

History 284: From the KGB to the Elf on the Shelf
Surveillance in Modern History
Spring 2023: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 1:00-1:50

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Office hours: Tues. 10:30-
11:30; Fri. 2-3; or by
appointment

Course Overview

This course examines the political, social, and cultural history of mass surveillance in America, Britain, the USSR, China, and several European countries, looking at the use of informers and secret agents in authoritarian regimes, the efforts of governments across the industrialized world to shape their citizens through mass information-gathering, modern cultures of state secrecy and surveillance, and technology's growing role in the monitoring of everyday citizens by governments and corporations alike. What role did World War I and American empire in the Philippines play in the growth of US surveillance? Why did a British group called Mass Observation recruit "observers" to spy on everyday citizens in pubs in the decade before World War II? How did the KGB balance its goals of planting secret agents in the population and convincing citizens to report on each other to the regime, and how did East Germany's Stasi convince husbands and wives to spy on each other? These are just a few of the questions we'll ask as we study the history of mass surveillance from the rise of the modern state to the rise of Google.

Course Readings

The following book is available for purchase at the college bookstore and is available in an electronic version through Burling Library:

Gary Bruce, *The Firm: The Inside Story of the Stasi*

Other readings (marked "[Pioneerweb]" below) will be available on the course's Blackboard site.

Learning Goals

This course has three broad objectives: to help students understand the modern history of surveillance (in its many different forms), to enable them to critically read both primary documents and secondary sources, and to help them improve their analytical writing skills. But it also has several more specific goals:

Historical Analysis Goals

By the end of the semester, students who have completed this course will be able to:

- explain the meaning of three different concepts (surveillance state, surveillance society, and surveillance capitalism) while discussing the relationship between these phenomena and the factors driving the development of each phenomenon;

- explain how and why the concept of surveillance has changed over time. To what extent is political surveillance in 18th-century France the same as political surveillance in 21st-century China?
- discuss the role of technology, state formation, empire-building, war, and economic change in the development of surveillance around the world.

Critical Reading Goals ^[L] _[SEP]

By the end of the course, students will have refined their ability to:

- interpret a primary source (historical document) by analyzing its structure, audience, goals, and biases;
- identify and critique the argument of a secondary text (a book or article by a present-day historian), while situating that text within a larger historical debate or literature.

Analytical Writing Goals

By the end of the semester, students will have improved their ability to:

- craft a clear, specific, and nuanced thesis statement in response to a historical question;
- construct a well-organized, evidence-rich, and cohesive paper in defense of a central argument

Office Hours

I strongly encourage students to come talk to me during my office hours, so we can discuss course readings, assignments, the study of history, or related issues. This semester I will always be available to meet with on Tuesdays from 10:30 to 11:30 and on Fridays from 2:00 to 3:00 (immediately after class), either in my office (ARH 3226) or (weather permitting) outside.

These are drop-in hours; you are welcome to come by without an appointment (and, in fact, I will leave these hours free for drop-ins.) You are also welcome to email me to arrange a different time to meet. I will most likely cancel my regular office hours a couple weeks each semester (say, during registration week) and instead offer meetings by appointment only. But I can always find time to meet with you, so please don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions or need to discuss something.

Students are welcome to meet with me to discuss any questions they might have about this course, the study of history, or other academic issues at Grinnell. If you're having trouble with a written assignment, I particularly encourage you to come: for instance, if you get stuck writing a thesis statement or can't figure out what you want to say in a paper, it's often better to meet with someone about it than to try to just push yourself to get something done. I'm also happy to discuss course readings in more detail, to answer questions, to talk about the history major, or to discuss any academic questions that might concern you.

Assignments and Grading

Your grade in this class will be based on the following requirements. Note that you must hand in every assignment listed below in order to pass the class, and that if your grades improve steadily over the course of the semester, I will take that into consideration in deciding your final grade:

- A 2-page paper providing a definition of surveillance (10% of your final grade)

- A 3-page paper on the relationship between surveillance and authoritarianism (15% of your final grade)
- An approximately 8-page analysis of documents from the Mass-Observation movement in the United Kingdom (20% of your final grade)
- Preliminary assignments for the Mass-Observation paper (10% of your grade)
- A take-home exam (with essay questions) (20% of your final grade)
- Class participation (25% of your grade)

Here are some general observations about class participation:

