

The American Gulag: Brick by Brick, Our Prison Walls Get More Oppressive by the Day

By [John W. Whitehead](#)

Global Research, August 29, 2019

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Law and Justice](#), [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

[“The exile of prisoners to a distant place, where they can ‘pay their debt to society,’ make themselves useful, and not contaminate others with their ideas or their criminal acts, is a practice as old as civilization itself. The rulers of ancient Rome and Greece sent their dissidents off to distant colonies. Socrates chose death over the torment of exile from Athens. The poet Ovid was exiled to a fetid port on the Black Sea.”— Anne Applebaum, Gulag: A History](#)

This is how freedom dies.

This is how you condition a populace to life as prisoners in a police state: by brainwashing them into *believing* they are free so that they will march in lockstep with the state and be incapable of recognizing the prison walls that surround them.

Face the facts: we are no longer free.

We in the American Police State may enjoy the illusion of freedom, but that is all it is: an elaborate deception, rooted in denial and delusion, that hides the grasping, greedy, power-hungry, megalomaniacal force that lurks beneath the surface.

Brick by brick, the prison walls being erected around us by the government and its corporate partners-in-crime grow more oppressive and more pervasive by the day.

Brick by brick, we are finding there is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide.

Brick by brick, we are being walled in, locked down and locked up.

That’s the curious thing about walls: they not only keep those on the outside from getting in, they also keep those on the inside from getting out.

Consider, if you will, some of the “bricks” in the police state’s wall that serve to imprison the citizenry: [Red flag gun laws](#) that strip citizens of their rights based on the flimsiest of pretexts concocted by self-serving politicians. Overcriminalization resulting in jail time for nonviolent offenses such as feeding stray cats and [buying foreign honey](#). Military training drills—showy exercises in armed intimidation—and [live action “role playing” between soldiers and “freedom fighters”](#) staged in small rural communities throughout the country. Profit-driven speed and red light cameras that do little for safety while [padding the pockets of government agencies](#). Overt [surveillance](#) that turns citizens into suspects.

Police-run facial recognition software that mistakenly [labels law-abiding citizens as](#)

[criminals](#). Punitive programs that [strip citizens of their passports](#) and right to travel over unpaid taxes. Government agents that [view segments of the populace as “subhuman”](#) and treat them accordingly. A social credit system (similar to China’s) that rewards behavior deemed “acceptable” and [punishes behavior the government and its corporate allies find offensive, illegal or inappropriate](#).

Facial Recognition Software Incorrectly Flags 26 State Lawmakers as Criminals, ACLU Says



Amazon said the false matches were a result of incorrect settings. SHUTTERSTOCK

By [Kate Elizabeth Queram](#),
Staff
Correspondent

AUGUST 13, 2019

One California lawmaker said a recent test of Amazon's technology is proof that it should be kept from body-worn police cameras. The company says the testing method used by the ACLU wasn't fair.

Screenshot from [Route Fifty](#)

These are just a small sampling of the oppressive measures used by the government to control and constrict the American people.

What these despotic tactics add up to is an authoritarian prison in every sense of the word.

Granted this prison may not appear as overtly bleak as the soul-destroying gulags described by [Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn](#) in his masterpiece *The Gulag Archipelago*, but that’s just a matter of aesthetics.

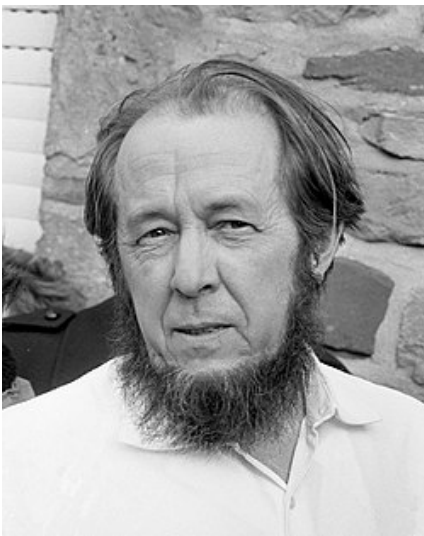
Strip away the surface embellishments and you’ll find the core is no less sinister than that of the gulags of the Cold War-era Soviet Union.

