

# Democracy in Danger



"If this were a dictatorship it would be a heck of a lot easier--just so long as I'm the dictator." **George W. Bush, Dec. 18, 2000<sup>1</sup>**

Whether said seriously or in jest, this is hardly a fitting comment from the President of the United States.

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In order for our democracy to exist the principles embodied in the Constitution and the Bill of Rights must be adhered to. These include the freedom of people to express their ideas, the right to a fair and open trial, and the system of checks and balances between the executive, judicial and legislative branches of government. Government must abide by the rule of law, and the people must know what its government is doing.

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## ***Some ways the Bush Administration has undermined the above principles:***

- 1) Actions of the government have been hidden behind a veil of **SECRECY**:
  - Bush has effectively repealed the **PRESIDENTIAL RECORDS ACT**, whereby all of a president's records--generated by public servants with public funds--were released to the public twelve years after a President left office. Bush issued an Executive Order that allows Presidents (or their children or representatives) to withhold those papers forever unless a person wanting the records succeeds in obtaining a court order. (In such a situation the ex-President would be defended by the Justice Department at taxpayer expense!) Bush also gave Vice Presidents their own executive privilege for the first time.<sup>2</sup>
  - Bush has severely restricted the **FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT**, the law that gives Americans the right to access the records of federal agencies. Attorney General Ashcroft sent a memo to all agencies saying that if they can find any sound legal reason to withhold information, he will back them up.<sup>3</sup>
  - More than six thousand public documents have been removed from the web sites of over a dozen government agencies.<sup>4</sup> The Administration has made millions of pages of information on health, safety, and environmental matters, including data on drinking-water quality, auto tire safety and nuclear power plants, off limits to ordinary citizens!<sup>5</sup>
  - Vice President Cheney continues to refuse to release the names of the energy industry executives with whom he met when he crafted the country's energy policy.<sup>6</sup>
  - The Administration has repeatedly resisted the establishment of **INVESTIGATIVE COMMISSIONS** and, if they are created anyway, withholds vital information. An example is the 9/11 Commission, which came about only because of the persistence of four 9/11 widows. Bush stonewalled the Commission's information requests for months.<sup>7</sup> (The President himself would testify to that Commission only after it was agreed that he would testify in private, not under oath, and that the Commission could not call any further White House officials to testify ever.)
  - Journalists who ask probing questions of the President in his infrequent press conferences are rarely if ever called on.

2) In order for democracy to function, it is vital that citizens and legislators be given truthful information on which to base decisions. This Administration gives out misleading information and outright **FALSEHOODS** in order to get what it wants.

These range from **CENSORING** and tinkering with scientific reports that do not support its policies, e.g., the part of the Environmental Protection Agency's report which said that the air quality at Ground Zero might well pose a hazard,<sup>8</sup> to lies about Iraq's WMD and supposed links between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda.

3) **DISSENT** is vital to any democracy. The Administration uses smear tactics and acts of retaliation to discredit and stifle dissent. Those who criticize its policies are accused of being unpatriotic or somehow endangering our national security.

The F.B.I. collects information about protesters and has instructed local police to regard protesters as potential terrorists.<sup>9</sup> Protesters are not allowed to exercise their Constitutionally guaranteed right to free speech in areas near where the President appears.

4) The Administration promotes the passage of laws that enable it to **SPY** on us and have access to our medical, financial and other personal records, without having to prove to a judge that such searches and surveillance are warranted due to probable criminality.<sup>10</sup> Did you know that you will be assigned a "threat index score" based on what magazines you read and other personal information?<sup>11</sup>

5) The right to a **FAIR TRIAL** is an inherent part of our democracy. Over one thousand non-American citizens have been imprisoned without due process. And President Bush has maintained that he can imprison any American citizen indefinitely, without charges, by declaring him an "enemy combatant."<sup>12</sup>

6) The President has created **LAW-FREE** zones, such as Guantanamo, where he says the laws of our land do not apply.<sup>13</sup>

7) As policies applying to detainees and prisoners of war were devised, top Administration lawyers advised that in conducting the war on terror the President is essentially **ABOVE THE LAW!**<sup>14</sup> Both lawyers were nominated by Bush for positions in the federal judiciary.<sup>15</sup>

8) Needless to say, our government's system of **CHECKS AND BALANCES** between the executive, judicial and legislative branches has been seriously upset under Bush, as he has succeeded in accruing more and more power in the Presidency. **IT IS NOT AN EXAGGERATION TO SAY THAT THE COUNTRY IS BEING LED IN THE DIRECTION OF AN ELECTED OR SELECTED DICTATORSHIP IN WAYS THAT IT NEVER HAS BEFORE.**

**If you care about freedom and the wonderful form of democratic government that our Founding Fathers gave us--vote for Bush's opponent, John Kerry.**

For more information about threats to civil liberties visit [www.bordc.org](http://www.bordc.org).

## Citizens to Save Our Democracy

For a downloadable copy of this flyer, go to [www.savedemocracy.com](http://www.savedemocracy.com).

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2. [http://www.pbs.org/now/printable/transcript\\_secretgov\\_print.html](http://www.pbs.org/now/printable/transcript_secretgov_print.html). 3. <http://www.usdoj.gov/oip/foiapost/2001foiapost19.htm>. 4. In "Bush Administration Secrecy Imperils Environment and Public Health," [http://www.bushgreenwatch.org/mt\\_archives/000142.php](http://www.bushgreenwatch.org/mt_archives/000142.php). 5. USNews.com, 12/12/03. 6. New York Times, "Federal Judge Orders Release of Documents of White House Task Force on Energy," April, 12, 2004. 7. New York Times, "Partial Progress for the 9/11 Inquiry," (editorial), Feb. 6, 2004. 8. Cronkite, Walter, "Secrets and Lies Becoming Commonplace," <http://www.truthout.org/cgi-bin/artman/exec/view.cgi/8/4087>. 9. New York Times, "FBI Scrutinizes Antiwar Rallies," Nov. 23, 2003, p. 1. 10. New York Times, "FBI's Reach into Records is Set to Grow," Nov. 12, 2003. 11. Rosen, Jeffrey, "How to Protect America and Your Rights" (op-ed), New York Times, Feb. 6, 2004. 12. New York Times, "The Enemy Combatant Sham" (editorial), Nov. 19, 2003. 13. New York Times, "The Court and Guantanamo" (editorial), April, 2004. 14. Washington Post, "Memo Offered Justification for Use of Torture," June 8, 2004; New York Times, "Lawyer Decided Ban on Torture Didn't Bind Bush," June 8, 2004. 15. Marjorie Cohn, <http://www.truthout.org/cgi-bin/artman/exec/view.cgi/10/4899>.