



THEY KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT YOU

## HOW DATA-COLLECTING CORPORATIONS AND SNOOPING GOVERNMENT AGENCIES ARE DESTROYING DEMOCRACY

ROBERT SCHEER

AUTHOR OF THE GREAT AMERICAN STICK-UP

# They Know Everything About You: How Data-Collecting Corporations and Snooping Government Agencies Are Destroying Democracy

*Robert Scheer*

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## They Know Everything About You: How Data-Collecting Corporations and Snooping Government Agencies Are Destroying Democracy Robert Scheer

*They Know Everything About You* is a groundbreaking exposé of how government agencies and tech corporations monitor virtually every aspect of our lives, and a fierce defense of privacy and democracy.

The revelation that the government has access to a vast trove of personal online data demonstrates that we already live in a surveillance society. But the erosion of privacy rights extends far beyond big government. Intelligence agencies such as the NSA and CIA are using Silicon Valley corporate partners as their data spies. Seemingly progressive tech companies are joining forces with snooping government agencies to create a brave new world of wired tyranny.

Life in the digital age poses an unprecedented challenge to our constitutional liberties, which guarantee a wall of privacy between the individual and the government. The basic assumption of democracy requires the ability of the individual to experiment with ideas and associations within a protected zone, as secured by the Constitution. The unobserved moment embodies the most basic of human rights, yet it is being squandered in the name of national security and consumer convenience.

Robert Scheer argues that the information revolution, while a source of public enlightenment, contains the seeds of freedom's destruction in the form of a surveillance state that exceeds the wildest dream of the most ingenious dictator. The technology of surveillance, unless vigorously resisted, represents an existential threat to the liberation of the human spirit.

## They Know Everything About You: How Data-Collecting Corporations and Snooping Government Agencies Are Destroying Democracy Details

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## **Jonathan says**

Well, that was terrifying. Hello NSA, this is my book review!

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## **Terry says**

This book editorializes the effects of Edward Snowden's leaks regarding the NSA's overreach and I agree with most Scheer has to say. Further, he sheds new light on the developing relationship between the Washington politicians and the Silicon Valley elite. I wish the book offered more original research and suggestions and less repeating of how serious a threat our loss of privacy is to democracy.

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## **LeAnn says**

Politicians who lie, telecom companies that turn over private citizens' data, government spy agencies finding loopholes around the 4th amendment, prosecuting whistleblowers, threatening (killing?) reporters, mapping the entire internet, none of this is surprising or shocking. Scary, yes, shocking, no. Americans do not seem to care about government surveillance. That is what is shocking. The most important message I took from this book is that 'liberty does not have to be sacrificed for security'. We should still have the 'right to privacy in the digital age'.

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## **LOL\_BOOKS says**

WHAT BOOKS HAVE YOU BEEN READING, MEMERITAS?

WHY NATIONS FAIL, THEY KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT US AND LOSING GROUND. ALL OF THESE BOOKS ARE BOARING. :(

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## **David Lentz says**

I'm in a quandary, a pickle, a trick bag, a jam. They know everything. Not only about me. But also about you. So they know I'm writing this review now and it may come back to haunt me. I want to share with you what I've learned from this book. But sooner or later, one day or another, I may regret writing this review. And you may regret reading it. Like every serious writer I know about the First Amendment. And the Fourth Amendment about illegal search and seizure without probable cause and a warrant. I'm not paranoid. But as a poet, I am perceptive. I dreamed a dream that I lived in a free country. But I don't. None of us does. Not any

