

# Lost Liberties

## Shed a tear for our vanishing freedoms

**I**S the best of the free life behind us now?" Merle Haggard asked in a haunting 1982 country music hit song.

Nine years earlier, Haggard had scoffed at potheads and draft dodgers in a White House performance for President Richard Nixon. But, reflecting widespread loss of faith in the American dream in the 1970s, his "free life" song lamented Nixon's lies, the Vietnam debacle and the ravages of inflation.

The "free life" question helped inspire me 30 years ago to write a book titled "Lost Rights," chronicling how "Americans' liberty is perishing beneath the constant growth of government power."

When I recently updated the political damage report in a book titled "Last Rights," the late 20th century seemed practically a golden era of freedom in hindsight. Indeed, since then, federal censorship multiplied a hundredfold.

The Biden administration trampled the First Amendment by "suppressing millions of protected free speech postings by American citizens," a federal appeals court recently ruled.

The Supreme Court will hear that bellwether case next month.

In the 1990s, local bureaucrats sporadically cracked down on home schooling, preventing a smattering of parents from teaching their own kids.

During the recent COVID epidemic, teacher unions spurred unjustified school lockdowns that victimized tens of millions of children. Vast learning losses resulted that continue to plague young lives.

In the 1990s, controversies erupted when some schools gave free condoms to teenagers. Nowadays, many of the nation's largest school systems encourage children to agonize over their own gender identity from kindergarten through high school.

Ten million kids attend government schools that will assist children in changing their gender without parents' knowledge or permission.

Puberty blockers and "gender-affirming" double mastectomies are far more disruptive than prophylactic freebies.

In the 1990s, civil-liberties



**Better days? Merle Haggard (l.) with then-President Richard Nixon.**

groups challenged laws requiring drug tests for new employees.

In September 2021, President Biden decreed that 80 million-plus adults working for private companies must get Covid vaccine injections.

After millions of Americans took the jab thanks to his edict, the Supreme Court struck down his order.

But neither Biden nor his political appointees have any liability for that illicit command or the side effects of the vax.

Haggard lamented the decline of the work ethic, harkening back to a time "when a man could still work and still would."

Since the "free life" song came out, the number of handout recipients has more than doubled, and the feds are now feeding more than 100 million Americans.

In the 1990s, police used ethnic and racial profiles to target suspected drug couriers.

After the 9/11 attacks, the Patriot Act treated every American like a terrorist suspect.

The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court secretly ruled in 2006 that all Americans' telephone records were "relevant" to terrorism investigations and thus could be poached.

The National Security Agency entitled itself to snuff the privacy of anyone "searching the Web for suspicious stuff."

A federal report admitted last year that FBI warrantless searches had zapped the privacy of more than 3 million Americans,

but Congress recently extended the FISA law with no reform.

Haggard's 1982 song had a piercing refrain: "Are we rolling down hill like a snowball headed for Hell?"

He tacked on an upbeat ending: "The best of the free life is still yet to come."

But he lost hope and lamented before his death: "In 1960, when I came out of prison as an ex-convict, I had more freedom under parolee supervision than there's available to an average citizen in America right now . . . God almighty, what have we done to each other?"

Since Haggard's passing in 2016, freedom is even more of an endangered species.

The biggest sea change is the plummeting number of Americans who cherish their own liberty. Many of the protesters who vehemently denounce Donald Trump or Joe Biden are not opposed to dictators per se; they simply want different dictators.

No wonder a 2022 nationwide poll found that six times as many Americans expected their rights and freedoms to decline in the next decade, compared to the number expecting an increase.

Unfortunately, it's easier to document the loss of freedom than rouse people to defend their rights. But citizens cannot shrug off rising oppression until a neon "Here Comes Tyranny!" sign flashes in Times Square.

Liberty is invaluable regardless of how many politicians seek to destroy it or how many fools fail to cherish it.



**JAMES BOVARD**