Book Review

Review of Reeves, Joshua. 2017. *Citizen Spies: The Long Rise of America's Surveillance Society*. New York: New York University Press.

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What do George Zimmerman, D.A.R.E. drug prevention programs, and TV personality John Walsh have in common? In his book *Citizen Spies: The Long Rise of America's Surveillance Society*, Joshua Reeves argues that they are all examples of the extraordinarily widespread, powerful, and sometimes misguided effort to use ordinary citizens in policing and social control efforts. The central problematic of the book is a theoretical and historical focus on lateral surveillance, framed around the post-9/11 slogan, "If you see something, say something." *Citizen Spies* is an extraordinarily wide-ranging look at how "American citizens have been imagined and deployed as crucial—yet unpredictable and potentially dangerous—resources for policing the American experiment" (p. 3). This thesis is explored through substantive chapters on police crowdsourcing, 911 emergency response, neighborhood watch organizations, drug policing in schools, and terrorism.

There are several notable strengths of *Citizen Spies*, the first and most significant is its focus on communication. In the work, Reeves, a New Media Communications scholar at Oregon State University, foregrounds the second half of the phrase noted above: the urge for citizens to "say something." An implicit assumption—and bias—of much of the surveillance literature is a focus on the effects of the *act of watching* as a creation of visibility, which functions as a form of social control. The assumption is that when one is (or is able to be) seen, this changes their behavior, creating passive, docile and governable subjects. While not ignoring this (the author explicitly invokes Foucault and theorists of biopolitics), the book looks in-depth at the idea that visibility is merely the first step in the activation of the individual citizen as surveillance-technology; the citizen must then refer suspicious activity to the proper authorities or, more problematically, act to curb "suspicious" behavior on their own. This focus on *saying* is perhaps the most significant contribution that Reeves makes, and it is a welcome addition to the literature on lateral surveillance and the history of social control in the United States.

Another strength of *Citizen Spies* is its ability to tie insights about micro-level lateral surveillance to macro-level processes of state-making and governance. Too often these levels of analysis are presented either in contrast with one another (which is more influential in the lives of ordinary citizens, the NSA or the neighborhood watch?) or analyzed as separate phenomena altogether. Reeves makes these connections

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explicit: that is, without the circulation of lateral surveillance technologies and the notion that “good citizenship” involves individual engagement in the policing process, top-down law enforcement would be exceedingly difficult to conduct. To stretch the metaphor further, the NSA could not do its job as effectively without the neighborhood watch. By engaging the public in policing efforts, “citizens’ eyes and ears are captured and put to use as mechanisms of lateral surveillance” while their mouths “are transformed into instruments for reporting crimes and suspicious activities” (pgs. 75-6). Lateral and hierarchical surveillance are increasingly two sides of the same coin, working in tandem; they are two processes in the operation of a network of power relations.

Reeves also highlights the important, sometimes devastating, implications when “seeing/saying citizens”—encouraged to be the “eyes and ears” of the police—take matters into their own hands and become acting citizens. He describes several cases where D.A.R.E. officers encourage children to report their parents’ drug use, leading authorities to kick down the family’s doors and haul the parents off to jail, oftentimes leaving the children in more vulnerable circumstances than those from which they emerged. More-or-less organized groups of citizens empowered to police their own communities can lead to a mob mentality and a loss of control by law enforcement. In one of the most notorious cases of the “citizen-as-cop” phenomenon, neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman ignored the advice of the 911 operator and pursued Trayvon Martin through his neighborhood, leading to the death of the 17-year old Martin from a gunshot wound after an altercation. *Citizen Spies* makes important connections between disparate cases by highlighting the ways that organized—and unorganized—lateral surveillance can go awry.

Citizen Spies is a synthesis of ideas and examples. One effect of this treatment is the somewhat superficial treatment of its cases, which results in oversights and analytical ambiguity. While engaging and readable—with more than a few flashes of insight and brilliance—what the book sacrifices in depth leads to a somewhat scattered picture of an important topic. Reeves’s five substantive chapters are organized around cases—terrorism, D.A.R.E., citizens’ patrols, etc.—and each of these chapters can cover as much as 300 years of history. Each chapter could, in effect, be its own book. This broad sweep, combined with the lack of original empirical research, leaves the reader with as many questions as answers about the cases in question, as huge historical events are glossed over and moving from one paragraph to another sometimes skips an entire century’s worth of history. Furthermore, Reeves lightly touches on several important points that could have been explored more fully. For instance, the effect of lateral surveillance on the erosion of social trust is mentioned several times, but never given an extensive treatment. This would have been an exceptional addition to his analysis, and strengthened the sometimes thin connection between chapters. Moreover, it is not always clear what analytical frame Reeves is using. For much of the book, it seems he is attempting to transcend the Foucauldian framework described above by showing how citizens reject or resist their duty to inform. At other times, Reeves returns to seeing them as relatively passive nodes within a network of power relations. Despite these blemishes, *Citizen Spies* is a well-written and engaging exploration of the roots and practices of lateral surveillance in the U.S. and its implications for contemporary citizenship.