more. Because they know everything. But who are they? NSA, CIA, FBI, IRS. Somehow this Federal, alphabet soup bought all this technology with your hard earned tax dollars and they are using it against you. They mean to scare you and intimidate you with the power of their technology. They want to keep you safe. They want you to be a good citizen. They want you to pay more taxes than multi-billion dollar corporations sending money offshore to tax safe havens. They want to keep away the bad guys. They want to go to war to sell guns and oil. They want to know what you're up to. No worries because if you're not doing anything wrong, why should you care about giving up your freedom so they can protect you from the bad guys? You are simply not safe here. People are out to get you. They have weapons of mass destruction. It's easily worth the trade-off. Life is dangerous, after all, as they have told you countless times. There could be a red alert any day now. That could really up the ante. But they know how to contact you. If you use a search engine, they know what you buy. If you use Google maps, they know where you are and where you've been and where you live. They know your financial transactions, credit card information, loans, where you work, gender, marital status, age, street address. They know about your love life. They know what people think about you. Are you a member of any clubs? They know about it. You told them all about yourself on Facebook. Here's the part which immediately affects us: they know the books you read and may even write. They even know what you think about the books you read. Take this review as an example. Let's face it: you can kiss your privacy goodbye. It's gone. It was fun for a while, whimsical... I wax sentimental just thinking about all the good times I had in my privacy. I miss it so much. Sniff, sniff. I shed a tear at its passage. But don't bemoan its passing: I'm just glad I had it for so many years. So what's to be done? Become a Luddite? The case for this philosophy of brutes and monoliths and even the simple-minded among us is getting stronger every day. Move into the wilderness out of range? Tempting, tempting. Move to another country? But where? They speak English here. Not the King's English. But they speak the jargon, the argot, the vernacular: something which resembles a country bumpkin, slang version of it. No, I think not. I am highly biased in favor of the English of the King against whom we rebelled as a nation due in part to his penchant for illegal search and seizure. Pandora's Box has been opened and there's no putting the genie back in the bottle: just ask Mr. Snowden. Now, I've gone and done it: this review will probably pop-up on some screen on the plains of Utah or in Virginia somewhere or Google. They'll think I'm disgruntled or maybe unmanageable or, God forbid, an unpatriotic citizen. If you have an ounce of perception and you see life as it is, where we live, it makes them angry. Your views agitate them. And they care what you think. Red lights blink upon consoles. Little blips and bleeps and flashing text comes out of their machines. And you just never know whether the persons who see all these red flags, as they are called in the business of security, have any sense of humanity. They may want to screw with you just for fun. They may misunderstand you. They may think you are a danger to your fellow man. They may lack a sense of humor or irony. They may want to destroy you utterly. It's a kind of Russian Roulette as to who is reading all this big data they've scooped up about you. What do you know about them? Probably not as much as they know about you. How could you? They are tight-lipped. They're sworn to secrecy. Has your computer crashed recently? It could be them. It's one of their calling cards to let you know they're watching. FISA Court? Don't make me laugh: we're not worth it to them. It's a one-way street and we're heading down it the wrong way for all they know. Your file is vast. It could fill a library. As Whitman wrote, "I am a multitude." Have you read your personal file lately? They have. And they are paid to keep you in line. So here is my best advice: reclaim your First and Fourth Amendment Rights. How? Buy the best encryption that you can afford and live your life as our Founding Fathers intended. Be responsible. Love your nation. But be free. Because then they won't know everything about you. But rather only those things you want them to know. And that should suffice. Because if you're not doing anything wrong, they should have nothing to fear from you. Spare yourself and "Like" this review at your own peril. Because they're watching. And they know everything about you. How are you not overcome by the chilling effect of it?

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### **Jim says**

I'm a fan of Robert Scheer from his website TruthDig as well as his weekly appearances on one of my favorite podcasts, "Left, Right and Center" from KCRW in Los Angeles. This book is a great companion read to Glenn Greenwald's "No Place to Hide," which is also about the surveillance state but with a special emphasis on Edward Snowden's revelations. Scheer's book relates modern digital surveillance to the 4th Amendment and how it impacts privacy. It's quite astonishing to read about how every keystroke you make it seems is being logged either by a corporation or by the government, so much of it in the vain hope of catching terrorists. Scheer also lays out why this reasoning is faulty, and convincingly so. I think we see that evidence all around us, as terrorist events keep happening that weren't on anyone's radar - which would seem to argue that all this metadata collection really isn't doing that much good. It's a dry read compared to Greenwald's "spy novel" pace, but well worth the time.

