlement is a far cry from the kind of constitutional republic America's founders envisioned.

Gone is the proud, independent-minded, pioneering spirit of early Americans like my parents who rejected what they called “hand-outs,” worked hard for whatever they had, protected their homes and families, and believed the government’s job was to govern based on the consent of the governed and not dictate.

Contrast those fiercely-independent, early Americans who took to heart James Madison’s admonition to distrust all those in power with today’s citizens who not only expect the government to care for their needs but have blindly entrusted the government with vast, growing powers.

By giving the government the green light to act *in loco parentis* and treat the citizenry as children in need of caretakers, “we the people” have allowed ourselves to be demoted and infantilized, reduced from knowledgeable, independent-minded, capable masters of a republic to wayward, undisciplined, dependent, vulnerable children incapable of caring for ourselves.

It’s time to grow up.

Incredibly, despite the fact that we allowed the government to become all-knowing, all-powerful and all-mighty in the mistaken belief that it would make our lives safer, easier and more affluent, we’re still shocked when that power and might is used against us.

It’s time to stop being so gullible and so trusting.

Even when the headlines blare out the news about SWAT team raids gone awry, police shootings of unarmed citizens, roadside cavity searches of young women, children being shackled and tasered, and Americans jailed for profit in private prisons, we still somehow maintain our state of denial until suddenly we’re the ones in the firing line being treated like suspects and criminals, having our skulls cracked, our doors smashed, our pets shot, our children terrorized, and our loved ones jailed for non-offenses.

It’s time to remove those rose-colored, partisan-tinted glasses and wake up to the fact that our nation of sheep has given rise to a government of wolves.

Even though, deep down, we have suspected that the system is run by an elite who views the citizenry as little more than cattle destined for the slaughterhouse, we’re still shocked to find ourselves treated like slaves and economic units.

How could we not have seen it coming?

How long has the writing been on the wall?

How could we have been so blind, deaf and dumb to the warnings all around us?

Unfortunately, it happens this way in every age, in every place where freedom falls and tyranny flourishes.

As Aldous Huxley recognized in his foreword to *Brave New World*: “A really efficient totalitarian state would be one in which the all-powerful executive of political bosses and their army of managers control a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced, because they love their servitude. To make them love it is the task assigned, in present-day totalitarian states, to ministries of propaganda, newspaper editors and schoolteachers.”

This is how the seeds of authoritarianism are planted and watered and cultivated into aggressive, invasive growths that can quickly dominate an environment.

Remember, tyrants don't always come to power in a show of force. Often, they sweet-talk their way to absolute power, buoyed along by a wave of populist demand for someone to save the country from economic, military and political crises.

As historian Jim Powell writes for *Forbes*:

Hitler didn't take over a small government with an effective separation of enumerated, delegated and limited powers. He took over a large welfare state... He dealt with unemployment by introducing forced labor for both men and women. Government control of the economy made it virtually impossible for anyone to seriously threaten his regime. Hitler added secret police, death camps and another war machine. The German educational system, which had inspired so many American progressives, played a major role in all this... the government gained complete control of schools and universities, and their top priority was teaching obedience. The professorial elite promoted collectivism. The highest calling was working for the government.

It can easily happen here.

In fact, the early signs of this downshift are all around us if you only know where to look.

You can smell it in the air: there's danger coming. A recent *New Yorker* article reveals the lengths some of the wealthiest in America are going to in order to survive an apocalyptic breakdown of society: isolated refuges, bunkers, gas masks, generators, solar panels, ammunition, etc.

You can see it in the changes taking place all around you: the government is preparing for something ominous. For example, the Pentagon is using a dystopian training video to prepare special forces to deal with the urban challenges of megacities: criminal networks, illicit economies, decentralized syndicates of crime, substandard infrastructure, religious and ethnic tensions, impoverishment, economic inequality, protesters, slums, open landfills, over-burdened sewers, and a “growing mass of unemployed.”

You can hear it in the news coming out of the independent media: the Executive, Legislative and Judicial Branches have already weakened our long-established bulwarks against tyranny by their constant undermining of the Constitution and the president's amassing of imperial power.

We are no longer a constitutional republic.

The American dream is turning into a living nightmare.

We are fast moving towards full-blown fascism.

So what's the answer?

The powers that be can—and will—continue to distract us with electronic gadgets and entertainment news, they can seduce us with promises they have no intention of keeping, they can drug us with politics packaged to resemble religion, and they can use the schools to breed a populace of compliant slaves.

In the end, however, the choice of whether to keep drinking the Kool-Aid or reject the false prophets and promises of the police state—a.k.a. fascism or totalitarianism or tyranny—rests with “we the people.”

After all, as I make clear in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People*, it was “we the people” who struck this devil’s bargain in the first place, trading our liberties for dubious promises of prosperity, security and advancement.

Through our inaction, our apathy and our unwillingness to do the hard work of holding the government accountable, perhaps “we the people” have been the greatest menace to freedom.

Perhaps all of this is our fault.

My parents’ advice was that if you made a mess, you had to clean it up.

No one else is going to clean this mess up for us, certainly not anyone on the government’s payroll.

As Jim Powell rightly concludes: “Ultimately, liberty can be protected only if people care enough to fight for it, because everywhere governments push for more power, and they never give it up willingly.”

So let’s stop buying into the fairytale that politicians are saviors, capable of fixing what’s wrong with our communities and our lives.

Let’s stop expecting the government to solve all our problems.

Stop playing the partisan game that paints anyone not of your political persuasion as evil.

Stop defending the insanity of an immoral system of government that sees nothing wrong with bombing innocent civilians, jailing innocent citizens, and treating human beings as little more than cattle.

Stop validating a system of laws, tactics and policies that are illegitimate, egregious or blatantly unconstitutional.

While you're at it, start taking responsibility for your lives—and your freedoms—again. And maybe, just maybe, there will be some hope for tomorrow.