

# punishing the innocent

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 [blog.ayjay.org/punishing-the-innocent/](http://blog.ayjay.org/punishing-the-innocent/)

Re: Yascha Mounk's article on leftist mobs punishing the innocent: For the ones doing the mobbing, ruining the lives of innocent people is not a bug in their program, it's an essential feature. There can be no reign of terror when only the guilty are punished.

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* is the great text for understanding this phenomenon. Punishment of the guilty is, from the perspective of social control, an implicit confession of failure. A social order that has proper control over its members will not *have* to punish them, because they will be obedient. And you make people obedient by instilling discipline: you carefully and thoroughly train them to say what you want them to say and do what you want them to do, and to refrain from saying or doing what you think inappropriate.

However, the disciplinary systems that do this work — schools, for instance — are scarcely less efficient than punishment. What must be created is an environment in which people discipline *themselves*. But they will only do this when they fear exposure (and subsequent punishment) so much that they will go to extreme lengths to *perform their obedience*. And people will only exert the energy to enact this ongoing self-policing if they believe that anything they do or say can be seen. They need to believe that they are living in a Panopticon.

This is where social media come in. If everyone has a smartphone and access to social media accounts, then anything you do or say might be recorded and published. Anything those to whom you are *related* do or say may be recorded and published, to shame you before the entire world. From the perspective of those who lust for social control, this is an ideal situation, because if they make you sufficiently fearful of exposure then you will not only police yourself, you will police your friends and family. And if you can be exposed and punished not only for what you intentionally do and say, but for what you inadvertently do and say, and for what people you know do and say, then you will become *obsessively vigilant* in your policing.

That is why, for those who want to effect social change by exposure and shaming, punishing the innocent is a feature of their system, not a bug. It increases fear, which increases discipline, not only of oneself but of others. And every employer who fires an employee because they're afraid of a social-media mob draws us closer to a fully Panoptic society, a social tyranny with an efficiency beyond the dreams of totalitarian societies of the past.