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**The Last Gasp of American Democracy**

by Chris Hedges, Truthdig—Op-Ed

This is our last gasp as a democracy. The state’s wholesale intrusion into our lives and obliteration of privacy are now facts. And the challenge to us—one of the final ones, I suspect—is to rise up in outrage and halt this seizure of our rights to liberty and free expression. If we do not do so we will see ourselves become a nation of captives.

The public debates about the government’s measures to prevent terrorism, the character assassination of Edward Snowden and his supporters, the assurances by the powerful that no one is abusing the massive collection and storage of our electronic communications miss the point. Any state that has the capacity to monitor all its citizenry, any state that has the ability to snuff out factual public debate through control of information, any state that has the tools to instantly shut down all dissent is totalitarian. Our corporate state may not use this power today. But it will use it if it feels threatened by a population made restive by its corruption, ineptitude and mounting repression. The moment a popular movement arises—and one will arise—that truly confronts our corporate masters, our venal system of total surveillance will be thrust into overdrive.

The most radical evil, as Hannah Arendt pointed out, is the political system that effectively crushes its marginalized and harassed opponents and, through fear and the obliteration of privacy, incapacitates everyone else. Our system of mass surveillance is the machine by which this radical evil will be activated. If we do not immediately dismantle the security and surveillance apparatus, there will be no investigative journalism or judicial oversight to address abuse of power. There will be no organized dissent. There will be no independent thought. Criticisms, however tepid, will be treated as acts of subversion. And the security apparatus will blanket the body politic like black mold until even the banal and ridiculous become concerns of national security.

I saw evil of this kind as a reporter in the Stasi state of East Germany. I was followed by men, invariably with crew cuts and wearing leather jackets, whom I presumed to be agents of the Stasi—the Ministry for State Security, which the ruling Communist Party described as the “shield and sword” of the nation. People I interviewed were visited by Stasi agents soon after I left their homes. My phone was bugged. Some of those I worked with were pressured to become informants. Fear hung like icicles over every conversation.

The Stasi did not set up massive death camps and gulags. It did not have to. The Stasi, with a network of as many as 2 million informants in a country of 17 million, was everywhere. There were 102,000 secret police officers employed full time to monitor the population—one for every 166 East Germans. The Nazis broke bones; the Stasi broke souls. The East German government pioneered the psychological deconstruction that torturers and interrogators in America’s black sites, and within our prison system, have honed to a gruesome perfection.

The goal of wholesale surveillance, as Arendt wrote in “The Origins of Totalitarianism,” is not, in the end, to discover crimes, “but to be on hand when the government decides to arrest a certain category of the population.” And because Americans’ emails, phone conversations, Web searches and geographical movements are recorded and stored in perpetuity in government databases, there will be more than enough “evidence” to seize us should the state deem it necessary. This information waits like a deadly virus inside government vaults to be turned against us. It does not matter how trivial or innocent that information is. In totalitarian states, justice, like truth, is irrelevant.

The object of efficient totalitarian states, as George Orwell understood, is to create a climate in which people do not think of rebelling, a climate in which government killing and torture are used against only a handful of unmanageable renegades. The totalitarian state achieves this control, Arendt wrote, by systematically crushing human spontaneity, and by extension human freedom. It ceaselessly peddles fear to keep a population traumatized and immobilized. It turns the courts, along with legislative bodies, into mechanisms to legalize the crimes of state.

The corporate state, in our case, has used the law to quietly abolish the Fourth and Fifth amendments of the Constitution, which were established to protect us from unwarranted intrusion by the government into our private lives. The loss of judicial and political representation and protection, part of the corporate coup d’état, means that we have no voice and no legal protection from the abuses of power. The recent ruling supporting the National Security Agency’s spying, handed down by U.S. District Judge William H. Pauley III, is part of a very long and shameful list of judicial decisions that have repeatedly sacrificed our most cherished constitutional rights on the altar of national security since the attacks of 9/11. The courts and legislative bodies of the corporate state now routinely invert our most basic rights to justify corporate pillage and repression. They declare that massive and secret campaign donations—a form of legalized bribery—are protected speech under the First Amendment. They define corporate lobbying—under which corporations lavish funds on elected officials and write our legislation—as the people’s right to petition the government. And we can, according to new laws and legislation, be tortured or assassinated or locked up indefinitely by the military, be denied due process and be spied upon without warrants. Obsequious courtiers posing as journalists dutifully sanctify state power and amplify its falsehoods—MSNBC does this as slavishly as Fox News—while also filling our heads with the inanity of celebrity gossip and trivia. Our culture wars, which allow politicians and pundits to hyperventilate over nonsubstantive issues, mask a political system that has ceased to function. History, art, philosophy, intellectual inquiry, our past social and individual struggles for justice, the very world of ideas and culture, along with an understanding of what it means to live and participate in a functioning democracy, are thrust into black holes of forgetfulness.

The political philosopher Sheldon Wolin, in his essential book “Democracy Incorporated,” calls our system of corporate governance “inverted totalitarianism,” which represents “the political coming of age of corporate power and the political demobilization of the citizenry.” It differs from classical forms of totalitarianism, which revolve around a demagogue or charismatic leader; it finds its expression in the anonymity of the corporate state. The corporate forces behind inverted totalitarianism do not, as classical totalitarian movements do, replace decaying structures with new structures. They instead purport to honor electoral politics, freedom of expression and the press, the right to privacy and the guarantees of law. But they so corrupt and manipulate electoral politics, the courts, the press and the essential levers of power as to make genuine democratic participation by the masses impossible. The U.S. Constitution has not been rewritten, but steadily emasculated through radical judicial and legislative interpretation. We have been left with a fictitious shell of democracy and a totalitarian core. And the anchor of this corporate totalitarianism is the unchecked power of our systems of internal security.

Our corporate totalitarian rulers deceive themselves as often as they deceive the public. Politics, for them, is little more than public relations. Lies are told not to achieve any discernable goal of public policy, but to protect the image of the state and its rulers. These lies have become a grotesque form of patriotism. The state’s ability through comprehensive surveillance to prevent outside inquiry into the exercise of power engenders a terrifying intellectual and moral sclerosis within the ruling elite. Absurd notions such as implanting “democracy” in Baghdad by force in order to spread it across the region or the idea that we can terrorize radical Islam across the Middle East into submission are no longer checked by reality, experience or factually based debate. Data and facts that do not fit into the whimsical theories of our political elites, generals and intelligence chiefs are ignored and hidden from public view. The ability of the citizenry to take self-corrective measures is effectively stymied. And in the end, as in all totalitarian systems, the citizens become the victims of government folly, monstrous lies, rampant corruption and state terror.

The Romanian poet Paul Celan captured the slow ingestion of an ideological poison—in his case fascism—in his poem “Death Fugue”:

Black milk of dawn we drink it at dusk

we drink it at noon and at daybreak

we drink it at night we drink it and drink it

we are digging a grave in the air there’s room for us all

We, like those in all emergent totalitarian states, have been mentally damaged by a carefully orchestrated historical amnesia, a state-induced stupidity. We increasingly do not remember what it means to be free. And because we do not remember, we do not react with appropriate ferocity when it is revealed that our freedom has been taken from us. The structures of the corporate state must be torn down. Its security apparatus must be destroyed. And those who defend corporate totalitarianism, including the leaders of the two major political parties, fatuous academics, pundits and a bankrupt press, must be driven from the temples of power. Mass street protests and prolonged civil disobedience are our only hope. A failure to rise up—which is what the corporate state is counting upon—will see us enslaved.

**Life in the Electronic Concentration Camp: The Many Ways That You’re Being Tracked and Controlled**

by John W Whitehead, The Rutherford Institute—News Analysis

“[A security camera] doesn’t respond to complaint, threats, or insults. Instead, it just watches you in a forbidding manner. Today, the surveillance state is so deeply enmeshed in our data devices that we don’t even scream back because technology companies have convinced us that we need to be connected to them to be happy.”

—Pratap Chatterjee, journalist

What is most striking about the American police state is not the mega-corporations running amok in the halls of Congress, the militarized police crashing through doors and shooting unarmed citizens, or the invasive surveillance regime which has come to dominate every aspect of our lives. No, what has been most disconcerting about the emergence of the American police state is the extent to which the citizenry appears content to passively wait for someone else to solve our nation’s many problems. Unless Americans are prepared to engage in militant nonviolent resistance in the spirit of Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi, true reform, if any, will be a long time coming.

Yet as I detail in my book A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State, if we don’t act soon, all that is in need of fixing will soon be unfixable, especially as it relates to the police state that becomes more entrenched with each passing day. By “police state,” I am referring to more than a society overrun by the long arm of the police. I am referring to a society in which all aspects of a person’s life are policed by government agents, one in which all citizens are suspects, their activities monitored and regulated, their movements tracked, their communications spied upon, and their lives, liberties and pursuit of happiness dependent on the government’s say-so.

That said, how can anyone be expected to “fix” what is broken unless they first understand the lengths to which the government with its arsenal of technology is going in order to accustom the American people to life in a police state and why being spied on by government agents, both state and federal, as well as their partners in the corporate world, is a problem, even if you’ve done nothing wrong.

Indeed, as the trend towards overcriminalization makes clear, it won’t be long before the average law-abiding American is breaking laws she didn’t even know existed during the course of a routine day. The point, of course, is that while you may be oblivious to your so-called law-breaking—whether it was collecting rainwater to water your lawn, lighting a cigarette in the privacy of your home, or gathering with friends in your backyard for a Sunday evening Bible study—the government will know each and every transgression and use them against you.

As noted by the Brookings Institution, “For the first time ever, it will become technologically and financially feasible for authoritarian governments to record nearly everything that is said or done within their borders — every phone conversation, electronic message, social media interaction, the movements of nearly every person and vehicle, and video from every street corner.”

As the following will show, the electronic concentration camp, as I have dubbed the surveillance state, is perhaps the most insidious of the police state’s many tentacles, impacting almost every aspect of our lives and making it that much easier for the government to encroach on our most vital freedoms, ranging from free speech, assembly and the press to due process, privacy, and property, by eavesdropping on our communications, tracking our movements and spying on our activities.

**Tracking you based on your consumer activities:** Fusion centers, federal-state law enforcement partnerships which attempt to aggregate a variety of data on so-called “suspicious persons,” have actually collected reports on people buying pallets of bottled water, photographing government buildings, and applying for a pilot’s license as “suspicious activity.” Retailers are getting in on the surveillance game as well. Large corporations such as Target have been tracking and assessing the behavior of their customers, particularly their purchasing patterns, for years. In 2015, mega-food corporations will be rolling out high-tech shelving outfitted with cameras in order to track the shopping behavior of customers, as well as information like the age and sex of shoppers.

