

Are things worse in America now than ever before? Barak Obama doesn't think so. In his book, [The Audacity of Hope](#) (review coming soon) he comments that when he hears liberals complain because America is slipping dangerously toward fascism, and our [Constitution](#) is being shredded beyond all recognition, he reminds them of darker times our country has faced. He refers them to the [Alien and Sedition Act](#) of our second president, John Adams; to [slavery](#); to the [Japanese internment camps](#) during World War Two; to the [McCarthy era communist witch hunts](#); to the [lynchings](#) of blacks that lasted right into the 60s.

He could also have mentioned the [suspension of Habeas Corpus by Lincoln during the Civil War](#); the crimes of the [robber barons](#) of the 19th and early 20th centuries, whose greedy and inhumane behavior led to [bombings and assassinations of coal executives by labor unions](#); [Jim Crow laws](#) and [segregation](#); the assassinations of two Kennedys, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X; the [Watergate scandal](#), the [Vietnam War](#), and the criminalization of marijuana strictly in order to [target peace activists](#) and other “enemies” of the Nixon administration; [J. Edgar Hoover's](#) use of the FBI as his personal attack dogs to persecute “undesirables” like [John Lennon](#); [Milton Friedman's](#) support of [Augusto Pinochet](#) in Chile and the [CIA's involvement in training his](#) and [other repressive regimes](#) in torture techniques; [Iran Contra](#); and many other tragedies. Our history is filled with actions that run completely counter to the ideals upon which this country was founded, and that flout the rule of law and the Constitution.

In my day, our high school history teachers were honest with us about the horrible things some people in our government have done in our name – [stealing Native American land](#); the [Dred Scott decision](#); or the [Tuskegee Syphilis Study](#) which experimented on African Americans by deliberately leaving their syphilis untreated and not telling the patients they even had it. The general tone of such classes, however, was that those were “the bad old days,” that our ignorant

forefathers may have been guilty of such evils, but in contrast, everything “now” was rosy. Our Constitution was in place, our country was as enlightened as our founding fathers ever dreamed it should be, and though we needed to remain vigilant to ensure that Hitler’s [Nazi Germany](#) could never happen here, that was only a distant possibility, not something that could happen tomorrow, and certainly not something we would find in whatever our current administration happened to be.

At that time, the evils that *were* being perpetrated by our government were limited to far away foreign lands and third world countries. Things like the [Iran Contra scandal](#), though recognized as wrong, did not seem to reach close to home. Why should the average American care about what’s happening in [El Salvador](#), [Grenada](#), [Serbia](#), or [Bosnia](#)? Even all the horrible things going on in [Iraq](#) don’t seem to concern Mr. and Mrs. Heartland America, except insofar as they may have a child serving in harms way. Who really cares what horrendous things happen to a bunch of poor brown heathens thousands of miles away?

What is really unprecedented about our current situation is the extent of [war crimes](#) that are being carried out by our administration not just abroad, but at home. These are the days and the events that our history teachers warned us about, that we thought were in some distant, theoretical future. The President of the United States has [authorized torture, admitted it](#), and not been prosecuted for it. Innocent people are being [kidnapped out of American airports](#), transported to countries like Syria where torture is the norm, and tormented for months or years only to be released without apology. Average, law-abiding American citizens are having their [phone calls, emails, and bank accounts](#) tapped [illegally](#), with the complicity and assistance of America’s phone companies and banks, and the United States Congress is in the process of granting them [immunity from prosecution](#).

Even more unprecedented is the complicity of the American people in our own subjugation. We apathetically, even willingly, give up our civil liberties to war criminals and [corporatists](#), over and over again -- the same civil liberties that we proudly declare our forefathers shed their blood for, in the Revolution and two world wars. African Americans and women [suffragists](#) fought and died for the right to vote, but now the American public stands idly by while [elections are rigged](#), [voters are caged](#), [votes are thrown out](#), [votes are changed to votes for the opposing candidate by electronic voting machines](#), and [voting id card legislation](#) is pushed through, making it harder for traditionally democratic voters such as African Americans, the poor, and the elderly to vote.

Yes, at every other period of our nation's history we could indeed point to ways in which our country was going horribly wrong, even as in other ways it was going wonderfully right. With 20/20 hindsight we can say, "thank God those bad old days are over." And yet, contrary to Mr. Obama's assertion, the situation we currently find ourselves in is indeed much worse than any of the eras that have come before -- not because any one injustice alone is worse in scope than slavery, internment camps, or McCarthyism; but because of the sheer volume and variety of attacks on our Constitution and the very basis of our American way of life. Our values as a people and our civil liberties are under threat of [collapse](#) because of egregious assaults on multiple fronts.

What we need to learn from our darkest history is not that we should be grateful that the evils of our current era are not, taken individually, as bad. Rather, we must recognize that those past evils are truly horrible stains on our past, on our reputation as a country, and on our collective soul as a nation; that only through the valiant struggles of moral, ethical and righteous people against the status quo were we able to overcome those people, institutions, and attitudes

responsible for such evils, and to move our country into a better, more enlightened frame of mind.

Thomas Jefferson fought against John Adams' Alien Sedition Act and undid it when he became the third president of the United States. Abraham Lincoln abolished slavery, even though he was assassinated for it. Habeas corpus was restored after the dangers of the Civil War had passed. The robber barons were cut down several notches by the institution of income tax laws and government regulation of corporations. The labor unions were able to win for us the 8 hour work day, the five day work week, the institution of child labor laws, and many other protections that we take for granted today. Blacks and women both finally won the right to vote. The Japanese internment camps were done away with at the end of World War Two, and our country at least had the decency to express its shame and apologize. McCarthy was finally [publicly shamed](#) and his career ended; the 54th anniversary of that event just passed a couple of weeks ago on June 9. The [civil rights movement](#), [Roe v. Wade](#), [Brown vs. the Board of Education](#), all are achievements our country should be proud of. They show that, as a people, we are capable of overcoming evil and institutionalizing what is right, moral, and just -- in spite of constant opposition from evil, selfish, racist, sexist, corporatist factions in our midst.