Those gulags, according to historian Anne Applebaum, used as a form of “administrative exile—which required no trial and no sentencing procedure—was an [ideal punishment not only for troublemakers as such, but also for political opponents of the regime.](#)”

The word “gulag” refers to a labor or concentration camp where prisoners (oftentimes political prisoners or so-called “enemies of the state,” real or imagined) were imprisoned as punishment for their crimes against the state. As Applebaum explains:

Over time, the word “Gulag” has also come to signify not only the administration of the concentration camps but also the system of Soviet slave labor itself, in all its forms and varieties: labor camps, punishment camps, criminal and political camps, women’s camps, children’s camps, transit camps. Even more broadly, [“Gulag” has come to mean the Soviet repressive system itself](#), the set of procedures that prisoners once called the “meat-grinder”: the arrests, the interrogations, the transport in unheated cattle cars, the forced labor, the destruction of families, the years spent in exile, the early and unnecessary deaths.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (image on the right) was such a political prisoner.



For the crime of daring to criticize Stalin in a private letter to a school friend, Solzhenitsyn was arrested and sentenced to eight years in exile in a labor camp.

That was before psychiatry paved the way for totalitarian regimes such as the Soviet Union to declare dissidents mentally ill and consign political prisoners to prisons disguised as psychiatric hospitals, where they could be isolated from the rest of society, their ideas discredited, and subjected to electric shocks, drugs and various medical procedures to break them physically and mentally.

In addition to declaring political dissidents mentally unsound, government officials in the Cold War-era Soviet Union also made use of an administrative process for dealing with individuals who were considered a bad influence on others or troublemakers. Author George Kennan describes a process in which:

The obnoxious person may not be guilty of any crime . . . but if, in the opinion of the local authorities, his presence in a particular place is “prejudicial to public order” or “incompatible with public tranquility,” he may be arrested without warrant, may be held from two weeks to two years in prison, and may then be removed by force to any other place within the limits of the empire and there be [put under police surveillance for a period of from one to ten years](#).

Warrantless seizures, surveillance, indefinite detention, isolation, exile... sound familiar?

It should.

The age-old practice by which despotic regimes eliminate their critics or potential adversaries by making them disappear—or forcing them to flee—or exiling them literally or figuratively or virtually from their fellow citizens—is happening with increasing frequency in America.

We saw it happen with **Julian Assange**. With **Edward Snowden**. With **Bradley Manning**.

They, too, were exiled for daring to challenge the powers-that-be.

It happened to [26-year-old decorated Marine Brandon Raub](#), who was targeted because of his Facebook posts, interrogated by government agents about his views on government corruption, arrested with no warning, labeled mentally ill for subscribing to so-called “conspiratorial” views about the government, detained against his will in a psych ward for standing by his views, and isolated from his family, friends and attorneys.

Raub’s case exposed the seedy underbelly of a governmental system that is targeting Americans—[especially military veterans](#)—for expressing their discontent over America’s rapid transition to a police state.

Now, through the use of [red flag laws](#), [behavioral threat assessments](#), and [pre-crime policing prevention programs](#), the government is laying the groundwork that would allow it to weaponize the label of mental illness as a means of exiling those whistleblowers, dissidents and freedom fighters who refuse to march in lockstep with its dictates.

That the government is using the charge of mental illness as the means by which to immobilize (and disarm) its critics is diabolically brilliant. With one stroke of a magistrate’s pen, these individuals are declared mentally ill, locked away against their will, and stripped of their constitutional rights.

These developments are merely the realization of various U.S. government initiatives dating back to 2009, including one dubbed [Operation Vigilant Eagle](#) which calls for surveillance of military veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, characterizing them as extremists and potential domestic terrorist threats because they may be “disgruntled, disillusioned or suffering from the psychological effects of war.”