**Tracking you based on your public activities:** Sensing a booming industry, private corporations are jumping on the surveillance state bandwagon, negotiating lucrative contracts with police agencies throughout the country in order to create a web of surveillance that encompasses all major urban centers. Companies such as NICE and Bright Planet are selling equipment and services to police departments with the promise of monitoring large groups of people seamlessly, as in the case of protests and rallies. They are also engaging in extensive online surveillance, looking for any hints of “large public events, social unrest, gang communications, and criminally predicated individuals.” Defense contractors are attempting to take a bite out of this lucrative market as well. Raytheon has recently developed a software package known as Riot, which promises to predict the future behavior of an individual based upon his social media posts.

**Tracking you based on your phone activities:** The CIA has been paying AT&T over $10 million per year in order to gain access to data on Americans’ phone calls abroad. This is in addition to telecommunications employees being embedded in government facilities to assist with quick analysis of call records and respond to government requests for customer location data. They receive hundreds of thousands of such requests per year.

**Tracking you based on your computer activities:** Federal agents now employ a number of hacking methods in order to gain access to your computer activities and “see” whatever you’re seeing on your monitor. Malicious hacking software can be installed via a number of inconspicuous methods, including USB, or via an email attachment or software update. It can then be used to search through files stored on a hard drive, log keystrokes, or take real time screenshots of whatever a person is looking at on their computer, whether personal files, web pages, or email messages. It can also be used to remotely activate cameras and microphones, offering another means of glimpsing into the personal business of a target.

**Tracking you based on your behavior:** Thanks to a torrent of federal grants, police departments across the country are able to fund outrageous new surveillance systems that turn the most basic human behaviors into suspicious situations to be studied and analyzed. Police in California, Massachusetts, and New York have all received federal funds to create systems like that operated by the New York Police Department, which “links 3,000 surveillance cameras with license plate readers, radiation sensors, criminal databases and terror suspect lists.” Police all across the country are also now engaging in big data mining operations, often with the help of private companies, in order to develop city-wide nets of surveillance. For example, police in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, now work with IBM in order to “integrate new data and analytics tools into everyday crime fighting.”

**Tracking you based on your face:** Facial recognition software promises to create a society in which every individual who steps out into public is tracked and recorded as they go about their daily business. The goal is for government agents to be able to scan a crowd of people and instantaneously identify all of the individuals present. Facial recognition programs are being rolled out in states all across the country (only twelve states do not use facial recognition software). For example, in Ohio, 30,000 police officers and court employees are able to access the driver’s license images of people in the state, without any form of oversight to track their views or why they’re accessing them. The FBI is developing a $1 billion program, Next Generation Identification, which involves creating a massive database of mugshots for police all across the country.

**Tracking you based on your car:** License plate readers, which can identify the owner of any car that comes within its sights, are growing in popularity among police agencies. Affixed to overpasses or cop cars, these devices give police a clear idea of where your car was at a specific date and time, whether the doctor’s office, the bar, the mosque, or at a political rally. State police in Virginia used license plate readers to record every single vehicle that arrived to President Barack Obama’s inauguration in 2009 from Virginia. They also recorded the license plates of attendees at rallies prior to the election, including for then-candidate Obama and Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin. This data collection came at the request of the U.S. Secret Service. Incredibly, Virginia police stored data on some 8 million license plates, some for up to three years.

**Tracking you based on your social media activities:** The obsession with social media as a form of surveillance will have some frightening consequences in coming years. As Helen A.S. Popkin, writing for NBC News, has astutely observed, “We may very well face a future where algorithms bust people en masse for referencing illegal ‘Game of Thrones’ downloads, or run sweeps for insurance companies seeking non-smokers confessing to lapsing back into the habit. Instead of that one guy getting busted for a lame joke misinterpreted as a real threat, the new software has the potential to roll, Terminator-style, targeting every social media user with a shameful confession or questionable sense of humor.”

**Tracking you based on your metadata:** Metadata is an incredibly invasive set of data to have on a person. Indeed, with access to one’s metadata, one can “identify people’s friends and associates, detect where they were at a certain time, acquire clues to religious or political affiliations, and pick up sensitive information like regular calls to a psychiatrist’s office, late-night messages to an extramarital partner or exchanges with a fellow plotter.” The National Security Agency (NSA) has been particularly interested in metadata, compiling information on Americans’ social connections “that can identify their associates, their locations at certain times, their traveling companions and other personal information.” Mainway, the main NSA tool used to connect the dots on American social connections, collected 700 million phone records per day in 2011. That number increased by 1.1 billion in August 2011. The NSA is now working on creating “a metadata repository capable of taking in 20 billion ‘record events’ daily and making them available to N.S.A. analysts within 60 minutes.”

**Tracking you from the skies:** Nothing, and I mean nothing, will escape government eyes, especially when drones take to the skies in 2015. These gadgets, ranging from the colossal to the miniature, will have the capability of seeing through the walls of your home and tracking your every movement.

To put it bluntly, we are living in an electronic concentration camp. Through a series of imperceptible steps, we have willingly allowed ourselves to become enmeshed in a system that knows the most intimate details of our lives, analyzes them, and treats us accordingly. Whether via fear of terrorism, narcissistic pleasure, or lazy materialism, we have slowly handed over our information to all sorts of entities, corporate and governmental, public and private, who are now using that information to cow and control us for their profit. As George Orwell warned, “You had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized.”

Thus, we have arrived in Orwell’s world. The question now is: will we take a stand and fight to remain free or will we go gently into the concentration camp?

**Drone-War Doublethink**

by Gene Healy

“Political language,” George Orwell wrote in 1946, “is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable.” When government action can only be defended by arguments “too brutal for most people to face,” governments reliably brutalize the language, resorting to “euphemism, question-begging and sheer cloudy vagueness.”

The Bush administration introduced any number of such fuzzwords to the political lexicon: “regime change,” “enhanced interrogation,” and “self-injurious behavior incidents” (Pentagon jargon for suicide attempts by Gitmo prisoners—sorry, “enemy combatants.”)

And who can forget the Obama national security team’s insistence last year that pounding Libya with Tomahawk missiles and Predator dronestrikes wasn’t “war,” but rather, “kinetic military action?” (As opposed to “static” action?)

The Obama team has lately added a new term to the doublespeak lexicon, “the disposition matrix.” This soporific word-cloud replaces the admirably frank “kill or capture list.”

Killing or capturing terrorists with the means and the intent to kill Americans is eminently defensible, but a *Washington Post* investigative report published last week raises questions about whether bureaucratic “mission creep” has cut the program loose from its original justification. “Obama has institutionalized the highly classified practice of targeted killing,” the *Post’s* Greg Miller writes, “transforming ad-hoc elements into a counterterrorism infrastructure capable of sustaining a seemingly permanent war.” He reports “broad consensus” among Obama terror-warriors that “such operations are likely to be extended at least another decade.”

“Living Under Drones,” a recent report from researchers at Stanford and New York University law schools notes that, as the death toll from drone warfare over Pakistan approaches 3,000, “the number of ‘high-level’ targets killed as a percentage of total casualties is extremely low—estimated at just 2 percent.”

That assessment has been echoed elsewhere by former top national security officials. Dennis Blair, Obama’s director of national intelligence until he was fired in 2010, has commented that during his tenure, the emphasis on drone strikes “reminded me of body counts in Vietnam.” Another former Obama counterterror official told Esquire: “It’s not at all clear that we’d be sending our people into Yemen to capture the people we’re targeting. But it’s not at all clear that we’d be targeting them if the technology wasn’t so advanced. What’s happening is that we’re using the technology to target people we never would have bothered to capture.”

That Brave New War has taken on a surreal aspect, as the *Los Angeles Times* detailed in 2010 with a visit to Creech Air Force Base in Nevada, from which American pilots are conducting a remote war just a short drive from Las Vegas—and half a world away from their targets. From a command seat they’ve dubbed the “Naugahyde Barcalounger,” American drone warriors guide Hellfire-armed Reaper UAVs to their targets. “Part of the job is to try to identify body parts,” one officer explained.

Meanwhile, as the Stanford/NYU report notes, “collateral damage” estimates from drone warfare in Pakistan range as high as 881 civilians and 176 children, and “evidence suggests that U.S. strikes have facilitated recruitment” to terrorist groups. You have to wonder if this is a smart long-term policy in an unstable country with nuclear weapons.

*Time* magazine’s Joe Klein provoked outrage recently when he defended our drone program by insisting that the “bottom line” is “whose 4-year-old gets killed? What we’re doing is limiting the possibility that 4-year-olds here will get killed by indiscriminate acts of terror.” That language is stark, but unlike terms such as “collateral damage” and “disposition matrix,” it’s clarifying. And there’s good reason to doubt Klein’s assessment.

In the debate last week, Mitt Romney insisted that we “can’t kill our way out of this problem.” He was right; unfortunately, both he and his opponent appear determined to keep trying.

Healy, Gene. “Drone-War Doublethink.” *Reason.com.* 30 Oct. 2012. Web. 19 Apr. 2014.

**The Eternal Value of Privacy**

by Bruce Schneier

The most common retort against privacy advocates—by those in favor of ID checks, cameras, databases, data mining and other wholesale surveillance measures—is this line: “If you aren’t doing anything wrong, what do you have to hide?”

Some clever answers: “If I’m not doing anything wrong, then you have no cause to watch me.” “Because the government gets to define what’s wrong, and they keep changing the definition.” “Because you might do something wrong with my information.” My problem with quips like these—as right as they are—is that they accept the premise that privacy is about hiding a wrong. It’s not. Privacy is an inherent human right, and a requirement for maintaining the human condition with dignity and respect.

Two proverbs say it best: *Quis custodiet custodes ipsos?* (“Who watches the watchers?”) and “Absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

Cardinal Richelieu understood the value of surveillance when he famously said, “If one would give me six lines written by the hand of the most honest man, I would find something in them to have him hanged.” Watch someone long enough, and you’ll find something to arrest—or just blackmail—with. Privacy is important because without it, surveillance information will be abused: to peep, to sell to marketers and to spy on political enemies—whoever they happen to be at the time.

Privacy protects us from abuses by those in power, even if we’re doing nothing wrong at the time of surveillance.

We do nothing wrong when we make love or go to the bathroom. We are not deliberately hiding anything when we seek out private places for reflection or conversation. We keep private journals, sing in the privacy of the shower, and write letters to secret lovers and then burn them. Privacy is a basic human need.

