

History 295: From the KGB to the Elf on the Shelf
Surveillance in Modern History
Fall 2019: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 11:00-11:50

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Mears 316 (X3107)

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Office hours: Tuesday 9-10,
Wednesday 10-10:50
(HSSC atrium),
Thursday 2-3

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 pay “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 books are all available for purchase at the college bookstore and are on course reserve at Burling Library:

Gary Bruce, *The Firm: The Inside Story of the Stasi*
Josh Lauer, *Creditworthy: A History of Consumer Surveillance and Financial Identity in America*

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 many of its 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?
- explain the role of technology, state formation, empire-building, war, and economic change in the development of surveillance around the world.

Critical Reading Goals

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 students in my office (Mears 316) on Tuesdays from 9:00 to 10:00 and on Thursdays from 2:00 to 3:00. I will also be available to meet with students in the HSSC atrium from 10 to 10:50 on Wednesdays (between my two classes).

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. I can always find time to meet with you!

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: 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 4-page paper (15% of your final grade)
- An 8-to-10-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
 - 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.
- 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; missing class once or twice won't affect your grade, but if you have more than two unexcused absences, your participation grade will go down. If you have more than six unexcused absences, you will generally receive a participation grade of F or zero. Please contact me at least a week in advance if you will be missing class because of an athletic event or another campus activity.
- If you will be missing a class, you can make sure your absence does not affect your grade by sending me a 300-to-500 word email on the day's reading. 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.
- Finally, I will generally give each student a brief "participation update" each time I send you feedback on a written assignment. I also 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 Lab (both at the drafting and at the revision stage, though a Writing Lab visit can be especially useful when you’re working on a revised paper.)

Revised papers will be due on Friday, December 13 (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, John Hirschman, who is located on the 3rd floor of Goodnow Hall (x3089).

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

Friday, August 30: Introduction to the Course

Monday, September 2: Theories of Surveillance

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

Wednesday, September 4: The Origins of the Information State

Reading: Edward Higgs, *The Information State in England*, 1-63

Friday, September 6: 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]

Monday, September 9: Foucault and the Panopticon

Reading: Michel Foucault, "Panopticism" [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, September 11: Surveillance in Early America

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

Friday, September 13: State Surveillance in Twentieth-Century Britain

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

Sunday, September 15: **2-page essay is due at 5:00 PM**

Monday, September 16: 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]
Lon Strauss, "The National Surveillance State, Going Strong since 1917" [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, September 18: Empire and Surveillance in the US

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

Friday, September 20: Social Security and Surveillance

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

Monday, September 23: 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]

Wednesday, September 25: Stalinist Surveillance

Reading: Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, pp. 164-217 [Pioneerweb]

- Friday, September 27: **NO CLASS (the professor is at a conference)**
- Monday, September 30: Surveillance and Crime in Germany
- Reading: Sace Elder, “Murder, Denunciation, and Criminal Policing in Weimar Berlin”
[Pioneerweb]
- Wednesday, October 2: 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, October 4: The Gestapo and Nazi Surveillance
- Reading: Claire Hall, “An Army of Spies? The Gestapo Spy Network 1933-45” [P-web]
- Monday, October 7: Mass-Observation: An Introduction
- Reading: *Mass-Observation* by Charles Madge and Tom Harrison
“Mass-Observation: A Nation-Wide Intelligence Service”
- Wednesday, October 9: Scholars on Mass-Observation
- Readings: J. Michael Hogan, “The Road Not Taken in Opinion Research: Mass-Observation
in Great Britain, 1937-1940” [Pioneerweb]
Peter Gurney, “‘Intersex’ and ‘Dirty Girls’: Mass-Observation and Working-Class
Sexuality in England in the 1930s” [Pioneerweb]
- Friday, October 11: Observers among Workers
- Reading: Report from Mass-Observation on “Demolition in London, 1941”
- Monday, October 14: Did World War II Propaganda Posters Work?
- Reading: “Government Posters in War-Time: Report from Mass-Observation”
- Wednesday, October 16: Surveillance and War-Time Morale
- Reading: reports on British morale during World War II
- Friday, October 18: The War-Time Mood
- Reading: “Christmas Shopping in War Time”
“Report from Mass-Observation on Public Opinion about Mr. Chamberlain”
- Assignment: **3-page paper is due by 5:00 PM**

FALL BREAK: OCTOBER 19-27

Monday, October 28: Soviet secret policing and the KGB

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

Wednesday, October 30: The KGB and Surveillance

Reading: Oleg Kharkhordin, *The Collective and the Individual in Russia*, excerpts
[Pioneerweb]
Edward Cohn,
Harrison and Zaksauskiene

Friday, November 1: 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]

Sunday, November 3: **your Mass Observation paper proposal is due by 5:00 PM**

Monday, November 4: Stasi Employeers and Informants

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

Wednesday, November 6: Under the Stasi's Eyes

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

Friday, November 8: The Stasi and Spy Technology

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

Monday, November 11: Spying for the People in Mao's China

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

Wednesday, November 13: Espionage and Ethnography

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

Friday, November 15: The Stasi on Film

Film screening: *The Lives of Others* (screening to be arranged)

Assignment: **3-page "problem paper" on Mass-Observation is due by 5:00 PM**

Monday, November 18: Reining in the US Security State

Reading: Kathryn Olmsted, *Challenging the Secret Government: The Post-Watergate Investigations of the CIA and FBI*, excerpts [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, November 20: FBI Surveillance and MLK

Reading: David Garrow, "The Troubling Legacy of Martin Luther King" [Pioneerweb]
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" [Pioneerweb]

Friday, November 22: 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]

Monday, November 25: **NO CLASS (the professor is at a conference)**

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

Wednesday, November 27: Consumer Surveillance in the Postwar US

Reading: Lauer, chapters 6-7

Friday, November 29: **THANKSGIVING BREAK**

Monday, December 2: Consumer Surveillance in the Computer Age

Reading: Lauer, chapters 8-9 and epilogue

Wednesday, December 4: A Surveillance Society?

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

Friday, December 6: The Information State and Social Control in Britain

Reading: Higgs, pp. 168-205

Monday, December 9: Surveillance, Crime, and the War on Terror

Reading: Athan Theoharis, "Expanding U.S. Surveillance Powers: The Costs of Secrecy" [Pioneerweb]
Benjamin Goold, Ian Loader and Angélica Thumala, "The Banality of Security:

The Curious Case of Surveillance Cameras” [Pioneerweb]

Wednesday, December 11: Surveillance Capitalism

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

Friday, December 13: 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]
“The Chinese Surveillance State” and related materials from *The New York Times* [Pioneerweb]

Thursday, December 19: **take-home exam is due by 5:00 PM by email**