These factions are more powerful and influential than ever before. [Christian fascists](#) make up as much as [one third of the population](#) of the United States. As many as [100 interns at the White House](#) were college trained by these cults, and their agenda is [world domination](#). They have successfully won themselves [positions of influence](#) in which to use the power and military dominance of the United States to achieve their goals. We must not allow them to succeed.

Oil cartels are [running the White House](#), and the price of gas has gone from about [\\$1.50/gallon 7 years ago](#) to [\\$4 dollars a gallon today](#). Oil companies are making [record profits](#),

while average Americans are losing [jobs because they can't afford the gas](#) to drive to work. [Food riots](#) are happening all over the third world because prices are rising sky high.

Our Vice President continues to [hold stock in Halliburton](#), one of the most egregious [war profiteering companies](#), and is making his fortune by denying our soldiers in Iraq the body armor and armored vehicles they need to survive while Halliburton pockets the profits they are paid to provide such armor and clean drinking water to our troops, instead giving them [filth and sewage to drink and bathe in](#).

Mercenaries run by private corporations like [Blackwater](#) are being [paid ten times](#) what our soldiers are to do the same jobs – and their employee pool is built from some of the worst [war criminals from around the world](#). Meanwhile, they exist in a [legal black hole](#) and cannot be held accountable for their war crimes. Our troops, in contrast, are incarcerated for following the orders of their commanding officers in places like [Abu Ghraib](#).

Separation of church and state is under constant attack from the religious right and the Bush administration. [Faith based initiatives have given religious discrimination federal sanction](#), and encouraged religious bigots everywhere. Freedom of assembly has been reduced to “[free speech zones](#)” for protesters set up in [cages](#) miles from the event the protesters are speaking against. Free speech has been muzzled, as attendees at Bush appearances have been [arrested](#) for the anti-Bush slogans on their t-shirts.

Privacy has become almost non-existent as the [Patriot Act](#) has opened our library records, our phone calls, our bank records, and our emails to constant monitoring. And [complicit in this violation are the American citizens](#) who express the attitude that ["I've kind of made being a public person just a personal policy. It's just a rule for living."](#) That's all well and good I suppose, until the [Dominionists](#) are the ones deciding what is considered “proper” behavior. Our

[medical records are being disseminated](#) amongst a wider and wider variety of information collectors, from our employers to insurance companies to the government. Already people are being [denied jobs because they are smokers](#), [denied insurance because they carry a gene for some inherited disease](#), [denied employment](#) unless they pee in a cup.

As current laws (the Patriot Act and its ilk) stand, [any American citizen can be disappeared](#) off of main street America and whisked away to [Guantanamo](#) or a [CIA prison](#) somewhere in Eastern Europe or the Middle East, to be held indefinitely without trial or counsel, and tortured, perhaps never to be heard from again. The Supreme Court only recently [ruled](#) that habeas corpus and the Constitution are still the law of the land, confirming that what Bush's regime has been doing in Guantanamo is illegal – and yet to date nothing has been done to correct or prosecute these crimes of the administration. The House of Representatives just granted [immunity](#) to the Telecom companies for their part in illegally spying on the American public (the bill is in the Senate now), after months of bitter opposition from citizens who still believe in the Constitution. And another [\\$165 billion](#) in funding for the Iraq war is being pushed through this week, without bringing the troops home.

It is not enough for a Democrat to be elected to the office of President in November, nor for an overwhelming Democratic majority to take over both houses of Congress. It has become clear that this unconscionable and unprecedented travesty has only taken place with the complicity of the American public, a public that has become [apathetic](#) about our civil rights and national ethics, and [ignorant](#) of the importance of our Constitution to protecting our way of life.

A massive education effort has to be undertaken to ensure that the next generation of Americans is better prepared than the current one to stand up to the fascist forces that have been seeking to undermine our democracy throughout its 200+ year history. They have to be taught

that these violations of our rights are NOT acceptable, moral or ethical, much less legal, and that the Constitution is not just an archaic, quaint [piece of paper](#) that has become irrelevant in a post 9/11 world; that religious superstition and mythology has no place in public policy or in the science classroom; that intellectual curiosity is **not** a crime against God; and that blind obedience, hatred, and submission are **not** family values, nor American ones.

Racism and sexism were drastically reduced in our country because of efforts to re-educate the public to better behavior. The reaction of the fascist factions to that success has been a Herculean effort over the last 30 years to remove civics classes and science education from the schools, excising independent action and critical thought from the curriculum. In their place students are being trained to accept the unacceptable. These efforts are all designed to create a generation of [pliable, mindless, docile citizens](#) that would allow those very factions to reach positions of power and implement their evil agenda. This horrible damage must be undone.

Not only must school curricula reintroduce critical thinking and place stronger emphasis on civics and government (as Air America's [Tom Hartmann](#) is constantly recommending), but public service messages and social influence campaigns must be utilized to try to undo the brainwashing the Christian right and fascist corporatists have instilled over the last 30 plus years. Parents must educate their children in the values of freedom and democracy that makes America such a very special place. Bloggers must speak their values in their posts. Every one of us must stand up for the Constitution, our democracy, and our civil liberties, and that means exercising them, loudly and often.

We have a lot of work to do, people; a lot of important, serious work, vital to civilization and the survival of our democracy. And it's about time Mr. and Mrs. John Q. Public finally stepped up to the plate and took the responsibility for doing it.