A future in which privacy would face constant assault was so alien to the framers of the Constitution that it never occurred to them to call out privacy as an explicit right. Privacy was inherent to the nobility of their being and their cause. *Of course* being watched in your own home was unreasonable. Watching at all was an act so unseemly as to be inconceivable among gentlemen in their day. You watched convicted criminals, not free citizens. You ruled your own home. It’s intrinsic to the concept of liberty.

For if we are observed in all matters, we are constantly under threat of correction, judgment, criticism, even plagiarism of our own uniqueness. We become children, fettered under watchful eyes, constantly fearful that—either now or in the uncertain future—patterns we leave behind will be brought back to implicate us, by whatever authority has now become focused upon our once-private and innocent acts. We lose our individuality, because everything we do is observable and recordable.

How many of us have paused during conversation in the past four-and-a-half years, suddenly aware that we might be eavesdropped on? Probably it was a phone conversation, although maybe it was an e-mail or instant-message exchange or a conversation in a public place. Maybe the topic was terrorism, or politics, or Islam. We stop suddenly, momentarily afraid that our words might be taken out of context, then we laugh at our paranoia and go on. But our demeanor has changed, and our words are subtly altered.

This is the loss of freedom we face when our privacy is taken from us. This is life in former East Germany, or life in Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. And it’s our future as we allow an ever-intrusive eye into our personal, private lives.

Too many wrongly characterize the debate as “security versus privacy.” The real choice is liberty versus control. Tyranny, whether it arises under threat of foreign physical attack or under constant domestic authoritative scrutiny, is still tyranny. Liberty requires security without intrusion, security plus privacy. Widespread police surveillance is the very definition of a police state. And that’s why we should champion privacy even when we have nothing to hide.

Schneier, Bruce. “The Eternal Value of Privacy.” *Schneier on Security.* Wired News. 18 May 2006. Web. 19 Apr. 2014.

**George Orwell, Doublethink, and Today’s Politicians**

by Walter Korschek

I am a big fan of George Orwell’s classic novel *1984*. I think he was a great writer and a better prognosticator since many of the predictions he made on *1984* of how democracies would die are actually unfolding today, throughout the world and throughout America. One of the concepts he talks about is “doublethink,” which he defines as the ability “to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them.” If a leader can establish doublethink in the minds of his followers, then the credibility of that leader will never be questioned. Since whatever he says is right, doublethink suppresses free thought and free will.

I was thinking of how proud Orwell would be of our current day political class. Many examples abound of how our politicians and the government they run can implement two contradictory programs and never once stop to consider the incongruity and disconnect between the two programs. Consider:

—One of the leading drivers of escalating health care costs in this country is the poor eating habits and exercise habits of many Americans, leaving them overweight and susceptible to many diseases. In fact, one of the main activities of Michele Obama since coming to Washington has been to work hard to reduce the obesity problem plaguing many, many kids in this country. One of the efforts that Ms. Obama—along with other parts of the government, including the Agriculture Department—is pushing is to reduce the amount of saturated fat that Americans eat, encouraging us to move towards low-fat milk and other low-fat dairy products.

This all sounds good. However, consider an organization called Dairy Management, as described in a November 8, 2010 *New York Times* article. Dairy Management is financed by a government-mandated fee on the dairy industry and receives millions of dollars a year directly from the budget of the Agricultural Department. The Agriculture Department sits on Dairy Management’s board, approves its marketing campaigns, and interfaces with Congress on its work. But Dairy Management recently worked with Domino’s Pizza to develop a new line of pizza offerings. These new pies had 40% more cheese, and Dairy Management helped develop and pay for the associated $12 million marketing campaign.

But wait. Each slice of these new pizzas contains as much as two-thirds of a person’s daily recommended amount of saturated fat, which has been linked to heart disease and other diseases. Thus our government is telling people to eat better and to reduce the amount of unsaturated fat in their diets while they are funding support for private companies to put more saturated fat back into Americans’ diets. The particularly ironic part of this Domino’s example is that I would assume that kids are high pizza eaters, the same type of Americans whom Michele Obama is trying to get healthy. Doublethink in the Agriculture Department—eat healthier but don’t eat healthier.

—There has been a lot of hype lately regarding all electric cars, some of which will be available shortly for consumer use: for example, General Motors’ Volt. The hope behind electric cars is that they will not spew out pollutants like the gasoline internal combustion engine, they will help improve the environment, and they will help wean us from dependency on foreign energy sources. Our political class is so excited about the future of electric cars that, according to an article in the October 9, 2010 issue of *The Economist*, you can get up to a $7,500 subsidy rebate from the U.S. government if you purchase one.

Sounds like a great deal. Get taxpayer money to buy a new car while helping the environment. But are these vehicles really helping the environment? While the car itself is less polluting, the energy creation needed to generate the electricity to power these cars will increase. In the United States, we get a lot of our electrical power from coal electric plants, which are not the cleanest producers of electricity from an environmental perspective. Thus, we need to find a way to reduce the amount of coal-created electricity if the potential of electric cars is to be fulfilled.

But according to a *Washington Post* article from May 14, 2007, the government’s National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, another Agriculture Department effort, plans to spend $35 billion over the next decade to help build conventional coal electricity plants. More doublethink in the Agriculture Department—the government hands out taxpayer funds for the purchase of electric cars to clean up the environment but uses other taxpayer money to dirty up the environment with coal electricity plants to power the cleaner electric cars.

—Over the past sixty years, the United States has probably spent hundreds of billions of dollars supporting the security and prosperity of South Korea. We fought on South Korea’s side, defending them from North Korean and Chinese troops in the Korean war; we provided aid for the recovery and have stationed tens of thousands of troops in the country since the end of that war. As a result, the South Korean economy has grown into one of the strongest in the world. Besides providing a security cover for their economy to blossom, we are also an important trading partner and market for their companies.

Recently, our State Department has been working to generate support for economic sanctions against the Iranian government in retaliation for the Iranians supposedly developing a nuclear weapon technology. The State Department strategy is to make life so uncomfortable for the Iranian people and government that they will become less likely to develop a nuclear bomb capability.

So what do the South Korean do relative to Iran? According to an article in the October 9, 2010 issue of *The Economist* magazine, South Korea still wants to protect its annual $10 billion trade volumes with Iran, so it recently signed a deal with Iran so that Korean and Iranian business partners could settle trade accounts via a special facility established in two Korean banks and in Korean currencies. State Department doublethink: South Korea is our ally even though they go out of their way to bypass the very sanctions the State Department wants to impose on Iran.

—For years now, the Federal government has subsidized American corn farmers, recently to the tune of $7 billion a year, enticing them to grow more corn, which is eventually turned into ethanol. The ethanol is then added to our national gasoline supply to theoretically extend our gasoline supplies, to reduce our dependency on foreign oil, and to clean up the environment by burning more ethanol and less gasoline.

But the inconvenient truth is that the benefits never really materialized, and additional problems were created. Since ethanol contains significantly less energy potential than gasoline, more gasoline has to be burned to make up for the energy loss when burning ethanol. According to Robert Bryce of the National Review Online, studies have shown that ethanol use as a motor vehicle fuel increases nitrogen oxides and other key pollutants by 7% over gasoline and also corrodes the fuel lines of older cars and other engines.

According to Cornell Professor David Pimentel, as covered in the energy policy section of “Love My Country, Loathe My Government,” corn ethanol is a terrible fuel. It diverts corn crops from the food chain to the energy chain, increasing food costs; it takes a terrible toll on the soil environment, and it is a net user of energy: it uses more energy to produce than it creates.

Sounds horrible: bad fuel economy, air pollution, soil pollution, bad economics. So what is the political class about to do? According to Mr. Bryce, President Obama recently announced that his administration was going to allow the blend of gasoline to ethanol (currently 90/10) to rise to 85/15. He did this as a favor to the corn industry, which has more ethanol distillery capacity than it needs. Energy Department doublethink: using ethanol in a 90/10 mixture is a bad thing to do, but moving to an 85/15 mixture is a good thing.

—According to a November 8, 2010 Associated Press report, our war effort in Afghanistan faces a dire shortage of 900 trainers and not enough Afghan officers in the race to build up a viable native Afghan fighting force, which would allow NATO and the United States to get its troops out of the country as soon as possible. According to the recent report, the head of the training operation in the country said that if these trainers are not brought on board soon, the July, 2011 pulldown date of American forces is not going to happen.

Training challenges include a high illiteracy rate among Army and police forces (over 90%), high corruption among the officer ranks, and high levels of attrition (which I think is the code word for desertion.) Nine years after we entered Afghanistan, these elementary problems have not been addressed.

Since this situation is critical to successfully ending our occupation and expense of Afghanistan, one would have hoped that every effort and resource would have been used to fill this training need. However, a November 4, 2010, article in the *St. Petersburg Times* reported that the U.S. government will spend over a half-billion taxpayer dollars to expand its embassy in the Afghanistan capital of Kabul. How many trainers do you think $511 million could buy? How many Afghanistan police officers and soldiers could be made semi-literate, enough so that they became good soldiers?

Thus we have some Obama administration doublethink going on: we want to get out of Afghanistan as quickly as possible, our number one priority. We need a 50% increase in military trainers (900 additional trainers) to make that happen, but we will lavishly spend resources to expand a single building complex in the capital. This is a major disconnect in logic: if we cannot produce a viable native fighting force via training, who cares how big or how nice the U.S. embassy is? It will eventually be occupied by the Taliban. Fix the root cause of the problem, the Afghan military; don’t try to convince yourselves that both the military readiness and a single building are equally important. A non-doublethink approach would devote some of that $511 million to the training issue since that would recognize the vastly different priorities and importance at play here.

I am sure that you can find government and political class doublethink examples all around you. Sometimes doublethink happens because we have allowed the federal government to get so large that one part of it does not know what the other parts of the government are doing. One part wants to reduce pollution by promoting electric cars while another part subsidizes coal-burning electric plants that dirty up the air. One part of the government wants Americans kids and adults to get healthy by eating low fat foods while another part, in this case within the same Cabinet Department (Agriculture), helps Domino’s Pizza get more fatty, cheesy pizza into Americans’ diets.

Sometimes doublethink happens because no one in the political class prioritizes needs and importance—for example, the wasting of millions of dollars dressing up an embassy when military trainers, vital to our military success, go wanting. Other times politicians do doublethink to please their election campaign donors—for example, corn farmers who get favorable treatment from the political class, even though those in the political class know that this favorable treatment is not good economically or environmentally.

