

H A R L A N   R I C H A R D S

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The Fascist States of America

Welcome to the new paradigm, where no one is safe from government intrusion. Forget Obamacare telling you that you are responsible for your own medical costs and must be insured to cover those costs. That's merely sound economic policy.

I'll bet you won't hear any Tea Party Fanatics speaking out against the latest Supreme Court decision which held that anyone arrested for any reason may be strip-searched. In the case before the court, a passenger in a car was arrested based on a 7 year-old warrant for a fine he had already paid off years earlier. A state employee failed to enter the payment into the database so the warrant stayed active. The man was subjected to two strip-searches and spent a week in jail based on a computer error. When he sued for the unconstitutional strip-searches, the Supreme Court held that it was reasonable to strip-search everyone arrested for any reason (the 4th amendment of the U.S. Constitution prohibits "unreasonable" search and seizure . . .). The dissent noted that people had been arrested for offenses as minor as a bell on a bicycle not being loud enough.

With this decision the courts have now held that anyone at any time can be a victim of police misconduct. But most citizens will no doubt shrug it off, believing that "it can't happen to me." Think again. Imagine taking your child to soccer practice and being pulled over for a traffic violation or an unpaid parking ticket. If you are an attractive woman, there's a chance you and your child will be arrested for no other reason than the good ol' boy who pulled you over wants to see you naked. Imagine the humiliation as 4 or 5 male deputies stand around as you strip and are told to begin the degrading contortions required in strip-searches. Ever heard the phrase "bend over and spread 'em?" You'll be able to experience what I have been subjected to countless times in the last 27 years.

A strip-search is not about finding contraband. It is about power and control, degradation and humiliation. The invasive pre-flight searches currently conducted by Homeland Security are nothing compared to what is yet to come. How many horror stories will we hear about citizens detained and stripped under various pretexts because we are no longer safe from unreasonable searches?

The demonstrations in the state capitol in the summer of 2011 over collective bargaining would have been a vastly different experience for those protestors if they would have been forced to get naked in front of jeering cops when they were arrested.

How could this happen? How could the so-called freest country in the world sanction strip-searches of innocent citizens? I know: Thomas, Scalia, Alito and Roberts. Four right-wing ideologues with lifetime appointments, put there by Republicans following a long-term agenda. None of these fanatics should ever have been allowed to sit on the Supreme Court. It was only the craven acquiescence of Democratic senators in confirmation proceedings that allowed these 4 justices to reshape American society.

When Republicans decry activist judges they only mean judges who do not share their right-wing agenda. They have no problem with judges who award the presidency to their candidate of choice (George Bush) or give corporations first amendment rights greater than what human beings have (Citizens United . . .). It's fine to let corporations buy the sort of government they want. CEOs in limos won't be getting pulled over and strip-searched. But the average citizen in a Ford or Chevy better make sure he or she is wearing clean underwear because from this day forward, every time you leave your house you face the prospect of a degrading and invasive strip-search where you will have to bend over and spread 'em.