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### **Freeson says**

Like most people, I click through the terms of service agreements of most websites I visit mindlessly. Surely Yelp knowing my location is okay if they're just trying to find me a good restaurant, right? *They Know Everything About You* takes a penetrating look at this mindset and details the extent to which private corporations - the Googles, Facebooks, and Palantirs of the world - have worked with the United States government in destroying the average citizen's privacy in the name of national security. Scheer makes the argument that all the data collected in the name of, for example, the Patriot act, has not made us safer. It has been a failure to connect the dots, rather than a failure of collecting dots. The story behind Palantir, with the CIA propping it up for most of its early life, really struck me. Scheer also argues for the importance of whistle-blowing and the lack of protections for them. Scheer writes clearly and eloquently about such invasions of privacy and vehemently argues for increased privacy of the people.

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### **Victoria says**

Surveillance State=Zero Personal Privacy=New Normal

This is a good read that probably just scratches the surface in exposing the tentacles reaching out to grab your personal data. The 24/7/365 collection grab is mind blowing.

Other than educating yourself about who/what/where/when/why/ and how it's currently being done, (and newer/creative ways are always being invented) there is really nothing you can do. Data mining is now ingrained into every aspect of your existence... Sigh...

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### **Gloria says**

Written in 2014, this gives a relatively succinct overview of the revelations by Edward Snowden regarding the NSA as well as the reactions by particular people in government. It also covers the partnerships between corporations (large, global corporations, i.e. Google, Facebook, Amazon, etc.) and government intelligence agencies. The corporations (mostly) make their money by data mining, which most people don't(?) have a problem with because it allows the companies to provide personalized recommendations for them; but the government also dips into the data mining done by the companies.

People who were concerned about the revelations by Snowden believe he should be pardoned - even today in 2017, Snowden is a fugitive, in Russia because his American passport was revoked before he could get to a country offering him asylum. Others, and prominent government officials among them, believe he is a traitor and should be imprisoned.

The book covers the continual prosecution of journalists and their sources, as well as whistleblowers, by both the Bush and Obama administrations. At the time of the writing of the book, there was one being prosecuted that had not had an outcome. Others were indicted on felonies, but pled to lesser charges.....

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### **Carman Chew says**

Just a long-ass version of the snowden story? okay I mean there's data here and there (hence the two instead of one), but just long-winded in general

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### **Michael says**

Scariest book I've read in years. I haven't slept much since I've finished it. How the hell do you get off this technology ride ? Sadly, this book doesn't tell you. Maybe the sequel will.

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### **Neil H says**

The ease and convenient reliance on technology to provide information without the enlightenment of the cultural, political, economic, academic and ground research knowledge in its proper context places all of us including the ones in governmental power into confused lull of belief in data computation prowess. Whether it's silicon Valley, capitalism and consumerism driven by advertising or purchasing dollars. We risk the very real danger of non contemplative thoughts.

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### **Paul Brannan says**

By happy coincidence my two latest library books were delivered at the same time: a hardback on Shakespeare's coded writing, *Shadowplay*, by Clare Asquith and a digital copy of Robert Scheer's *They Know Everything About You*.

Though separated by almost 500 years they share a number of common themes: manipulation of the law, curtailment of individual rights and abuse of power.

It's tempting to think of a meeting between Elizabeth I's spymaster Sir Francis Walsingham and his present day NSA counterparts. How he would have marveled at, and enjoyed, the apparatus of the watchers of the modern state.

Along with William Cecil, Elizabeth's chief adviser, Walsingham turned England into a police state. Feared threats from Catholic plotters at home and Jesuit infiltrators abroad were met with manhunts, torture,

extracted confessions and executions.

Fast forward to the post 9-11 period and substitute al-Qaeda or ISIS for the Catholic menace and the same tactics and justifications are being made for the extraordinary powers needed to protect the homeland.