Whatever the reasons underlying the doublethink situation, you can bet that the American taxpayer is footing an unnecessary bill. That is why Step 1 of “Love My Country, Loathe My Government” is so important. The Step itself calls for an annual 10% reduction in the federal government budget for five years. One way to accomplish this reduction, according Step 1, is to do a bottom-up, zero-based budget review. Every government program, law, department, and expenditure would be on the table, stripped down to its core function and mission in order to look for redundancies and doublethink situations, like the Dairy Management situation described above.

Only then can we rationalize what we are paying for, why we are paying for it, if we should we be paying for it—and not pay for things that are not worthwhile. Hopefully, once our politicians have far less government to think about and to track, they can focus much more closely on a smaller set of priorities, identifying wasteful doublethink quicker and more efficiently. Think about that wonderful goal: a quicker and more efficient government-run operation, a government that has retired Orwell’s concept of doublethink from our world.

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**If I’m Not Doing Anything Wrong, Why Should I Care About Surveillance?**

by Jeremy Carp

Despite recent uproar over the secret collection of Americans’ telephone records and internet activity, government surveillance programs have long thrived under the indifference of Americans.

A major source of this apathy is the enduring myth that law-abiding citizens have little reason to fear surveillance. If one has nothing to hide, the reasoning goes, then why care about being watched? Senator Lindsey Graham, a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, echoed this sentiment in a recent interview: “I don’t think you’re talking to the terrorists. I know I’m not. So we don’t have anything to worry about.”

This is an oddly passive response from a nation whose citizens celebrate their robust liberties and reject the surveillance-driven philosophies of authoritarian regimes. Such a response is also an exceedingly narrow and short-sighted understanding of contemporary surveillance and its far-reaching consequences.

In a democracy, it is essential that the lion’s share of power lay in the hands of the people. With the rise of massive data storage capabilities and powerful analytic computers, information is increasingly the currency of power. As the government’s capabilities to collect and retain vast swaths of information continue to grow, so too does its power. This consolidation of information is troubling not so much for its effects on any one person, but rather for its effects on the organization of social and political activity.

Already there is evidence to this effect. Muslim communities in New York, under heavy surveillance by the NYPD, report a chilling effect on a wide range of behaviors. Some Muslim student associations, for instance, have felt compelled to limit their outreach and to refrain from holding political discussions in public spaces. Similarly, increased surveillance capabilities have made it easier for the government to identify reporters’ sources, damaging media groups’ ability to gather the information they need to report.

There is a real danger that political and civil groups, or even just individual citizens, will be increasingly hesitant to enter their opinions into the public and digital spheres. The cumulative absence of these voices—potentially stymieing such things as political mobilization and public debate—will impact everyone. Simply put, even in the unlikely event that one lives outside the scope of surveillance, it is simply false to believe that one could ever live outside of its effects.

People with “nothing to hide” have additional reason to be concerned at the prospect of dragnet surveillance. The further technologies of government and corporate surveillance penetrate into people’s lives, the harder it is to control the content and distribution of information about oneself. As websites, digital devices, drones, and security cameras harvest and organize nearly unfathomable masses of personal data, previously anonymous individuals are transformed into digital subjects, identified and linked to unseen records.

One’s inability to control, correct, and, often, simply view such records can place law-abiding citizens in a precarious position. In the private sector, personal data can be used to determine things like eligibility for loans, healthcare benefits, or infringement of copyright. At the government level, personal data can be used to identify individuals for criminal investigation, restrict travel privileges, or deny financial benefits. In both instances, errors or misrepresentations can have serious consequences.

Unfortunately, personal identifiers—such as IP addresses—are notoriously unreliable and often produce faulty matches of people and data. Yet, as corporations and government increasingly interact with our digital identities, such records are becoming more “real” than our true identities, resulting in opaque digital profiles which are unrepresentative of a person’s true beliefs and activities. In this way, surveillance is not so much recording information as it is creating it.

Finally, the very idea that some people have nothing to hide is itself a fallacy. As Russell Baker writes, “I hear it said that people who have nothing to hide need not fear this strangulating technology of surveillance. And where are they, these people with nothing to hide?” Although penned in 1988, Baker’s point is even more salient today: we all have information that we would rather keep private.

History makes clear that collected information need not be criminal in nature for it to be leveraged against individuals. The FBI’s infiltration of the student movement in Berkeley during the 1960s, outlined in a recent book by Seth Rosenfeld, illustrates this point vividly. In gathering troves of information about the First Amendment protected activities of (harmless) student protesters, the FBI systematically destroyed careers, ruined innocent lives, and manipulated the political process.

This is not to say that corporate and government surveillance can serve no legitimate purpose. However, it is highly misleading to suggest that large segments of the American population are immune to the consequences of over-surveillance. To claim otherwise—thereby discouraging people from challenging the status quo—effectively disenfranchises those who are naïve enough to believe the myth.

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**Invasion Newspeak: U.S. & USSR**

by Noam Chomsky

In May 1983, a remarkable event took place in Moscow. A courageous newscaster, Vladimir Danchev, denounced the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in five successive radio broadcasts extending over five days, calling upon the rebels to resist. This aroused great admiration in the West. The New York Times (8/6/83) commented accurately that this was a departure from the official Soviet propaganda line, that Danchev had “revolted against the standards of doublethink and newspeak.” Danchev was taken off the air and sent to a psychiatric hospital. When he was returned to his position several months later, a Russian official was quoted as saying that “he was not punished, because a sick man cannot be punished.”

What was particularly remarkable about Danchev’s radio broadcasts was not simply that he expressed opposition to the Soviet invasion and called for resistance to it, but that he called it an “invasion.” In Soviet theology, there is no such event as the Russian invasion of Afghanistan; rather, there is a Russian defense of Afghanistan against bandits operating from Pakistani sanctuaries and supported by the CIA and other warmongers. The Russians claim they were invited in, and in a certain technical sense this is correct. But as the London Economist grandly proclaimed (10/25/80), “An invader is an invader unless invited in by a government with some claim to legitimacy,” and the government installed by the USSR to invite them in can hardly make such a claim, outside the world of Orwellian newspeak.

Implicit in the coverage of the Danchev affair in the West was a note of self-congratulation: It couldn’t happen here—no U.S. newscaster has been sent to a psychiatric hospital for calling a U.S. invasion “an invasion” or for calling on the victims to resist. We might, however, inquire further into just why this has never happened. One possibility is that the question has never arisen because no mainstream U.S. journalist has ever mimicked Danchev’s courage, or could even perceive that a U.S. invasion of the Afghan type is in fact an invasion.

Consider the following facts. In 1962, the United States attacked South Vietnam. In that year, President John F. Kennedy sent the U.S. Air Force to attack rural South Vietnam, where more than 80 percent of the population lived. This was part of a program intended to drive several million people into concentration camps (called “strategic hamlets”) where they would be surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards. This would “protect” these people from the guerrillas whom, we conceded, they were largely supporting.

The direct U.S. attack against South Vietnam followed our support for the French attempt to reconquer their former colony, our disruption of the 1954 “peace process,” and a terrorist war against the South Vietnamese population. This terror had already left some 75,000 dead while evoking domestic resistance, supported from the northern half of the country after 1959, that threatened to bring down the regime that the U.S. had established. In the following years, the U.S. continued to resist every attempt at peaceful settlement, and in 1964 began to plan the ground invasion of South Vietnam. The land assault took place in early 1965, accompanied by the bombing of North Vietnam and an intensification of the bombing of the south, at triple the level of the more publicized bombing of the north. The U.S. also extended the war to Laos and Cambodia.

The U.S. protested that it was invited in, but as the Economist recognized in the case of Afghanistan (never in the case of Vietnam), “an invader is an invader unless invited in by a government with some claim to legitimacy,” and outside the world of newspeak, the client regime established by the U.S. had no more legitimacy than the Afghan regime established by the USSR. Nor did the U.S. regard this government as having any legitimacy; in fact, it was regularly overthrown and replaced when its leaders appeared to be insufficiently enthusiastic about U.S. plans to escalate the terror. Throughout the war, the U.S. openly recognized that a political settlement was impossible, for the simple reason that the “enemy” would win handily in a political competition—which the U.S. therefore deemed unacceptable.

For the past 25 years I have been searching to find some reference in mainstream journalism or scholarship to a U.S. invasion of South Vietnam, or U.S. aggression in Indochina—without success. Instead I find a U.S. defense of South Vietnam against terrorists supported from outside (namely, from Vietnam), a defense that was unwise, the doves maintain.

In short, there are no Danchevs here. Within the mainstream, there is no one who can call an invasion “an invasion,” or even perceive the fact; it is unimaginable that any U.S. journalist would have publicly called upon the South Vietnamese to resist the U.S. invasion. Such a person would not have been sent to a psychiatric hospital, but it’s doubtful that he would have retained his professional position and standing.

Note that here it takes no courage to tell the truth, merely honesty. We cannot plead fear of state violence, as followers of the party line can in a totalitarian state.

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**How the NSA Threatens National Security**

by Bruce Schneier

Secret NSA eavesdropping is still in the news. Details about once secret programs continue to leak. The Director of National Intelligence has recently declassified additional information, and the President’s Review Group has just released its report and recommendations.

With all this going on, it’s easy to become inured to the breadth and depth of the NSA’s activities. But through the disclosures, we’ve learned an enormous amount about the agency’s capabilities, how it is failing to protect us, and what we need to do to regain security in the Information Age.

First and foremost, the surveillance state is robust. It is robust politically, legally, and technically. I can name three different NSA programs to collect Gmail user data. These programs are based on three different technical eavesdropping capabilities. They rely on three different legal authorities. They involve collaborations with three different companies. And this is just Gmail. The same is true for cell phone call records, Internet chats, cell-phone location data.

Second, the NSA continues to lie about its capabilities. It hides behind tortured interpretations of words like “collect,” “incidentally,” “target,” and “directed.” It cloaks programs in multiple code names to obscure their full extent and capabilities. Officials testify that a particular surveillance activity is not done under one particular program or authority, conveniently omitting that it is done under some other program or authority.

Third, U.S. government surveillance is not just about the NSA.

The Snowden documents have given us extraordinary details about the NSA’s activities, but we now know that the CIA, NRO, FBI, DEA, and local police all engage in ubiquitous surveillance using the same sorts of eavesdropping tools, and that they regularly share information with each other.

The NSA’s collect-everything mentality is largely a hold-over from the Cold War, when a voyeuristic interest in the Soviet Union was the norm. Still, it is unclear how effective targeted surveillance against “enemy” countries really is. Even when we learn actual secrets, as we did regarding Syria’s use of chemical weapons earlier this year, we often can’t do anything with the information.

