

From the Archive #3: Privacy, Technology, and National Security

Jennifer Stoever 

Blog post published May 31, 2010 in *Sounding Out!*

<https://doi.org/10.59350/h5pvk-25a02>

Abstract

“Among technology’s dubious gifts to the 20th century is an ever-growing array of devices for snooping: wiretapping refinements, tiny movie cameras, camera film that takes pictures in the dark, microphones so sensitive that they can pick up a whisper through a masonry wall, tape recorders so compact that they will fit into a coat pocket.

Keywords

Music (Subfield), American Studies, Archival, Law, Listening, Recording

Recommended citation

Stoever, J. (2010, May 31). From the Archive #3: Privacy, Technology, and National Security. *Sounding Out!*. <https://doi.org/10.59350/h5pvk-25a02>

Copyright

Copyright © Jennifer Stoever 2010. Distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

“Among technology’s dubious gifts to the 20th century is an ever-growing array of devices for snooping: wiretapping refinements, tiny movie cameras, camera film that takes pictures in the dark, microphones so sensitive that they can pick up a whisper through a masonry wall, tape recorders so compact that they will fit into a coat pocket. Long before 1984, the state of affairs depicted by novelist George Orwell will be a technological possibility: ‘you had to live. . .in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard. . .every moment scrutinized.’



Sooner or later, free societies must deal with the danger that increasingly sensitive electronic eyes and ears may destroy personal freedom by annihilating privacy. This whole field of technological surveillance needs legislative attention. The Government cannot be given unlimited power to peep and to pry. ‘The greatest dangers to liberty,’ wrote Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis with reference to wiretapping, ‘lurk in insidious encroachment by men of zeal.’ But the government needs some power to balance the criminal’s new advantages to conspiracy against the national security.”

Time Magazine, “The Debate on Wiretapping,” January 4, 1954

Who would have thought a mainstream magazine article written during the height of the cold war would someday read like a liberal manifesto?

JSA

