

Frightened Out of All Proportion

I always thought that totalitarianism would come to the USA via war and the central government's ostensible efforts to fend off a foreign foe by regimenting the people. I failed to foresee that the country would arrive at this horrifying destination by a different road, namely, state and local government overreactions to a perceived public-health crisis.

Frightened out of all proportion to the actual risk, the people demanded that the governments "do something," and the political opportunists at the state and local levels were ever so happy to respond to that demand, whether they had any real understanding of the threat or not.

Ratchet effects guarantee that much if not all of the elements of public-health totalitarianism will persist, regardless of what happens in regard to the disease and its treatment and the development of an effective vaccine. Governors and mayors, having seen how easily they may seize great powers, will fight to retain those powers and, given the slightest pretext, to expand them, and large segments of the frightened public will capitulate or even beg to be controlled in the minutest detail.