Ubiquitous surveillance should have died with the fall of Communism, but it got a new—and even more dangerous—life with the intelligence community’s post-9/11 “never again” terrorism mission. This quixotic goal of preventing something from happening forces us to try to know everything that does happen. This pushes the NSA to eavesdrop on online gaming worlds and on every cell phone in the world. But it’s a fool’s errand; there are simply too many ways to communicate.

We have no evidence that any of this surveillance makes us safer. NSA Director General Keith Alexander responded to these stories in June by claiming that he disrupted 54 terrorist plots. In October, he revised that number downward to 13, and then to “one or two.” At this point, the only “plot” prevented was that of a San Diego man sending $8,500 to support a Somali militant group. We have been repeatedly told that these surveillance programs would have been able to stop 9/11, yet the NSA didn’t detect the Boston bombings—even though one of the two terrorists was on the watch list and the other had a sloppy social media trail. Bulk collection of data and metadata is an ineffective counterterrorism tool.

Not only is ubiquitous surveillance ineffective, it is extraordinarily costly. I don’t mean just the budgets, which will continue to skyrocket. Or the diplomatic costs, as country after country learns of our surveillance programs against their citizens. I’m also talking about the cost to our society. It breaks so much of what our society has built. It breaks our political systems, as Congress is unable to provide any meaningful oversight and citizens are kept in the dark about what government does. It breaks our legal systems, as laws are ignored or reinterpreted, and people are unable to challenge government actions in court. It breaks our commercial systems, as U.S. computer products and services are no longer trusted worldwide. It breaks our technical systems, as the very protocols of the Internet become untrusted. And it breaks our social systems; the loss of privacy, freedom, and liberty is much more damaging to our society than the occasional act of random violence.

And finally, these systems are susceptible to abuse. This is not just a hypothetical problem. Recent history illustrates many episodes where this information was, or would have been, abused: Hoover and his FBI spying, McCarthy, Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement, anti-war Vietnam protesters, and—more recently—the Occupy movement. Outside the U.S., there are even more extreme examples. Building the surveillance state makes it too easy for people and organizations to slip over the line into abuse.

It’s not just domestic abuse we have to worry about; it’s the rest of the world, too. The more we choose to eavesdrop on the Internet and other communications technologies, the less we are secure from eavesdropping by others. Our choice isn’t between a digital world where the NSA can eavesdrop and one where the NSA is prevented from eavesdropping; it’s between a digital world that is vulnerable to all attackers and one that is secure for all users.

Fixing this problem is going to be hard. We are long past the point where simple legal interventions can help. The bill in Congress to limit NSA surveillance won’t actually do much to limit NSA surveillance. Maybe the NSA will figure out an interpretation of the law that will allow it to do what it wants anyway. Maybe it’ll do it another way, using another justification. Maybe the FBI will do it and give it a copy. And when asked, it’ll lie about it.

NSA-level surveillance is like the Maginot Line was in the years before World War II: ineffective and wasteful. We need to openly disclose what surveillance we have been doing, and the known insecurities that make it possible. We need to work toward security, even if other countries like China continue to use the Internet as a giant surveillance platform. We need to build a coalition of free-world nations dedicated to a secure global Internet, and we need to continually push back against bad actors—both state and non-state—that work against that goal.

Securing the Internet requires both laws and technology. It requires Internet technology that secures data wherever it is and however it travels. It requires broad laws that put security ahead of both domestic and international surveillance. It requires additional technology to enforce those laws, and a worldwide enforcement regime to deal with bad actors. It’s not easy, and has all the problems that other international issues have: nuclear, chemical, and biological weapon nonproliferation; small arms trafficking; human trafficking; money laundering; intellectual property. Global information security and anti-surveillance needs to join those difficult global problems so that we can start making progress.

The President’s Review Group recommendations are largely positive, but they don’t go nearly far enough. We need to recognize that security is more important than surveillance, and work towards that goal.

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**Obama’s Newspeak**

by Victor Davis Hanson

The nightmare societies portrayed in the George Orwell novels *1984* and *Animal Farm* gave us the word “Orwellian.” That adjective reflects a vast government’s efforts not just to deceive and control the people, but also to do so by reinventing the meaning of ordinary words while rewriting the past itself.

America, of all places, is becoming Orwellian. The president repeatedly reminds the American people that under his leadership, the U.S. has produced a record level of new oil and natural gas. But didn’t Obama radically curtail leases for just such new energy production on federal lands? Have the edicts on the barn wall of Animal Farm been changed again, with the production of new oil and gas suddenly going from bad to good?

Does anyone remember that the Affordable Care Act was sold on the premise that it would guarantee retention of existing health plans and doctors, create 4 million new jobs, and save families $2,500 a year in premiums, all while extending expanded coverage to more people at a lower cost?

Only in Orwell’s world of doublespeak could raising taxes, while the costs of millions of health plans soars, be called “affordable.” Is losing your existing plan and doctor a way of retaining them?

The Congressional Budget Office recently warned that Obamacare would “keep hours worked and potential output during the next 10 years lower than they would be otherwise.” That nonpartisan verdict should be bad news for workers.

Not in our brave new world. The Obama administration says it is pleased that workers will now be freed from “job lock.” What is job lock—a made-up Newspeak word right out of 1984? Work fewer hours, make less money, and create fewer outputs—and be happy.

About every January since 2009, the president has promised to close Guantanamo Bay. Is the detention facility now sort of virtually closed—in the manner that Syrian president Bashar Assad and his chemical weapons are now virtually gone as Obama decreed years ago, and in the manner that we are still hunting down the murderers in Benghazi who were supposedly outraged over a video? Is there an Orwellian “memory hole” where these embarrassing proclamations are disposed?

In 2004, many in the media reported that George W. Bush, the demonized Emmanuel Goldstein of our era, had overseen a “jobless recovery.” Unemployment at election time in 2004 was 5.4 percent.

Yet since January 2009, only two months have seen joblessness dip slightly below 7 percent. A record 90 million able-bodied Americans are not participating in the workforce. Yet the president, in Orwellian doublespeak fashion, recently claimed that the job picture is good. If 5.4 percent unemployment was once called a jobless recovery, are we now in a jobless recovery from a jobless recovery?

In 2013, the IRS confessed that it had targeted particular political groups based on their names or political themes—a Big Brother intrusion into private lives that was revealed at about the same time the Associated Press and National Security Agency eavesdropping scandals came to light. During the initial media frenzy, President Obama blasted the politicization of the IRS as “outrageous.”

After the IRS was confirmed to be delaying the tax-exempt requests of conservative groups at a far greater rate than their liberal counterparts, the agency’s director, Douglas Shulman, stepped down at the end of his term. His replacement, acting commissioner Steven Miller, subsequently resigned from the agency. And the IRS official in charge of tax-exempt decisions, Lois Lerner, invoked her Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination before Congress. She and Joseph H. Grant, commissioner of the Tax Exempt and Government Entities Division, both abruptly retired from the IRS.

Congressional committees and the treasury inspector general for tax administration found that groups loosely associated with the Tea Party were more likely to have their tax-exempt requests put on hold than other nonprofits. Yet recently, President Obama concluded of this entire mess that it did not entail “even a smidgen of corruption.”

It takes Orwell’s doublethink to explain how a scandal might have rated an “outrageous” before the people in charge quit, retired, or invoked the Fifth Amendment, and then, after their embarrassing departures, was reinvented as an episode without a smidgen of corruption.

In politics, of course, Left and Right, conservative and liberal, make up stuff. But Orwell, who also blasted the rise of European fascism, focused more on the mind games of the statist Left.

Why? He apparently feared that the Left suffered an additional wage of hypocrisy in more openly proclaiming the noble interests of “the people.” Because of those supposedly exalted ends of equality and fairness, statists were more likely to get a pass from the media and public for the scary means they employed to achieve them.

Right now in America, the words and deeds of both past and present become reality only when the leaders put them in the correct service of the people.

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**Orwellian Concepts in Modern Society**

by [Laughing Rabbit](http://blackroserevolution.wordpress.com/author/laughingrabt/)

George Orwell is perhaps one of the greatest authors of the twentieth century, and one of his greatest novels was 1984. The book is often considered a dystopian novel criticizing the Soviet Union, but he is criticizing the western world just as much as Stalin’s nightmare. This failure to catch this criticism has perhaps allowed for western society to look more like Orwell’s horrifying depiction of the future. It is not just the result of a corrupt governmental system, but also of an economic system in which society is built around capitalism, which Orwell opposed despite popular belief.

One of the major examples of an Orwellian concept is doublethink, which has imbedded itself into our society. WAR IS PEACE, IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH, and SLAVERY IS FREEDOM are Orwell’s famous examples of doublethink. We have been taught doublethink from the beginning, and almost never realize the contradiction.

“War is peace” is one we are constantly feed during war time; we are always told it is not “a war but an act of self-defense against a homicidal maniac.” We are told the more we wage war, the closer we are brought to peace. In the Middle East, we have been brought to believe that by waging war against this dictator and killing this terrorist, we will bring peace to the Middle East. The simple truth is that violence breeds violence; by committing acts of violence, we simply perpetuate it. The more we drop bombs on their cities, demolish their homes, and burn their crops, the more we bring people to their side, and we end up fighting more and more and killing more and more. Somehow we have been taught that supporting war is patriotic, that sending our countrymen to their deaths is good for our country—but it’s not. Our Ministry of Peace is called the Pentagon.

One act of doublethink most of us are guilty is the idea that our government is simultaneously totalitarian and democratic. Our government was hardly democratic to begin with, and it has moved further from democracy over time. After the constitutional convention, a woman asked Benjamin Franklin what kind of government the convention created for them. Franklin replied “A Republic, ma’am if you can keep it.” A Republic is defined as “A state in which supreme power is held by the people and their elected representatives, and which has an elected or nominated president rather than a monarch.” In this system, we elect representatives to vote for us; it’s a spectator government not a participatory one; it is not a government for the people by the people; it is oligarchic in nature. Because we have been told otherwise, we believe the government is highly democratic and the best for us, but at the same time, we are aware of the tyranny of our government and thus are not willing to give any more power to the government. We believe our government is a democracy because we simply vote for politicians; however, “Voting is easy and marginally useful, but it is a poor substitute for democracy, which requires direct action by concerned citizens” (Howard Zinn). The right-wing libertarians, if they were truly libertarians would work towards making the government more democratic. This fact has scared us away from any kind of socialist or progressive reform, even socialism in its more perverted and modern understood form, which is just progressivism.