- Class participation is the largest part of your grade for several reasons, but the most important one is this: I believe that being able to delve into an intelligent, nuanced, civil, and respectful discussion with your peers is one of the most important skills a liberal arts education can give you. Moreover, having everyone participate—in one way or another—makes the experience better for everyone.
- Remember that there are many ways to participate in class discussions. The strongest participants in discussion will often make comments that analyze the readings (rather than merely recapping them), but I expect that active participants in discussion will play different roles at different times. For example, here are some different rhetorical moves you might make in class:
 - Answer a question posed by me or a classmate
 - Ask a question for the class to consider
 - Summarize a reading or part of a reading
 - Provide evidence or an example for a point someone else has made
 - Disagree (respectfully!) with a previous comment from class
 - Agree with a previous comment from class while adding an example or making a further connection
 - Connect two comments made by different discussion participants
 - Connect the day's reading to an earlier reading
- In general, any form of participation that shows engagement with the material and helps the class to understand the course's subject matter is fair game. Remember, too, that class participation depends not only on speaking, but on listening—both to me and to your classmates. Be respectful, listen carefully, and be ready to respond to your classmates and not just to me.
- Another general rule: *All else being equal, it will help you to provide evidence for your arguments when you speak in class.* Ground your participation in the text: be ready to quote the readings or to point out specific passages that you find useful, significant, or relevant.
- You should therefore come to class with copies of the day's reading and with your notes on what you've read. (You are welcome to bring the readings either in hard copies or on a computer, but you should remember that it is often easier to mark significant passages in a paper copy of the readings.) In particular, I recommend that you make note of quotations and details in the readings that you find especially compelling.
- Although I hope that all students will take part in the discussion (ideally speaking at least once per class session on average), remember that the thoughtfulness of your comments is generally more important than the quantity of your remarks.

- I also realize that some students will always be more talkative or more reserved than others. I'm happy to talk to you at any time about ways you might become more involved, and I think it's part of my job to make sure the classroom atmosphere is conducive to a broad, inclusive discussion.
- Students sometimes ask if talking to me in office hours can substitute for participation in class. My answer: not entirely. Talking to me in class can show engagement with the material, so if you've been quiet in class, it can help me understand how you've related to course materials. (If you've been active in class, I'm also happy to talk to you, but coming to office hours won't improve your grade.) On the other hand, I value class participation in part because discussion helps all your classmates to understand the course material and to have a good class experience, so coming to office hours is never a perfect substitute for class discussion.
- Class participation depends on attendance. I'll therefore keep track of your attendance throughout the semester; in general, I lower your participation grade if you missed class more than three times and give a participation grade of F or zero to students who missed more than six times. My main suggestion for COVID times: please keep in touch with me if you're missing class! I am prepared to be more lenient than usual, especially in cases where students remain in contact with me about how things are going and show continued engagement with the class.
 - If you've already missed class three times, you can make sure a further absence does not affect your grade by sending me a roughly 300-word word email on the day's reading. (I won't accept such an email the first couple times you're absent, since I assume that everyone will be ill a couple times and won't penalize you for initial absences.) Under normal circumstances, this email will be due within 24 hours of the class period; it should analyze the day's reading using the approach discussed in our primary and secondary source handouts or answer a question I posed by email to the class.
 - It should go without saying that absences due to serious illness or to Covid isolation will not affect your participation grade. I will also not penalize students for absences due to travel for an athletic team (or other similar extracurricular activities), and students will never be penalized for missing class due to religious holidays. Be in touch with me if you have any questions.
- I will generally give each student a brief "participation update" when I send you feedback on a written assignment. I encourage you to check in with me at any point if you have questions about the class or about how you can become more involved in the discussion.

Extension policy

Each student in the class can have one (and only one) 48-hour extension on a writing assignment over the course of the semester. To claim this extension, send me a brief email asking for extra time before the assignment's deadline. I will grant this extension automatically, so there is no need for you to explain why you need more time. Keep in mind, however, that once you've been given an extension on an assignment, I will not give you an extension on another except in the case of a documented emergency. Note, too, that you can have one extension of up to 48 hours; you cannot break your extension into two 24-hour extensions, for example. In the absence of an extension, late assignments will be penalized one third of a letter grade per day.

Paper revision policy

Students in the class will also have the opportunity to revise one of their papers and to hand it in again for re-grading; if you choose to exercise this option, your final grade for the assignment will be the average of your original grade and the grade for your revised paper. (In other words, if you at first receive a grade of B– and you’re given a grade of B+ for the rewrite, you will earn a B on the paper overall.)