Coupled with the report on “[Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment](#)” issued by the Department of Homeland Security (curiously enough, a Soviet term), which broadly defines rightwing extremists as individuals and groups “that are mainly antigovernment, rejecting federal authority in favor of state or local authority, or rejecting government authority entirely,” these tactics bode ill for anyone seen as opposing the government. Although these initiatives caused an initial uproar when announced in 2009, they were quickly subsumed by the ever-shifting cacophony of the news media and its ten-day cycles.

Yet while the American public may have forgotten about the government’s plans to identify and disable anyone deemed a potential “threat,” the government has put its plan into action.

Thus, what began as a blueprint under the Bush administration has become an operation manual under the Obama and Trump administrations to exile those who are challenging the government's authority.

An important point to consider, however, is that the government is not merely targeting individuals who are voicing their discontent so much as it is locking up individuals trained in military warfare who are voicing feelings of discontent.

Under the guise of mental health treatment and with the complicity of government psychiatrists and law enforcement officials, these veterans are increasingly being portrayed as ticking time bombs in need of intervention.

For instance, the Justice Department launched a [pilot program](#) aimed at training SWAT teams to deal with confrontations involving highly trained and often heavily armed combat veterans.

One tactic being used to deal with so-called "[mentally ill suspects who also happen to be trained in modern warfare](#)" is through the use of civil commitment laws, found in all states and employed throughout American history to not only silence but cause dissidents to disappear.

For example, in 2006, NSA officials attempted to label [former employee Russ Tice](#), who was willing to testify in Congress about the NSA's warrantless wiretapping program, as "mentally unbalanced" based upon two psychiatric evaluations ordered by his superiors.

In 2009, [NYPD Officer Adrian Schoolcraft](#) had his home raided, and he was handcuffed to a gurney and taken into emergency custody for an alleged psychiatric episode. It was later discovered by way of an internal investigation that his superiors were retaliating against him for reporting police misconduct. Schoolcraft spent six days in the mental facility, and as a further indignity, was presented with a bill for \$7,185 upon his release.

In 2012, it was Virginia's civil commitment law that was used to justify arresting and detaining [Marine Brandon Raub](#)—a 9/11 truther—in a psychiatric ward based on posts he had made on his Facebook page that were critical of the government.

Incredibly, [in Virginia alone, over 20,000 people annually are forced into psychiatric wards](#) by way of so-called Emergency Custody Orders and civil commitment procedures.

Each state has its own set of civil, or involuntary, commitment laws. These laws are extensions of [two legal principles](#): *parens patriae* *Parens patriae* (Latin for "parent of the country"), which allows the government to intervene on behalf of citizens who cannot act in their own best interest, and police power, which requires a state to protect the interests of its citizens.

The fusion of these two principles, coupled with a shift towards a dangerousness standard, has resulted in a Nanny State mindset carried out with the militant force of the Police State.

The problem, of course, is that the diagnosis of mental illness, while a legitimate concern for some Americans, has over time become a convenient means by which the government and its corporate partners can penalize certain "unacceptable" social behaviors.

In fact, in recent years, we have witnessed the pathologizing of individuals who resist

authority as suffering from oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), defined as “a pattern of disobedient, hostile, and defiant behavior toward authority figures.” Under such a definition, every activist of note throughout our history—from Mahatma Gandhi to Martin Luther King Jr.—could be classified as suffering from an ODD mental disorder.

Of course, this is all part of a larger trend in American governance whereby dissent is criminalized and pathologized, and dissenters are censored, silenced, declared unfit for society, labelled dangerous or extremist, or turned into outcasts and exiled.

Red flag gun laws, growing in popularity as a legislative means by which to seize guns from individuals viewed as a danger to themselves or others, are a perfect example of this mindset at work. “[We need to stop dangerous people before they act](#)”: that’s the [rationale behind the NRA’s support of these red flag laws](#), and at first glance, it appears to be perfectly reasonable to want to disarm individuals who are clearly suicidal and/or pose an “[immediate danger](#)” to themselves or others.