Not only is our government hardly democratic, but the few democratic controls we have are perverted by corporate interests. Every politician who gets elected did so because of a successful campaign, which can only be effectively run with a significant amount of money, most of which comes from PAC donations, which are raised by large and powerful corporations. The Democrat that filibustered the only progressive item in the health care bill happened to be the largest receiver of PAC money from insurance companies.

Our society also has its own versions of the ministry of Peace, the Ministry of Truth, and the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Peace is the Pentagon, the Ministry of Justice is the FBI and industrial prison complex, and the Ministry of Truth is the mass media.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation was established in 1908 with the purpose of investigating Federal crimes. Federal crimes include acts against homeland security, which is just vague enough to incriminate any dissidents. The Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), enacted in 1956, gave the FBI the authority to survey, infiltrate, discredit, and disrupt domestic political organizations. The FBI targeted a wide range of dissent groups, ranging from socialist and communist organizations to civil and women’s rights groups like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and any kind of peace activists as well—all in the name of homeland security. Although COINTELPRO was exposed in 1971, it has since been replaced by the Patriot Act, (Uniting [and] Strengthening America [by] Providing Appropriate Tools Required [to] Intercept [and] Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001), which allows for an immense amount of surveillance of U.S. citizens. Statistically, this has affected mostly marijuana users and political activists. A forty-four year old American anarchist by the name of Crow demanded the files on him from the FBI under the Freedom of Information Act, and found that the FBI had constant surveillance of him, despite his non-existent criminal record. This man had FBI trucks hovering around his house, his phone tapped, his emails intercepted, and cameras posted outside his house. The FBI had conformed to the very definition of the Thought Police.

The mainstream media is our Ministry of Truth. It is controlled by only a few media conglomerates such as Fox News Corp, Viacom, and Time Warner. The media bias is based on two factors: the leaning of the people who give it ratings and the leaning of the media conglomerates that control it. Compared to the rest of the world, the American population is rather centrist; even the more liberal members of society are rather centrist when compared to the left-wing of the rest of the world. Media conglomerates have a lot to gain from a more right-wing agenda. Even what is considered the liberal media will filter out and pervert left-wing ideas. During the Arab Spring, many of the nations—like Egypt and Tunisia—that were revolting, were not only fighting for democracy, but also fighting a class war. The vast majority of the citizens of Egypt and Tunisia lived on less than a dollar a day, while an elite few lived lavish lives. When the media mentions class war, it only portrays it as war waged against the wealthy in politics, not only giving it a negative spin, but portraying it as if it can only be waged in Congress and virtually out of the hands of the people. Our media often perverts our view of the world and makes us more submissive to the corporate powers that control them.

“Freedom is Slavery” is another example of doublethink we are guilty of. We have come to believe that through hard work and dedication, we can make something of our life, but all we do is make more money for those who employ us. Upward social mobility is a myth. Statistically, people are more likely to remain in the same income bracket that their family had or make less money than move up, let alone strike it rich. Most employment that requires some kind of college education pays roughly around the median cost of living for the area one is employed in. This means people generally make just enough to survive. The only ways families in lower income brackets survive are through severe debt or government programs. Even college-educated people are in severe debt, usually from student loans, mortgages and car loans. Forty-one percent of U.S. profits are generated from speculation alone. This means you really have to spend money to make money, but most people don’t have any money left over to spend. Any money the average person uses to invest is from loans, which require people to put up some sort of collateral. Often people risk opening a second mortgage on their home, which is a very risky move. A lot of people simply don’t have anything to put up as collateral to begin with, making it impossible to profit for simply having money. Over time, wealth has slowly trickled upwards, concentrating in the hands of the few, to where currently the top ten percent control seventy-one percent of the nation’s income and ninety percent of the nation’s wealth. Most people work the same job day in and day out, making just enough to survive, with almost no hope of moving up, and only making money for people who already have a lot of money—yet we are led to believe that this slavery is freedom.

Orwell’s dystopian depiction is a harsh reality in the Western world, suppressed by the manufactured consent of the media, the Though Police, and doublethink. Orwell wasn’t just talking about Soviet Russia, but the Western world as well, and especially the United States of America.

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**Rise of the Surveillance State**

by James Bovard

While high-tech breakthroughs make business more productive and life more pleasant, progress also has a dark side. Technology designed for benign purposes can be used for ill ones too. The Clinton administration has led the way, acting as if every new computer and telephone should have a welcome mat for federal wiretappers. A 1998 American Civil Liberties Union report noted, “The Administration is using scare tactics to acquire vast new powers to spy on all Americans.”

On April 16, 1993, the White House revealed that the National Security Agency had secretly developed a new microchip known as the Clipper Chip. The press release called it “a new initiative that will bring the Federal Government together with industry in a voluntary program to improve the security and privacy of telephone communications while meeting the legitimate needs of law enforcement.” This was practically the last time that the word “voluntary” was mentioned.

The Clipper Chip’s developers presumed it should be a crime for anyone to use technology—such as encryption—that frustrates government agents. Encryption software allows individuals to send messages between computers that cannot be read by third parties. It is vital to prevent fraud or abuse of financial transactions and is widely used both here and abroad. Encryption has a long history—Thomas Jefferson used secret codes in his correspondence to avoid detection by the British.

“The Clipper Chip proposal would have required every encryption user (that is, every individual or business using a digital telephone system, fax machine, the Internet, etc.) to hand over their decryption keys to the government, giving it access to both stored data and real-time communications,” the ACLU noted. Marc Rotenberg, director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center, observed: “You don’t want to buy a set of car keys from a guy who specializes in stealing cars.” When the federal National Institute of Standards and Technology formally published the proposal for the new surveillance chip, fewer than one percent of the comments received from the public supported the Clipper Chip plan.

Although it eventually abandoned its effort to impose the Clipper Chip, the administration did not give up on trying to tap the nation’s telephones. In 1994 it railroaded through Congress a law to dumb down phone technology in order to facilitate government wiretapping. On October 16, 1995, the telecommunications industry was stunned when a Federal Register notice appeared announcing that the FBI was demanding that phone companies provide the capability for simultaneous wiretaps of one out of every hundred phone calls in urban areas. The FBI notice represented “a 1,000-fold increase over previous levels of surveillance.” FBI Director Louis Freeh denied that any expansion of wiretapping was planned.

The 1994 Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement law led to five years of clashes between the FBI and the communications industry over the new standards. The Federal Communications Commission was the bill’s designated arbiter; in August 1999, the FCC caved and gave the FBI almost everything it wanted. The FCC ordered that all new cellular telephones become de facto homing devices for law enforcement by including components which enable law enforcement to determine the precise location from which a person is calling. As *Electronic Design* magazine noted, “Unlike the location feature being created for 911 emergency services, this capability will apply to all calls and users won’t be able to turn it off.” Attorney General Janet Reno hailed the decision: “The continuing technological changes in the nation’s telecommunications systems present increasing challenges to law enforcement. This ruling will enable law enforcement to keep pace with these changes.” The *New York Times* noted, “Law-enforcement officials have asserted that since the location of wired telephones is already public information, there is no intrusion of privacy in determining the location of wireless phones.” This is like saying that since police can determine a person’s home addresses by checking the phone book, it is no violation of privacy to let police follow the person around every place he goes once he leaves his house.

In addition to telephones, the security of computer software and the Internet have also been targeted. The administration spent three years hounding Phil Zimmerman, the inventor of Pretty Good Privacy, software designed to protect computer data and messages from surveillance. Someone placed PGP on an Internet site, thus making it available free to anyone in the world who chose to download it. For this the feds threatened Zimmerman with a five-year prison sentence and a million-dollar fine for exporting “munitions.” Noted Zimmerman in a 1999 interview: “In a number of countries with oppressive regimes, PGP is the only weapon that humanitarian aid workers have to prevent hostile dictatorships from monitoring their communications.”

Last August the Justice Department submitted the Cyberspace Electronic Security Act to Congress. The bill would make it easier for government to intrude on private communications by allowing law enforcement to obtain search warrants “to secretly enter suspects’ homes or offices and disable security on personal computers as a prelude to a wiretap or further search.” Average Americans would face to “black bag jobs” previously restricted to espionage or national security cases. Janet Reno justified the new powers thus: “When criminals like drug dealers and terrorists use encryption to conceal their communications, law enforcement must be able to respond in a manner that will not thwart an investigation or tip off a suspect.” But such searches pose special dangers because of the opportunities for government agents to tamper with evidence while manipulating software on a target’s computer.

In October 1999, members of the international Internet Engineering Task Force revealed that the FBI was pressuring them to create a “surveillance-friendly” architecture for Internet communications. The Bureau wanted the Task Force to build “trapdoors” into e-mail communications programs to allow law enforcement easy access to supposedly confidential messages. Several high-tech experts publicly warned: “We believe that such a development would harm network security, result in more illegal activities, diminish users’ privacy, stifle innovation, and impose significant costs on developers of communications.” The ACLU’s Barry Steinhardt said, “What law enforcement is asking . . . is the equivalent of requiring the home building industry to place a ‘secret’ door in all new homes to which only it would have the key.” Although the task force managed to rebuff the pressure, the fact the FBI even attempted to have software engineers sacrifice e-mail reliability for the sake of government intrusions is a warning as to how audacious the feds have become.

Last fall news broke about the existence of Echelon, a spy satellite system run by the National Security Agency along with the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. Echelon reportedly scans millions of phone calls, e-mail messages, and faxes each hour, searching for key words. The European Union and the governments of Italy and Russia loudly protested Echelon’s intrusions into their sovereign domains. European Parliament Speaker Nicole Fontaine harumphed: “We have every reason to be shocked at the fact that this form of espionage, which has been going on for a number of years, has not prompted any official protest.” One Portuguese paper complained that Echelon is “like a technological nightmare extracted from the crazy conspiracy theories of ‘The X-Files.’“

Rep. Bob Barr, a former CIA employee and the most vigilant congressman regarding federal high-tech intrusions, attached a rider to an appropriations bill last year that required the NSA and the CIA to report to Congress on the standards Echelon used to tap Americans’ communications. In a February letter, the NSA assured members of Congress that “the NSA’s activities are conducted in accordance with the highest constitutional, legal and ethical standards, and in compliance with statutes and regulations designed to protect the privacy rights of U.S. persons.” Even as it professed it would never act unconstitutionally, the NSA sought to block further House inquiries into Echelon’s operations.

A February report by the European Union alleged that Echelon has been used for economic espionage. Former CIA Director James Woolsey told a German newspaper in early March that Echelon collects “economic intelligence.” One example Woolsey gave was espionage aimed at discovering when foreign companies are paying bribes to obtain contracts that might otherwise go to American companies. Woolsey elaborated on his views in a condescending March 17 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, justifying Echelon spying on foreign companies because some foreigners do not obey the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. To add insult to injury, Woolsey noted there’s no reason for U.S. companies to steal backward Europe’s secrets.