I require that students who want to revise a paper come speak to me early on in the revision process to discuss how you plan to respond to my feedback on the first version of your paper. (Please come to this meeting with a tentative plan for your revisions and a marked-up version of your original paper.) I also strongly encourage all my students to bring drafts of their papers to the Writing Center (both at the drafting and at the revision stage, though a Center Lab visit can be especially useful when you’re working on a revised paper.) Revised papers will be due on Friday, May 12 (the last days of regular class sessions before reading day and finals week.)

Important notes

My goal is to create as inclusive a classroom as possible and to meet the needs of all of my students. I therefore encourage students with documented disabilities, including invisible or non-apparent disabilities such as chronic illness, learning disabilities, and psychiatric disabilities, to discuss reasonable accommodations with me. You will also need to have a conversation about and provide documentation of your disability to the Coordinator for Student Disability Resources, Jae Hirschman.

I will also, of course, excuse absences related to religious observance and will be flexible with deadlines that conflict with any religious holidays. Please let me know early in the semester if you expect to miss class because of a religious observance.

SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Unit One: The Theory of Surveillance—and Surveillance before the 20th Century

Monday, January 23: Introduction to the Course

Wednesday, January 25: Theories of Surveillance

Reading: Josh Lauer, [Creditworthy](#), 3-25
David Lyon, “Situating Surveillance: History, Technology, Culture” [Pioneerweb]

Friday, January 27: The Origins of the Information State

Reading: Edward Higgs, *The Information State in England*, vii-xi, 1-63 [Pioneerweb]

Monday, January 30: The Enlightenment, Surveillance, and the Rise of the State

Reading: Jacob Soll, *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System*, 1-83 [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, February 1: Foucault and the Panopticon

Reading: Michel Foucault, "Panopticism" [Pioneerweb]

Friday, February 3: Surveillance in Early America

Reading: Lauer, [Creditworthy](#), pp. 26-78
Sarah Igo, *The Known Citizen*, pp. 17-54 [Pioneerweb]

Unit Two: War, Empire, and the Rise of Surveillance

Monday, February 6: State Surveillance in Twentieth-Century Britain

Reading: Edward Higgs, *The Information State in England*, 99-167 [Pioneerweb]

Monday, February 6: **2-page essay is due at 10:00 PM**

Wednesday, February 8: Progressivism, War, and Surveillance

Reading: William Thomas, *Unsafe for Democracy: World War I and the U.S. Justice Department's Covert Campaign to Suppress Dissent*, pp. 3-67, 172-177 [Pioneerweb]

Friday, February 10: Empire and Surveillance in the US

Reading: Alfred McCoy, *Policing America's Empire*, pp. 293-346 [Pioneerweb]

Monday, February 13: Social Security and Surveillance

Reading: Sarah Igo, *The Known Citizen*, pp. 55-99 [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, February 15: World War I and Surveillance in Russia and Beyond

Reading: Peter Holquist, "'Information is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work': Bolshevik Surveillance in its Pan-European Context" [Pioneerweb]
Catherine Katz, "Shadows of the First World War: Surveillance, Censorship, and the Right to Privacy" [Pioneerweb]

Friday, February 17: Stalinist Surveillance

Reading: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 164-194 [Pioneerweb]
Jan T. Gross, "A Note on the Nature of Soviet Totalitarianism" [Pioneerweb]

Monday, February 20: Surveillance and Crime in Germany

Reading: Sace Elder, “Murder, Denunciation, and Criminal Policing in Weimar Berlin”
[Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, February 22: Surveillance and Dictatorship in Twentieth-Century Germany

Reading: Robert Gellately, “Denunciations in Twentieth-Century Germany: Aspects of
Self-Policing in the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic”
[Pioneerweb]

Friday, February 24: The Gestapo and Nazi Surveillance

Reading: Claire Hall, “An Army of Spies? The Gestapo Spy Network 1933-45” [P-web]

Unit Three: Mass-Observation

Monday, February 27: Mass-Observation: An Introduction

Reading: *Mass-Observation* by Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson
“Mass-Observation: A Nation-Wide Intelligence Service”

Wednesday, March 1: Mass Observation in Broader Perspective

Readings: J. Michael Hogan, “The Road Not Taken in Opinion Research: Mass-Observation
in Great Britain, 1937-1940” [Pioneerweb]
Helen Macdonald, “Murmurations” [Pioneerweb]

Friday, March 3: Observers among Workers

Reading: Report from Mass-Observation on “Demolition in London, 1941”

Sunday, March 5: **3-page paper is due by 5:00 PM**

Monday, March 6: Did World War II Propaganda Posters Work?

