

Rule by Criminals: When Dissidents Become Enemies of the State

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Global Research, March 27, 2024

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

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["In these days of worldwide confusion, there is a dire need for men and women who will courageously do battle for truth."](#)— Martin Luther King Jr.

When *exposing* a crime is treated as *committing* a crime, you are being ruled by criminals.

In the current governmental climate, obeying one's conscience and speaking truth to the power of the police state can easily render you an "enemy of the state."

The government's list of so-called "enemies of the state" is growing by the day.

Wikileaks founder [Julian Assange](#) is merely one of the most visible victims of the police state's war on dissidents and whistleblowers.

Five years ago, on April 11, 2019, [police arrested Assange](#) for daring to access and disclose military documents that portray the U.S. government and its endless wars abroad as reckless, irresponsible, immoral and responsible for thousands of civilian deaths.

Included among the leaked materials was [gunsight video footage from two U.S. AH-64 Apache helicopters engaged in a series of air-to-ground attacks](#) while American air crew laughed at some of the casualties. Among the casualties were two Reuters correspondents who were gunned down after their cameras were mistaken for weapons and a driver who stopped to help one of the journalists. The driver's two children, who happened to be in the van at the time it was fired upon by U.S. forces, suffered serious injuries.

There is nothing defensible about crimes such as these perpetrated by the government.

When any government becomes almost indistinguishable from the evil it claims to be fighting—whether that evil takes the form of war, terrorism, torture, drug trafficking, sex

trafficking, murder, violence, theft, pornography, scientific experimentations or some other diabolical means of inflicting pain, suffering and servitude on humanity—that government has lost its claim to legitimacy.

These are hard words, but hard times require straight-talking.

It is easy to remain silent in the face of evil.

What is harder—what we lack today and so desperately need—are those with moral courage who will risk their freedoms and lives in order to speak out against evil in its many forms.

Throughout history, individuals or groups of individuals have risen up to challenge the injustices of their age.

Nazi Germany had its [Dietrich Bonhoeffer](#). The gulags of the Soviet Union were challenged by [Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn](#). America had its color-coded system of racial segregation and warmongering called out for what it was, blatant discrimination and profiteering, by [Martin Luther King Jr.](#)

And then there was Jesus Christ, an itinerant preacher and revolutionary activist, who not only died challenging the police state of his day—namely, the Roman Empire—but [provided a blueprint for civil disobedience](#) that would be followed by those, religious and otherwise, who came after him.

Indeed, it is fitting that we remember that Jesus Christ—the religious figure worshipped by Christians for his death on the cross and subsequent resurrection—paid the ultimate price for speaking out against the police state of his day.

A radical nonconformist who challenged authority at every turn, Jesus was a far cry from the watered-down, corporatized, simplified, gentrified, sissified vision of a meek creature holding a lamb that most modern churches peddle. In fact, he spent his adult life speaking truth to power, challenging the status quo of his day, and pushing back against the abuses of the Roman Empire.

Much like the American Empire today, the Roman Empire of Jesus' day had all of the characteristics of a police state: secrecy, surveillance, a widespread police presence, a citizenry treated like suspects with little recourse against the police state, perpetual wars, a military empire, martial law, and political retribution against those who dared to challenge the power of the state.

For all the accolades poured out upon Jesus, little is said about the harsh realities of the police state in which he lived and its similarities to modern-day America, and yet they are striking.

Secrecy, surveillance and rule by the elite. As the chasm between the wealthy and poor grew wider in the Roman Empire, the [ruling class and the wealthy class became synonymous](#), while the lower classes, increasingly deprived of their political freedoms, grew disinterested in the government and easily distracted by “bread and circuses.” Much like America today, with its lack of government transparency, overt domestic surveillance, and [rule by the rich](#), the inner workings of the Roman Empire were [shrouded in secrecy](#), while its leaders were constantly on the watch for any potential threats to its power. The [resulting](#)

[state-wide surveillance was primarily carried out by the military](#), which acted as investigators, enforcers, torturers, policemen, executioners and jailers. Today that role is fulfilled by the NSA, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security and the increasingly militarized police forces across the country.

Widespread police presence. The Roman Empire used its military forces to maintain the “peace,” thereby establishing a police state that reached into all aspects of a citizen’s life. In this way, these military officers, used to address a broad range of routine problems and conflicts, enforced the will of the state. Today SWAT teams, comprised of local police and federal agents, are employed to [carry out routine search warrants for minor crimes](#) such as marijuana possession and credit card fraud.

Citizenry with little recourse against the police state. As the Roman Empire expanded, [personal freedom and independence nearly vanished](#), as did any real sense of local governance and national consciousness. Similarly, in America today, [citizens largely feel powerless](#), voiceless and unrepresented in the face of a power-hungry federal government. As states and localities are brought under direct control by federal agencies and regulations, a sense of [learned helplessness](#) grips the nation.

Perpetual wars and a military empire. Much [like America today](#) with its practice of policing the world, [war and an over-arching militarist ethos provided the framework for the Roman Empire](#), which extended from the Italian peninsula to all over Southern, Western, and Eastern Europe, extending into North Africa and Western Asia as well. In addition to significant foreign threats, [wars were waged against inchoate, unstructured and socially inferior foes](#).