The most egregious examples of governmental invasion of privacy relate to two of the most intimate areas in life—your money and your body. In September 1999, Marvin Goodfriend, a senior vice president at the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, proposed that government use new technology to penalize citizens who do not spend their cash as fast as government wanted. “The magnetic strip [in new U.S. currency] could visibly record when a bill was last withdrawn from the banking system. A carry tax could be deducted from each bill upon deposit according to how long the bill was in circulation.” *Wired News* noted that a federal “carry tax” would “discourage ‘hoarding’ currency, deter black market and criminal activities, and boost economic stability during deflationary periods when interest rates hover near zero.” Rep. Ron Paul, a member of the House Banking Committee, denounced the proposal: “The whole idea is preposterous. The notion that we’re going to tax somebody because they decide to be frugal and hold a couple of dollars is economic planning at its worst.”

Lastly, the Customs Service recently began deploying BodySearch equipment that allows Customs inspectors to see through the clothes of designated lucky travelers. The ACLU’s Gregory Nojeim warned that the new body scanners could show “underneath clothing and with clarity, breasts or a penis, and the relative dimensions of each. The system has a joystick-driven zoom option that allows the operator to enlarge portions of the image.” Customs spokesman Dennis Murphy explained: “What [BodySearch] does is alleviate the need for us to touch people, because people don’t like to be touched, and we don’t blame them, because our inspectors also feel uncomfortable touching people.” The BodySearch system has a feature that can potentially violate travelers more than a pat-down from a Customs agent: the capacity to save images of what it views. Travelers can now look forward to a new kind of trip souvenir: a picture of their privates on file at a federal agency.

*James Bovard is the author of Freedom in Chains: The Rise of the State and the Demise of the Citizen (St. Martin’s Press).*

Bovard, James. “Rise of the Surveillance State.” *American Spectator*. May. 2000: 68-69. *SIRS Issues Researcher.* Web. 19 Apr. 2014.

**Why Privacy Matters Even if You Have “Nothing to Hide”**

by Daniel J. Solove

When the government gathers or analyzes personal information, many people say they’re not worried. “I’ve got nothing to hide,” they declare. “Only if you’re doing something wrong should you worry, and then you don’t deserve to keep it private.”

The nothing-to-hide argument pervades discussions about privacy. The data-security expert Bruce Schneier calls it the “most common retort against privacy advocates.” The legal scholar Geoffrey Stone refers to it as an “all-too-common refrain.” In its most compelling form, it is an argument that the privacy interest is generally minimal, thus making the contest with security concerns a foreordained victory for security.

The nothing-to-hide argument is everywhere. In Britain, for example, the government has installed millions of public surveillance cameras in cities and towns, which are watched by officials via closed-circuit television. In a campaign slogan for the program, the government declares: “If you’ve got nothing to hide, you’ve got nothing to fear.” Variations of nothing-to-hide arguments frequently appear in blogs, letters to the editor, television news interviews, and other forums. One blogger in the United States, in reference to profiling people for national-security purposes, declares: “I don’t mind people wanting to find out things about me, I’ve got nothing to hide! Which is why I support [the government’s] efforts to find terrorists by monitoring our phone calls!”

The argument is not of recent vintage. One of the characters in Henry James’s 1888 novel, *The Reverberator*, muses: “If these people had done bad things they ought to be ashamed of themselves and he couldn’t pity them, and if they hadn’t done them there was no need of making such a rumpus about other people knowing.”

I encountered the nothing-to-hide argument so frequently in news interviews, discussions, and the like that I decided to probe the issue. I asked the readers of my blog, Concurring Opinions, whether there are good responses to the nothing-to-hide argument. I received a torrent of comments:

* My response is “So do you have curtains?” or “Can I see your credit-card bills for the last year?”
* So my response to the “If you have nothing to hide ... “ argument is simply, “I don’t need to justify my position. You need to justify yours. Come back with a warrant.”
* I don’t have anything to hide. But I don’t have anything I feel like showing you, either.
* If you have nothing to hide, then you don’t have a life.
* Show me yours and I’ll show you mine.
* It’s not about having anything to hide, it’s about things not being anyone else’s business.
* Bottom line, Joe Stalin would [have] loved it. Why should anyone have to say more?

On the surface, it seems easy to dismiss the nothing-to-hide argument. Everybody probably has something to hide from somebody. As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn declared, “Everyone is guilty of something or has something to conceal. All one has to do is look hard enough to find what it is.” Likewise, in Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s novella “Traps,” which involves a seemingly innocent man put on trial by a group of retired lawyers in a mock-trial game, the man inquires what his crime shall be. “An altogether minor matter,” replies the prosecutor. “A crime can always be found.”

One can usually think of something that even the most open person would want to hide. As a commenter to my blog post noted, “If you have nothing to hide, then that quite literally means you are willing to let me photograph you naked? And I get full rights to that photograph—so I can show it to your neighbors?” The Canadian privacy expert David Flaherty expresses a similar idea when he argues: “There is no sentient human being in the Western world who has little or no regard for his or her personal privacy; those who would attempt such claims cannot withstand even a few minutes’ questioning about intimate aspects of their lives without capitulating to the intrusiveness of certain subject matters.”

But such responses attack the nothing-to-hide argument only in its most extreme form, which isn’t particularly strong. In a less extreme form, the nothing-to-hide argument refers not to all personal information but only to the type of data the government is likely to collect. Retorts to the nothing-to-hide argument about exposing people’s naked bodies or their deepest secrets are relevant only if the government is likely to gather this kind of information. In many instances, hardly anyone will see the information, and it won’t be disclosed to the public. Thus, some might argue, the privacy interest is minimal, and the security interest in preventing terrorism is much more important. In this less extreme form, the nothing-to-hide argument is a formidable one. However, it stems from certain faulty assumptions about privacy and its value.

To evaluate the nothing-to-hide argument, we should begin by looking at how its adherents understand privacy. Nearly every law or policy involving privacy depends upon a particular understanding of what privacy is. The way problems are conceived has a tremendous impact on the legal and policy solutions used to solve them. As the philosopher John Dewey observed, “A problem well put is half-solved.”

Most attempts to understand privacy do so by attempting to locate its essence—its core characteristics or the common denominator that links together the various things we classify under the rubric of “privacy.” Privacy, however, is too complex a concept to be reduced to a singular essence. It is a plurality of different things that do not share any one element but nevertheless bear a resemblance to one another. For example, privacy can be invaded by the disclosure of your deepest secrets. It might also be invaded if you’re watched by a peeping Tom, even if no secrets are ever revealed. With the disclosure of secrets, the harm is that your concealed information is spread to others. With the peeping Tom, the harm is that you’re being watched. You’d probably find that creepy regardless of whether the peeper finds out anything sensitive or discloses any information to others. There are many other forms of invasion of privacy, such as blackmail and the improper use of your personal data. Your privacy can also be invaded if the government compiles an extensive dossier about you.

Privacy, in other words, involves so many things that it is impossible to reduce them all to one simple idea. And we need not do so.

In many cases, privacy issues never get balanced against conflicting interests, because courts, legislators, and others fail to recognize that privacy is implicated. People don’t acknowledge certain problems, because those problems don’t fit into a particular one-size-fits-all conception of privacy. Regardless of whether we call something a “privacy” problem, it still remains a problem, and problems shouldn’t be ignored. We should pay attention to all of the different problems that spark our desire to protect privacy.

To describe the problems created by the collection and use of personal data, many commentators use a metaphor based on George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four. Orwell depicted a harrowing totalitarian society ruled by a government called Big Brother that watches its citizens obsessively and demands strict discipline. The Orwell metaphor, which focuses on the harms of surveillance (such as inhibition and social control), might be apt to describe government monitoring of citizens. But much of the data gathered in computer databases, such as one’s race, birth date, gender, address, or marital status, isn’t particularly sensitive. Many people don’t care about concealing the hotels they stay at, the cars they own, or the kind of beverages they drink. Frequently, though not always, people wouldn’t be inhibited or embarrassed if others knew this information.

Another metaphor better captures the problems: Franz Kafka’s *The Trial*. Kafka’s novel centers around a man who is arrested but not informed why. He desperately tries to find out what triggered his arrest and what’s in store for him. He finds out that a mysterious court system has a dossier on him and is investigating him, but he’s unable to learn much more. The Trial depicts a bureaucracy with inscrutable purposes that uses people’s information to make important decisions about them, yet denies the people the ability to participate in how their information is used.

The problems portrayed by the Kafkaesque metaphor are of a different sort than the problems caused by surveillance. They often do not result in inhibition. Instead they are problems of information processing—the storage, use, or analysis of data—rather than of information collection. They affect the power relationships between people and the institutions of the modern state. They not only frustrate the individual by creating a sense of helplessness and powerlessness, but also affect social structure by altering the kind of relationships people have with the institutions that make important decisions about their lives.

Legal and policy solutions focus too much on the problems under the Orwellian metaphor—those of surveillance—and aren’t adequately addressing the Kafkaesque problems—those of information processing. The difficulty is that commentators are trying to conceive of the problems caused by databases in terms of surveillance when, in fact, those problems are different.

Commentators often attempt to refute the nothing-to-hide argument by pointing to things people want to hide. But the problem with the nothing-to-hide argument is the underlying assumption that privacy is about hiding bad things. By accepting this assumption, we concede far too much ground and invite an unproductive discussion about information that people would very likely want to hide. As the computer-security specialist Schneier aptly notes, the nothing-to-hide argument stems from a faulty “premise that privacy is about hiding a wrong.” Surveillance, for example, can inhibit such lawful activities as free speech, free association, and other First Amendment rights essential for democracy.

The deeper problem with the nothing-to-hide argument is that it myopically views privacy as a form of secrecy. In contrast, understanding privacy as a plurality of related issues demonstrates that the disclosure of bad things is just one among many difficulties caused by government security measures. To return to my discussion of literary metaphors, the problems are not just Orwellian but Kafkaesque. Government information-gathering programs are problematic even if no information that people want to hide is uncovered. In The Trial, the problem is not inhibited behavior but rather a suffocating powerlessness and vulnerability created by the court system’s use of personal data and its denial to the protagonist of any knowledge of or participation in the process. The harms are bureaucratic ones—indifference, error, abuse, frustration, and lack of transparency and accountability.

