

RHODRI JEFFREYS-JONES, *We Know All About You: The Story of Surveillance in Britain and America* (Oxford UP, 2017), 304 pp.

The 2013 NSA scandal triggered by whistleblower Edward Snowden intensified fears that new technologies and government surveillance had ushered in an era of “post-privacy,”¹ the age of the “surveillance society.”² While mass data collection, online-tracking, the advent of social media, and the ubiquity of smartphones certainly call for heightened attention to privacy concerns in the early 21st century, Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones reminds us of the long history of surveillance. In his study *We Know All About You*, the author surveys the history and current state of surveillance in the United States and the United Kingdom, beginning in the late 17th and early 18th centuries and leading up to Snowden and the Obama-Cameron era. A negotiation of conflicting needs guides many of the questions that his study addresses: How do governments and their intelligence agencies balance national security and individual privacy? Which factors contribute to a shift from benevolent vigilance and protection to overzealous spying and social control? What is the role of the private sector in modes and practices of surveillance? And how do Americans and Britons attempt to curb surveillance excesses and implement reform? Jeffreys-Jones speaks to these and more questions in his overarching narrative, masterfully combining insightful case studies with in-depth historical analysis. His focal point is a shift of emphasis from governments to the role of the “understudied phenomenon of private surveillance” (3) which often proves to be intricately linked with state surveillance.

In the introductory chapter entitled “A Survey of Surveillance” the author establishes the ambivalent role of the United States in the history of surveillance: on the one hand, he asserts, it was often the US who played a pioneering role in anti-surveillance efforts; at the same time, however, he stresses the leading role of the United States in the rise and intensification of surveillance, which he claims

is predicated on “the distinctively American combination of weak government and strong business” (13). An important and unexpected strand of surveillance is explored in chapter 2: private detective agencies like the Pinkerton National Detective Agency not only made surveillance in the 19th century “an American, and a private, affair” (20), but also ushered in more concerted efforts to monitor and disrupt unions. The rich and detailed account of the Pinkertons’ activities—they were hired by employers to infiltrate unions and intimidate labor movement activists—sets the stage for the next chapter. The intriguing case study of Englishman Tom Watkins, who was unable to find work after participating in a miner’s strike, illustrates the insidious system of blacklisting. This pervasive practice, which heavily relied on private informers, deeply affected workers and their families in both the United Kingdom and the United States and was fueled by the anti-left and anti-communist sentiments of the early twentieth century.

While blacklisting was and remained a contested issue, it was, according to Jeffreys-Jones, “the advent of middle-class concern that made surveillance a universal debating point” (74). Here, the author turns our attention to the United States and Franklin D. Roosevelt’s role in paving the way for the surveillance state by granting the FBI under J. Edgar Hoover unprecedented powers in bolstering security against communist and fascist activities within the United States. Despite the intense political surveillance conducted by the FBI, the author concludes that “America was far from being a police state” and urges the reader to resist the temptation to assume that “the concealment of evidence by the president and the FBI director meant they were engaged in a deep-seated conspiracy to spy on all Americans” (92). While the story of the FBI under FDR is insightfully described—Jeffreys-Jones is, after all, a historian of American intelligence and has published extensively on both the FBI and CIA—a discussion of the introduction of the Social Security Number in 1935—a pervasive system that for the first time made Americans identifiable and traceable—could have further supported the notion of FDR as a trailblazer for today’s surveillance state.

Jeffreys-Jones’s narrative and analytical skills are on fine display when he takes on McCarthyism in the following two chapters, outlining the development of the American

¹ Joshua Meyrowitz, “Post-Privacy America,” *Privatheit im öffentlichen Raum. Medienhandeln zwischen Individualisierung und Entgrenzung*, eds. Ralph Weiß and Jo Groebel (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2002), 153.

² See: http://www.surveillance-studies.net/?page_id=119.

'original' first, then dissecting the British version which he describes as "silent McCarthyism that affected millions but attracted little attention" (107). Under Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative prime minister who viewed the 1984 miner's strike as subversive and strikers as the enemy within, the United Kingdom's secret service MI5 drastically increased the surveillance of union leaders. Politically motivated surveillance, however, went well beyond the labor movement, Jeffreys-Jones notes, and included activists championing denuclearization and civil liberties proponents (123). Once again, the author highlights the intersection of state and private surveillance, for example through McCarthy's reliance on the "Loyal American Underground – civil servants who informed (or misinformed) on their colleagues" (103)—and vividly illustrates the corrosive effect of mistrust and mutual spying on the social fabric.