Martial law. Eventually, Rome established a permanent military dictatorship that left the citizens at the mercy of an unreachable and oppressive totalitarian regime. In the absence of resources to establish civic police forces, the Romans relied increasingly on the military to intervene in all matters of conflict or upheaval in provinces, from small-scale scuffles to large-scale revolts. Not unlike police forces today, with their [martial law training drills on American soil](#), militarized weapons and “shoot first, ask questions later” mindset, the Roman soldier had [“the exercise of lethal force at his fingertips”](#) with the potential of wreaking havoc on normal citizens’ lives.

A nation of suspects. Just as the American Empire looks upon its citizens as [suspects to be tracked, surveilled and controlled](#), the Roman Empire looked upon all potential insubordinates, from the common thief to a full-fledged insurrectionist, as [threats to its power](#). The insurrectionist was [seen as directly challenging the Emperor](#). A “bandit,” or [revolutionist](#), was seen as capable of overturning the empire, was always considered guilty and deserving of the most savage penalties, including capital punishment. Bandits were usually punished publicly and cruelly as a means of [detering others from challenging the power of the state](#). Jesus’ execution was one such public punishment.

Acts of civil disobedience by insurrectionists. Much like the Roman Empire, the American Empire has exhibited [zero tolerance for dissidents such as Julian Assange, Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning](#) who exposed the police state’s seedy underbelly. Jesus was also branded a political revolutionary starting with his attack on the money changers and traders at the Jewish temple, an act of civil disobedience at the site of the administrative headquarters of the Sanhedrin, the supreme Jewish council.

Military-style arrests in the dead of night. Jesus' arrest account testifies to the fact that the Romans perceived Him as a revolutionary. Eerily similar to today's SWAT team raids, Jesus was arrested in the middle of the night, in secret, by a [large, heavily armed fleet of soldiers](#). Rather than merely asking for Jesus when they came to arrest him, his pursuers collaborated beforehand with Judas. Acting as a government informant, Judas concocted a kiss as a secret identification marker, hinting that a level of deception and trickery must be used to obtain this seemingly "dangerous revolutionist's" cooperation.

Torture and capital punishment. In Jesus' day, religious preachers, self-proclaimed prophets and nonviolent protesters were not summarily arrested and executed. Indeed, the high priests and Roman governors normally allowed a protest, particularly a small-scale one, to run its course. However, government authorities were quick to dispose of leaders and movements that appeared to threaten the Roman Empire. The charges leveled against Jesus—that he was a threat to the stability of the nation, opposed paying Roman taxes and claimed to be the rightful King—were purely political, not religious. To the Romans, any one of these charges was enough to merit death by crucifixion, which was usually reserved for slaves, non-Romans, radicals, revolutionaries and the worst criminals.

Jesus was presented to Pontius Pilate "[as a disturber of the political peace](#)," a leader of a rebellion, a political threat, and most gravely—a claimant to kingship, a "king of the revolutionary type." After Jesus is formally condemned by Pilate, he is sentenced to death by crucifixion, "the Roman means of executing criminals convicted of high treason." The purpose of crucifixion was not so much to kill the criminal, as it was an immensely public statement intended to visually warn all those who would challenge the power of the Roman Empire. Hence, it was reserved solely for the most extreme political crimes: treason, rebellion, sedition, and banditry. After being ruthlessly whipped and mocked, Jesus was nailed to a cross.



The Passion of the Christ

Jesus—the revolutionary, the political dissident, and the nonviolent activist—lived and died in a police state. Any reflection on Jesus’ life and death within a police state must take into account several factors: Jesus spoke out strongly against such things as empires, controlling people, state violence and power politics. Jesus challenged the political and religious belief systems of his day. And worldly powers feared Jesus, not because he challenged them for control of thrones or government but because he undercut their claims of supremacy, and he dared to speak truth to power in a time when doing so could—and often did—cost a person his life.

Unfortunately, the radical Jesus, the political dissident who took aim at injustice and oppression, has been largely forgotten today, replaced by a congenial, smiling Jesus trotted out for religious holidays but otherwise rendered mute when it comes to matters of war, power and politics.

Yet for those who truly study the life and teachings of Jesus, the resounding theme is one of outright resistance to war, materialism and empire.

What a marked contrast to the advice being given [to Americans](#) by church leaders to “submit to your leaders and those in authority,” which in the American police state translates to complying, conforming, submitting, obeying orders, deferring to authority and generally doing whatever a government official tells you to do.

Telling Americans to blindly obey the government or [put their faith in politics and vote for a political savior](#) flies in the face of everything for which Jesus lived and died.

Will we follow the path of least resistance—turning a blind eye to the evils of our age and marching in lockstep with the police state—or will we be [transformed nonconformists](#) “dedicated to justice, peace, and brotherhood”?

As Martin Luther King Jr. reminds us in a powerful [sermon delivered 70 years ago](#), “This command not to conform comes ... [from] Jesus Christ, the world’s most dedicated nonconformist, whose ethical nonconformity still challenges the conscience of mankind.”

Ultimately, as I make clear in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) and in its fictional counterpart [The Erik Blair Diaries](#), this is the contradiction that must be resolved if the radical Jesus—the one who stood up to the Roman Empire and was crucified as a warning to others not to challenge the powers-that-be—is to be an example for our modern age.

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

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