Reading: “Government Posters in War-Time: Report from Mass-Observation”

Wednesday, March 8: Surveillance and War-Time Morale

Reading: reports on British morale during World War II

Friday, March 10: The War-Time Mood

Reading: “Christmas Shopping in War Time”

“Report from Mass-Observation on Public Opinion about Mr. Chamberlain”

Unit Four: Communist Surveillance

Monday, March 13: Soviet secret policing and the KGB

Reading: Julie Fedor, *Russia and the Cult of State Security*, pp. 1-57 [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, March 15: The KGB and Surveillance

Reading: Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]
Edward Cohn, “Coercion, Reeducation, and the Prophylactic Chat: *Profilaktika* and the KGB’s Struggle with Political Unrest in Lithuania” [Pioneerweb]
Mark Harrison and Inga Zaksauskienė, “Counter-Intelligence in a Planned Economy” [Pioneerweb]

Friday, March 17: Introducing the Stasi

Reading: Gary Bruce, *The Firm: The Inside Story of the Stasi*, intro and ch. 1
Stephen Kinzer, “East Germans Face their Accusers” [Pioneerweb]
Annalisa Quinn, “Piecing Together the Story of Stasi Spying” [Pioneerweb]

Assignment: **your Mass Observation paper proposal is due by 5:00 PM**

SPRING BREAK **March 18 to April 2**

Monday, April 3: Stasi Employees and Informants

Reading: Bruce, *The Firm*, ch. 2-3

Wednesday, April 5: Under the Stasi’s Eyes

Reading: Bruce, *The Firm*, ch. 4-6 and conclusion

Friday, April 7: The Stasi and Spy Technology

Reading: Kristie Macrakis, *Seduced by Secrets: Inside the Stasi’s Spy-Tech World*, pp. 225-280 [Pioneerweb]

Monday, April 10: Spying for the People in Mao’s China

Reading: Michael Schoenhals, *Spying for the People*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, April 12: Espionage and Ethnography

Reading: Katherine Verdery, *My Life as a Spy*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]

Friday, April 14: The Stasi on Film

Film screening: *The Lives of Others* (available on DVD by class reserve or online)
Assignment: **3-page “problem paper” on Mass-Observation is due by 5:00 PM**

Unit Five: The Late 20th-Century Surveillance State in America and Beyond

Monday, April 17: The FBI File of MLK

Reading: *Activists under Surveillance*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, April 19: FBI Surveillance and MLK

Reading: Jennifer Schuessler, “His Martin Luther King Biography Was a Classic. His Latest King Piece Is Causing a Furor” [Pioneerweb]
Caleb Crain, “Don’t Believe Everything You Read in an FBI File” [Pioneerweb]
Daniel Chard, “When the FBI Targeted the Poor People’s Campaign” [Pweb]

Friday, April 21: The FBI on Film

Viewing: *FBI/MLK* (available electronically for free; link to be provided)

Monday, April 24: FBI Surveillance at Grinnell in the 1970s

Reading: documents from the archives on the surveillance of Grinnell student activists in the civil rights and anti-Vietnam War movements [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, April 26: no class (working differently day)

Thursday, April 27: **Mass-Observation papers are due at 10:00 PM**

Friday, April 28: American Surveillance society

Reading: Joshua Reeves, *Citizen Spies: The Long Rise of America’s Surveillance Society*, pp. 21-50, 77-108 [Pioneerweb]

Monday, May 1: Consumer Surveillance in the Computer Age

Reading: Lauer, *Creditworthy*, chapters 8-9 and epilogue

Wednesday, May 3: A Surveillance Society?

Reading: Sarah Igo, *The Known Citizen*, pp. 221-263 [Pioneerweb]

Friday, May 5: The Information State and Social Control in Britain

Reading: Edward Higgs, *The Information State*, pp. 168-205 [Pioneerweb]

Monday, May 8: Surveillance Capitalism

Reading: Shoshanna Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, ch. 1 and 3 [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, May 10: The Future of Surveillance?

Reading: Laura Pinto and Selena Nemorin, “Who’s the Boss? ‘The Elf on the Shelf’ and the Normalization of Surveillance” [Pioneerweb]

“Surveillance and the ‘New Normal’ of COVID-19: Public Health, Data, and Justice” [Pioneerweb]

Sheena Greitens, “Surveillance, Security, and Liberal Democracy in the Post-COVID World” [Pioneerweb]

“The Chinese Surveillance State” and related materials from *The New York Times* [Pioneerweb]

Assignment: revised papers are due (optional) by 5:00 PM

Friday, May 12: Summing Things Up

Thursday, May 18: **take-home exam is due by 5:00 PM by email**