One such harm, for example, which I call aggregation, emerges from the fusion of small bits of seemingly innocuous data. When combined, the information becomes much more telling. By joining pieces of information we might not take pains to guard, the government can glean information about us that we might indeed wish to conceal. For example, suppose you bought a book about cancer. This purchase isn’t very revealing on its own, for it indicates just an interest in the disease. Suppose you bought a wig. The purchase of a wig, by itself, could be for a number of reasons. But combine those two pieces of information, and now the inference can be made that you have cancer and are undergoing chemotherapy. That might be a fact you wouldn’t mind sharing, but you’d certainly want to have the choice.

Another potential problem with the government’s harvest of personal data is one I call exclusion. Exclusion occurs when people are prevented from having knowledge about how information about them is being used, and when they are barred from accessing and correcting errors in that data. Many government national-security measures involve maintaining a huge database of information that individuals cannot access. Indeed, because they involve national security, the very existence of these programs is often kept secret. This kind of information processing, which blocks subjects’ knowledge and involvement, is a kind of due-process problem. It is a structural problem, involving the way people are treated by government institutions and creating a power imbalance between people and the government. To what extent should government officials have such a significant power over citizens? This issue isn’t about what information people want to hide but about the power and the structure of government.

A related problem involves secondary use. Secondary use is the exploitation of data obtained for one purpose for an unrelated purpose without the subject’s consent. How long will personal data be stored? How will the information be used? What could it be used for in the future? The potential uses of any piece of personal information are vast. Without limits on or accountability for how that information is used, it is hard for people to assess the dangers of the data’s being in the government’s control.

Yet another problem with government gathering and use of personal data is distortion. Although personal information can reveal quite a lot about people’s personalities and activities, it often fails to reflect the whole person. It can paint a distorted picture, especially since records are reductive—they often capture information in a standardized format with many details omitted.

For example, suppose government officials learn that a person has bought a number of books on how to manufacture methamphetamine. That information makes them suspect that he’s building a meth lab. What is missing from the records is the full story: The person is writing a novel about a character who makes meth. When he bought the books, he didn’t consider how suspicious the purchase might appear to government officials, and his records didn’t reveal the reason for the purchases. Should he have to worry about government scrutiny of all his purchases and actions? Should he have to be concerned that he’ll wind up on a suspicious-persons list? Even if he isn’t doing anything wrong, he may want to keep his records away from government officials who might make faulty inferences from them. He might not want to have to worry about how everything he does will be perceived by officials nervously monitoring for criminal activity. He might not want to have a computer flag him as suspicious because he has an unusual pattern of behavior.

The nothing-to-hide argument focuses on just one or two particular kinds of privacy problems—the disclosure of personal information or surveillance—while ignoring the others. It assumes a particular view about what privacy entails, to the exclusion of other perspectives.

It is important to distinguish here between two ways of justifying a national-security program that demands access to personal information. The first way is not to recognize a problem. This is how the nothing-to-hide argument works—it denies even the existence of a problem. The second is to acknowledge the problems but contend that the benefits of the program outweigh the privacy sacrifice. The first justification influences the second, because the low value given to privacy is based upon a narrow view of the problem. And the key misunderstanding is that the nothing-to-hide argument views privacy in this troublingly particular, partial way.

Investigating the nothing-to-hide argument a little more deeply, we find that it looks for a singular and visceral kind of injury. Ironically, this underlying conception of injury is sometimes shared by those advocating for greater privacy protections. For example, the University of South Carolina law professor Ann Bartow argues that in order to have a real resonance, privacy problems must “negatively impact the lives of living, breathing human beings beyond simply provoking feelings of unease.” She says that privacy needs more “dead bodies,” and that privacy’s “lack of blood and death, or at least of broken bones and buckets of money, distances privacy harms from other [types of harm].”

Bartow’s objection is actually consistent with the nothing-to-hide argument. Those advancing the nothing-to-hide argument have in mind a particular kind of appalling privacy harm, one in which privacy is violated only when something deeply embarrassing or discrediting is revealed. Like Bartow, proponents of the nothingto-hide argument demand a dead-bodies type of harm.

Bartow is certainly right that people respond much more strongly to blood and death than to more-abstract concerns. But if this is the standard to recognize a problem, then few privacy problems will be recognized. Privacy is not a horror movie, most privacy problems don’t result in dead bodies, and demanding evidence of palpable harms will be difficult in many cases.

Privacy is often threatened not by a single egregious act but by the slow accretion of a series of relatively minor acts. In this respect, privacy problems resemble certain environmental harms, which occur over time through a series of small acts by different actors. Although society is more likely to respond to a major oil spill, gradual pollution by a multitude of actors often creates worse problems.

Privacy is rarely lost in one fell swoop. It is usually eroded over time, little bits dissolving almost imperceptibly until we finally begin to notice how much is gone. When the government starts monitoring the phone numbers people call, many may shrug their shoulders and say, “Ah, it’s just numbers, that’s all.” Then the government might start monitoring some phone calls. “It’s just a few phone calls, nothing more.” The government might install more video cameras in public places. “So what? Some more cameras watching in a few more places. No big deal.” The increase in cameras might lead to a more elaborate network of video surveillance. Satellite surveillance might be added to help track people’s movements. The government might start analyzing people’s bank records. “It’s just my deposits and some of the bills I pay—no problem.” The government may then start combing through credit-card records, then expand to Internet-service providers’ records, health records, employment records, and more. Each step may seem incremental, but after a while, the government will be watching and knowing everything about us.

“My life’s an open book,” people might say. “I’ve got nothing to hide.” But now the government has large dossiers of everyone’s activities, interests, reading habits, finances, and health. What if the government leaks the information to the public? What if the government mistakenly determines that based on your pattern of activities, you’re likely to engage in a criminal act? What if it denies you the right to fly? What if the government thinks your financial transactions look odd—even if you’ve done nothing wrong—and freezes your accounts? What if the government doesn’t protect your information with adequate security, and an identity thief obtains it and uses it to defraud you? Even if you have nothing to hide, the government can cause you a lot of harm.

“But the government doesn’t want to hurt me,” some might argue. In many cases, that’s true, but the government can also harm people inadvertently, due to errors or carelessness.

When the nothing-to-hide argument is unpacked, and its underlying assumptions examined and challenged, we can see how it shifts the debate to its terms, then draws power from its unfair advantage. The nothing-to-hide argument speaks to some problems but not to others. It represents a singular and narrow way of conceiving of privacy, and it wins by excluding consideration of the other problems often raised with government security measures. When engaged directly, the nothing-to-hide argument can ensnare, for it forces the debate to focus on its narrow understanding of privacy. But when confronted with the plurality of privacy problems implicated by government data collection and use beyond surveillance and disclosure, the nothing-to-hide argument, in the end, has nothing to say.

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Solove, Daniel. “Why Privacy Matters Even if You Have “Nothing to Hide.” *The Chronicle Review.* The Chronicle of Higher Education. 15 May 2011. Web. 19 Apr. 2014.

**Will More Video Surveillance Cameras Make Us Any Safer?**

by Ginny Sloan, President, The Constitution Project and Sharon Bradford Franklin, senior policy counsel, The Constitution Project

In the wake of the Boston marathon bombing, Boston Police Commissioner Davis has called for more surveillance cameras, and press accounts report new calls for cameras from Richmond, Virginia to San Francisco. Mayor Emmanuel has said Chicago will keep adding cameras, and Mayor Bloomberg is warning New York City residents that more cameras are coming, scoffing at complaints that this will be “Big Brother,” and telling New Yorkers to “Get used to it!” But does the Boston investigation really teach us that what our major cities need is more cameras?

True, it was video surveillance footage from a department store camera that provided the first important clues leading to the suspects in the marathon bombing. Additional video footage from members of the public also helped police identify and apprehend the suspects. The law enforcement officials who sought and examined the video footage, and the businesses and individuals who provided their videos in response, all deserve our praise and gratitude.

But we must be careful in identifying lessons from this use of video evidence. Most importantly, we should recognize that video cameras did not, and cannot, prevent an attack like the Boston marathon bombing. Nor did the ubiquitous cameras in London, the most-surveilled city on the planet, prevent the devastating bombing attacks in that city in 2005. This is not to discredit the important role that surveillance footage has played in identifying suspects after the fact in these cases and others. Yet increasing the number of cameras in cities like Boston, or Chicago—which already has over ten-thousand cameras—would not convert the cameras into a terrorism-prevention tool. Nor is there any indication that Boston investigators were hampered by having too little video footage to examine.

Furthermore, we must ensure that when government officials do rely on surveillance cameras, the systems incorporate robust privacy safeguards. Several years ago, The Constitution Project’s bipartisan Liberty and Security Committee developed a set of Guidelines for Public Video Surveillance, recommending best practices for camera systems to protect both safety and civil liberties. These include commonsense measures to ensure that cameras focus on detecting wrongdoing and to limit intrusions on private conduct. For example, cameras should not be used to track a specific person unless officers have sufficient legal reason to suspect the person of wrongdoing.

People routinely engage in activities in public places that are completely legal, but that they nonetheless consider private. Individuals use public spaces to enter Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and meetings of controversial political groups. To respect constitutional rights, the government cannot indiscriminately and constantly monitor people, even in public places. As five Justices of the Supreme Court recognized last year in a case involving GPS location tracking, long-term monitoring by electronic surveillance “impinges on expectations of privacy.” This does not mean that police should be prohibited from using cameras in public places; but it does mean that continuous surveillance of any particular person should require a warrant.

Video surveillance systems should also be covered by clear rules requiring that government agents use surveillance footage only for legitimate law enforcement purposes. This includes footage from government cameras, and private videos turned over to police. Thus, once Boston investigators have examined all the video footage they have received, they should retain only the video evidence identified as relevant to the investigation, and should delete the rest. Surveillance footage that simply shows marathon runners, spectators, and other members of the public engaged in normal lawful behavior should not end up in a law-enforcement file.

In rushing to protect ourselves from the next attack, we should not turn to unregulated government use of surveillance cameras. While we applaud Boston officials for their outstanding investigation, we must remember that video cameras are not an anti-crime or anti-terrorism panacea. The Boston experience demonstrates that video evidence can be important in identifying suspects and building a case. But it does not teach us that Boston—or anywhere else, for that matter—needs more surveillance cameras.

*This commentary was co-authored with Sharon Bradford Franklin, senior policy counsel at The Constitution Project.*

Sloan, Ginny and Sharon Bradford Franklin. “Will More Video Surveillance Cameras Make Us Any Safer?” *huffingtonpost.com.* The Huffington Post. 28 Jun. 2013. Web. 19 Apr. 2014.