Chapter 7 tackles the story of the FBI's secret COINTELPRO program, which served to spy on and disrupt a number of targets since its inception in 1956: the Communist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, the KKK, Black nationalist groups, and, starting in 1968, the New Left. Far from being the only surveillance program, Jeffreys-Jones observes that in the 1960s "government surveillance was becoming an ingrained tendency in American life" (133). The backlash against this development is analyzed as "An Age of Transparency" (chapter 8), when government and presidential transgressions—the Watergate scandal broke in 1972—created disillusionment and fostered mistrust in authorities. Information leaked to the press and the Church Committee's hearings disclosed the appalling practices of the US intelligence agencies, leading to sinking approval ratings of the FBI, CIA, and NSA—and ultimately paving the way for more regulation of governmental powers with the Privacy Act of 1974, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 (FISA), and the Computer Matching and Privacy Protection Act of 1988. These restrictions, Jeffreys-Jones emphasizes, serve as a "benchmark for future political discourse" (164) and "help[ed] to inspire reform in the United Kingdom and elsewhere," making the US a pioneer in the "rebalancing of national security and civil liberty" (169).

In the wake of 9/11 and the ensuing PATRIOT Act of 2001 surveillance intensified drastically, however, and "new attitudes and politics scarcely had a chance to bed down"

(183). The new terrorist threat increased public acceptance of surveillance, while the FISA court proved to be "a pushover, with few requests turned down" (180). Later, the author warns that "where governments possess surveillance powers they will, eventually, abuse them," and calls for "credible legislative and judicial oversight" (246). Turning away from state spying to "Private-Sector Surveillance in the Twenty-First Century" in the next chapter, Jeffreys-Jones argues that the contemporary surveillance practices of private actors not only led to new allegations of blacklisting practices (187), but made one thing clear: "the main threat to privacy is private, and not the public apparatus of an Orwellian state" (188). Again, Jeffreys-Jones draws our attention to the public/private nature of many surveillance activities, focusing on intelligence agencies: By 2006, he states, "70 per cent of the \$28 billion US national intelligence programme consisted of private contracts," making the state a "progenitor of a boom in the private security industry" (189). While private sector surveillance is hardly an understudied phenomenon per se—the academic literature on digital surveillance by private companies is extensive, but does not figure prominently in *We Know All About You* (Google and Facebook are barely mentioned)—it certainly rings true that the media and public tend to focus on the trope of Big Brother and more often than not view state surveillance as the bigger threat to privacy and civil liberties. Here, it would be interesting to look beyond corporations or agencies and focus on the individual's role in today's surveillance society, especially with regard to online behavior. Critics like Zygmunt Bauman have argued that a "confessional society" has ushered in a culture of self-surveillance, enticing users to engage in a "voluntary, do-it-yourself form of surveillance, beating hands down [...] the specialist agencies manned by professionals of spying and detection."³

Two factors make Jeffreys-Jones analysis more than worthwhile for both the interested public and scholarly readers: First, the continuing focus on labor surveillance allows the author to uncover the long history of today's practices of monitoring workers' com-

³ Zygmunt Bauman and Leonidas Don-skis, *Moral Blindness: The Loss of Sensitivity in Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 57-58.

munication and anti-unionism. Second, the comparative approach to the topic elegantly narrates the entangled stories of UK and US surveillance. Noting that the United States was quicker to implement reform with regard to state surveillance, but stressing that UK citizens demonstrated a higher degree of wariness towards private sector surveillance (but failing to implement serious regulations), Jeffreys-Jones convincingly reasons that Americans' reverence for private business and UK citizens' higher level of acceptance of government surveillance account for these differences.

While class issues and workers' rights figure prominently in *We Know All About You*, a broader view of social inequality and surveillance would make Jeffrey-Jones' story of surveillance even more compelling. Biometric and video surveillance, for example, often prove to be ineffective in fighting crime, but intensify social sorting and racial profiling.

Studies have examined the racialized⁴ and gendered nature of surveillance and contributed to our understanding of the unequal distribution of the surveillant gaze, and the policing of and scrutiny towards the female body are pertinent to the study of surveillance.⁵ These minor points of criticism aside, Jeffreys-Jones presents readers with a very readable, accessible, and informative comparative history of US and UK surveillance practices. Spanning several centuries and drawing on a wealth of vividly narrated case studies, Jeffrey-Jones' rich transatlantic analysis and masterful storytelling make *We Know All About You* a fascinating read. A historical perspective on surveillance is a valuable contribution to a discourse that is all too often overshadowed by alarmist notions of an unprecedented surveillance crisis that invoke an Orwellian dystopia and routinely proclaim the death of privacy.

Bärbel Harju (Munich)

⁴ Simone Browne, *Dark Matters. On the Surveillance of Blackness* (Durham, NC: Duke UP 2015).

⁵ Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Shoshana Amielle Magnet (eds.), *Feminist Surveillance Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke UP 2015).