

EXILED IN PURGATORY: NOTHING HAS CHANGED

I do not need to name names. I do not need to name cities. You've read it in your newspapers and seen it on your t.v.: a police officer (or officer) kills an unarmed citizen; choked him to death; shot him multiple times; beat him to death.

It plays over and over on the news. We seen it during the civil rights movement's during the 1960's as police beat peaceful protesters. We seen it in the 1970's, the 1980's, the 1990's as Rodney King lay on the ground being beaten over and over again by police. We remember Los Angeles "CRASH" unit that wrongly convicted thousands and shot - even killed - innocent people.

Nothing has changed, we just easily forget. We act suprised when U.S. soldiers in Iraq torture Iraqi citizens - then learn they were also prison guards in the U.S. Yet, we dont make a peep when those same guards commit those same acts in our own prisons. All one needs to do is review [prisonlegalnews.org](http://prisonlegalnews.org) to see decade of prison guard abuses.

U.S. police drive armored vehicles and carry military grade weapons because the U.S. is well on its way to being a police state. We have 5% of the worlds population and 25% of its prison population. More than 2.3 million are incarcerated. More than 14 million are arrested each year. We have more incarcerated than China and Russia. Our prison population is larger than any other in history.

We are not the land of the free.

Let us be real, for one moment. Are we really

surprised that our police act like military forces? We have Republican groups who would like us to build walls on the U.S. borders, fly "drones" to watch them, put up "check points", and otherwise be the watchers and the watched.

The author Gore Vidal described the state of our nation in 2004 like this:

Now (2004) that we have ceased to be a nation under laws, but a homeland where the withered Bill of Rights, like a dead trumpet vine, clings to our pseudo-Roman columns, Homeland Security appears to be uniting our secret police into a single sort of Gestapo with dossiers on everyone to prevent us, somehow or other, from being terrorized by various implacable Second and Third World enemies. Where there is no known Al Qaeda sort of threat, we create one, as in Iraq whose leader, Saddam Hussein, had no connection with 9-11 or any other proven terrorism against the United States, making it necessary for a president to invent the lawless as well as evil (to use his Bible-based language) doctrine of preemptive war based on a sort of hunch that maybe one day some country might attack us so, meanwhile, as he and his business associates covet their oil, we go to war, leveling their cities to be rebuilt by other business associates.<sup>1</sup>

That was more than a decade ago. Yet, today, nothing has changed. And now we have the Pentagon arming police departments to "protect" us from all sorts of "evils" and to "control" our citizens.

I hear many protesters argue that white families do not have to teach their children to take precautions when encountering police — it's a black and minority issue. I don't believe that it's that simple. I'm white. I grew up in a middle class family in a town that was 95% white. My step father's best friend, Jay, was shot and killed when I was 15 yrs old. He was white. The police were white. I know personally how it works.

It is a police issue, not a race issue. Although, the police target minority communities, they apply harsh tactics and enforce petty misdemeanor offences as a pretext to searching and harass them. The problem is still a police issue. The U.S. has progressively armed its police agencies to be sub-military assets, allows them to hone their skills in minority communities, then apply their tactics on the citizenry in general.

"[H]appily, for the busy lunatics who rule over us, we are permanently the United States of Amnesia. We learn nothing because we remember nothing."<sup>2</sup>

FOOTNOTES

(1) Vidal, Gore. Imperial America. New York: Nation Books (2004), p. 9

(2) Vidal, Id at p. 7