

How the government is watching you—and what you can do about it

The Age of Surveillance

Most people believe that they have some fundamental right to privacy—but how can anyone achieve privacy in an age when people are constantly surveilled by ever-more-sophisticated technology, on phones, GPS devices, surveillance cameras, and more? At the 2017 Cato Surveillance Conference, experts, policymakers, technologists, and civil society advocates gathered to discuss the state of surveillance and what can be done to stop the erosion of Americans' privacy. Rep. Ted Lieu (D-CA) delivered the opening remarks, recalling that his Taiwanese parents came to America precisely because America was a country where citizens had no need to fear their own government. Lieu warned that mass surveillance programs, such as those authorized by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act's controversial Section 702, which allows the government to intercept Americans' communications, are endangering the American dream his parents came here in search of. A series of flash talks throughout the afternoon went in-depth into surveillance techniques and how the government shields them from the public eye—through the practice of parallel construction, for example, which Sarah St. Vincent of Human Rights Watch dubbed “one of the most frightening civil liberties issues that you may never have heard of.” (See page 9). Justin Hansford of Howard University delivered



Top: Professors ANDREW FERGUSON and MARGARET HU, reporter JUSTIN JOUVENAL, and JOHN GRANT of Palantir Technologies; bottom: REP. TED LIEU (D-CA) and JUSTIN HANSFORD of Howard University.

the lunch keynote address, in which he reviewed the FBI's long history of surveilling civil rights activists under the guise of targeting “extremists.” A final panel discussed what self-defense strategies citizens can employ to shield themselves from surveillance. For example, Steve Bell previewed his venture Orchid Labs, which aims to build a totally decentralized, anonymous, and surveillance-

free layer of the internet by allowing users to sell their bandwidth—this way, users in countries where internet use is heavily regulated and surveilled, such as China, can purchase bandwidth from freer countries in the West, increasing global freedom and thwarting government surveillance. ■

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recognition technology on very minor crimes. They use it not only to shame jaywalkers, but also to report that crime to the police when it occurs. The Russian government is very actively using face recognition to crack down on anti-corruption and anti-government protesters. They publish protesters' names online and subject them to harassment if not arrest and

incarceration. And then a final note on real-time surveillance: China has 200 million cameras. They're planning to implement 400 million more in the coming years. They have real-time face recognition in a lot of these cameras. The BBC just did a report on this where they had the system enroll the face of one of their correspondents, and he was found by the face recognition system within seven

minutes of walking out the door. These systems are far more advanced than what we're seeing in the United States today. But without restrictions, without laws in place to limit these systems, without transparency, without public knowledge about this, these systems are being deployed, and there are very few practical limitations on a U.S. agency deciding to purchase them. ■