Where the problem arises, of course, is when you put the power to determine who is a *potential* danger in the hands of government agencies, the courts and the police.

Remember, this is the same government that uses the words “anti-government,” “extremist” and “terrorist” [interchangeably](#).

This is the same government whose agents are spinning a sticky spider-web of [threat assessments](#), behavioral sensing warnings, flagged “words,” and “suspicious” activity reports using automated eyes and ears, social media, [behavior sensing software](#), and citizen spies to identify *potential* threats.

This is the same government that keeps re-upping the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which allows the military to detain American citizens with no access to friends, family or the courts if the government believes them to be a threat.

This is the same government that has a growing list—shared with fusion centers and law enforcement agencies—of ideologies, behaviors, affiliations and other characteristics that could flag someone as suspicious and result in their being labeled *potential* enemies of the state.

This is the same government that has, along with its corporate counterparts (Facebook, Google, Twitter, etc.), made it abundantly clear at all levels (whether it be the FBI, NSA, local police, school personnel, etc.) that they want no one challenging their authority.

This is a government that pays lip service to the nation’s freedom principles while working overtime to shred the Constitution.

Yes, this is a prison alright.

Thus, for those who take to the streets to constitutionally express their opinions and beliefs, rows of riot police, clad in jackboots, military vests, and helmets, holding batons, stun guns, assault rifles, and sometimes even grenade launchers, are there to keep them in line.

For those who take to social media to express their opinions and beliefs, squadrons of AI censors are there to shadowban them and keep them in line.

As for that wall President Trump keeps promising to build, it's already being built, one tyranny at a time, transforming our constitutional republic into a carceral state.

Yet be warned: in a carceral state, there are only two kinds of people: the prisoners and the prison guards.

In a carceral state—a.k.a. a prison state or a police state—there is no difference between the treatment meted out to a law-abiding citizen and a convicted felon: both are equally suspect and treated as criminals, without any of the special rights and privileges reserved for the governing elite.

With every new law enacted by federal and state legislatures, every new ruling handed down by government courts, and every new military weapon, invasive tactic and egregious protocol employed by government agents, “we the people”—the prisoners of the American police state—are being pushed that much further into a corner, our backs against the prison wall.

This concept of a carceral state in which we possess no rights except for that which the government grants on an as-needed basis is the only way I can begin to comprehend, let alone articulate, the irrational, surreal, topsy-turvy, through-the-looking-glass state of affairs that is being imposed upon us in America today.

As I point out in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#), we who pretend we are free are no different from those who spend their lives behind bars.

You see, by gradually whittling away at our freedoms—free speech, assembly, due process, privacy, etc.—the government has, in effect, liberated itself from its contractual agreement to respect the constitutional rights of the citizenry while resetting the calendar back to a time when we had no Bill of Rights to protect us from the long arm of the government.

Aided and abetted by the legislatures, the courts and Corporate America, the government has been busily rewriting the contract (a.k.a. the Constitution) that establishes the citizenry as the masters and agents of the government as the servants. We are now only as good as we are useful, and our usefulness is calculated on an economic scale by how much we are worth—in terms of profit and resale value—to our “owners.”

Under the new terms of this revised, one-sided agreement, the government and its many operatives have all the privileges and rights and “we the prisoners” have none.

*

Note to readers: please click the share buttons above or below. Forward this article to your email lists. Crosspost on your blog site, internet forums. etc.

This article was originally published on [The Rutherford Institute](#).

*Constitutional attorney and author **John W. Whitehead** is founder and president of [The Rutherford Institute](#). His new book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) is available at www.amazon.com. Whitehead can be contacted at johnw@rutherford.org.*

Featured image is from The Crux

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: **[John W. Whitehead](#)**

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca
www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca