

The New Age of Petty Bureaucratic Tyrannies

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The Bureaucracy Gone Mad

We labour today under the weight of countless tyrannies, large and small, carried out in the name of the national good by an elite class of government officials who are largely insulated from the ill effects of their actions, which inflict hardship on an overtaxed, over regulated, and under represented populace.

Consider, for example, that federal and state governments now require on penalty of a fine that individuals apply for permission before they can grow exotic orchids, host elaborate dinner parties, gather friends in one's home for Bible studies, give coffee to the homeless, let their kids manage a lemonade stand, keep chickens as pets, or [braid someone's hair](#), as ludicrous as that may seem.

A current case before the Supreme Court, [Niang v. Tomblinson](#), strikes at the heart of this bureaucratic exercise in absurdity that has pushed overregulation and overcriminalization to outrageous limits. This particular case is about whether one needs a government license in order to braid hair.

Missouri, like many states across the country, has increasingly adopted as its governing style the authoritarian notion that the government knows best and therefore must control, regulate and dictate almost everything about the citizenry's public, private and professional lives.

In Missouri, anyone wanting to braid African-style hair and charge for it must first acquire a government license, which at a minimum requires the applicant to undertake at least 1500 hours of cosmetology classes costing tens of thousands of dollars. Tennessee has [fined residents](#) nearly \$100,000 just for violating its laws against braiding hair without a government license.

It's not just hair braiding that has become grist for the overregulation mill.

Almost every aspect of American life today—especially if it is work-related—is subject to this kind of heightened scrutiny and ham-fisted control, whether you're talking about aspiring “bakers, braiders, casket makers, florists, veterinary masseuses, tour guides, taxi drivers, eyebrow threaders, teeth whiteners, [and more](#).”

For instance, whereas 70 years ago, one out of every 20 U.S. jobs required a state license, today, almost [1 in 3](#) American occupations requires a license.

The problem of overregulation has become so bad that, as one analyst notes, “getting a license to style hair in Washington [takes more instructional time](#) than becoming an emergency medical technician or a firefighter.”

This is what happens when bureaucrats run the show, and the rule of law becomes little more than a cattle prod for forcing the citizenry to march in lockstep with the government.

Overregulation is just the other side of the coin to overcriminalization, that phenomenon in which

everything is rendered illegal and everyone becomes a lawbreaker.

This is the mindset that tried to penalize a fisherman with [20 years' jail time](#) for throwing fish that were too small back into the water and subjected a 90-year-old man to [arrest](#) for violating an ordinance that prohibits feeding the homeless in public.

It's no coincidence that both of these incidents—the fishing debacle and the homeless feeding arrest—happened in Florida.

Despite its pristine beaches and balmy temperatures, Florida is no less immune to the problems plaguing the rest of the nation in terms of over criminalization, incarceration rates, bureaucracy, corruption, and police misconduct.

In fact, the Sunshine State has become a poster child for how a seemingly idyllic place can be transformed into a police state with very little effort. As such, it is representative of what is happening in every state across the nation, where a steady diet of bread and circuses has given rise to an oblivious, inactive citizenry content to be ruled over by an inflexible and highly bureaucratic regime.

Just a few years back, in fact, Florida officials authorized police raids on barber shops in minority communities, resulting in barbers being handcuffed in front of customers, and their shops searched without warrants. All of this was purportedly done in an effort to make sure that the barbers' licensing paperwork was up to snuff.

As if criminalizing fishing, charity, parenting decisions, and haircuts wasn't bad enough, you could also find yourself passing time in a Florida slammer for such inane activities as singing in a public place while wearing a swimsuit, breaking more than three dishes per day, [farting in a public place](#) after 6 pm on a Thursday, and [skateboarding](#) without a license.

This transformation of the United States from being a beacon of freedom to a locked down nation illustrates perfectly what songwriter Joni Mitchell was referring to when she wailed, "They [paved paradise](#) and put up a parking lot."

Only in our case, sold on the idea that safety, security and material comforts are preferable to freedom, we've allowed the government to pave over the Constitution in order to erect a concentration camp.

The problem with these devil's bargains, however, is that there is always a catch, always a price to pay for whatever it is we valued so highly as to barter away our most precious possessions.

We've bartered away our right to self-governance, self-defense, privacy, autonomy and that most important right of all—the right to tell the government to "leave me the hell alone."

In exchange for the promise of safe streets, safe schools, blight-free neighborhoods, lower taxes, lower crime rates, and readily accessible technology, health care, water, food and power, we've opened the door to militarized police, government surveillance, asset forfeiture, school zero tolerance policies, license plate readers, red light cameras, SWAT team raids, health care mandates, overcriminalization, overregulation and government corruption.

In the end, such bargains always turn sour.

This is what happens when the American people get duped, deceived, double-crossed, cheated, lied to, swindled and conned into believing that the government and its army of bureaucrats—the people we appointed to safeguard our freedoms—actually have our best interests at heart.

Yet when all is said and done, who is really to blame when the wool gets pulled over your eyes: you, for believing the con man, or the con man for being true to his nature?

It's time for a bracing dose of reality, America.

Wake up and take a good, hard look around you, and ask yourself if the gussied-up version of America being sold to you—crime free, worry free and devoid of responsibility—is really worth the ticket price: nothing less than your basic freedoms.

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Jungle Drum Prose/Poetry. <http://jungledrum.lingama.net/news/story-3321.html>