Since 9-11 the US has spent more than \$500bn on intelligence, according to veteran journalist Scheer.

Following the attack on the World Trade Center, “priorities shifted from viewing the preservation of individual liberty as the guarantor of freedom to the justification of unbridled government power exercised in the name of preserving national security”.

And we’ve all gone along with it. We’ve become inured to intrusion and surrendered our privacy.

We accept CCTVs recording our presence, we know our emails are sifted for keywords, we willingly surrender our location history, we helpfully codify our social networks, we give up our relationship status and a million other things without being compelled to do so. We do it because on balance it makes our lives easier; we’ve traded convenience for privacy.

So far, so yawn. But Scheer reminds us there’s also a darker side to today’s unprecedented level of data gathering: “The point of Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* was to show that the public would come to accept totalitarian intrusion as part of the normal fabric of life, as something that was actually good for them”.

Except, of course, that it’s not. Scheer contends that the US surveillance state, governed by secrecy, drew the country into a futile search for weapons of mass destruction, a war with Iraq, and laid the foundation for the emergence of a jihadi caliphate hundreds of times bigger and better organized than al-Qaeda.

The war on terror had become a war on the public’s right to know, a bipartisan crusade that destroyed the foundation of democracy – an informed public.

It was only through whistleblower Edward Snowden’s disclosures that we came to learn digital behemoths like Google, Facebook, AoL and Microsoft had been compelled (some more willingly than others) to surrender vast amounts of data to the state surveillance apparatus.

The dirty secret of the internet was that it was privacy and not just advertising that was being sold.

Scheer states: “While there is no doubt the commercial exploitation of our most intimate practices to enhance advertising sales is destructive of privacy, it is a qualitatively different assault than secret monitoring by a government agency.”

He argues that government intrusions subvert constitutional intent and basic rights, specifically the Fourth Amendment’s guarantee of private space to collect one’s thoughts and papers free from the intimidating surveillance of government.

All the more surprising then that President Obama, a former constitutional law professor, has not only continued Bush-era surveillance powers but has expanded “on that horrid legacy” by cracking down on the press and prosecuting more whistleblowers under the Espionage Act than all previous US presidents combined.

It is here that Scheer delivers his most withering criticism of the president using a campaign speech the then-Senator Obama delivered in 2007 to deride President Bush's "false choice between the liberties we cherish and the security we demand".

His own administration, he said, would provide tools to take out terrorists without undermining the Constitution: "That means no more illegal wire-tapping of American citizens. No more national security letters to spy on citizens who are not suspected of a crime...No more ignoring the law when it is not convenient. That is not who we are. And it is not what is necessary to defeat terrorists. The FISA court works. The separation of powers works. Our Constitution works..."

Scheer's analysis is a gift to critics of the Obama administration but his frustration goes far deeper than simple partisan politics. He is neither a hysterical commentator, nor a soapbox scaremonger, but a man who believes the nation is sleepwalking on a dangerous path towards its own destruction.

In a rallying call for citizen action he cites the dictum that: "The most common way people give up their power is by thinking that they don't have any".

And he warns: "If we persist in apathetically accepting the privacy invasions of corporations and the predations of our own government – perhaps believing the war is already lost – our dystopian future is clear: a world where our private and public spheres are the same, where any agency or business or even individual who can afford the fee can scrutinize us at their leisure, and penalize us for any perceived defect or nonconformity."

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### **Rachel says**

I really liked it. ????????

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### **Jon says**

There are a lot of footnotes and it seems to be well-researched, but the slant of this book (maybe rightly so) really detracts from the writing. It always sounded like it was coming out of the mouth of the well-read conspiracy theorist nut friend we all seem to know. He can spout the truth all day, but the way he says it shuts out the message.

As I was reading, this felt like it was saying "and THEN do you know what they did? Do you? Oh, I'll tell you what those bastards did, and how."

It's somewhat interesting if you can ignore the slant.

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