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Video Surveillance and Liberty in America

In the United States of America, surveillance has become a staple of modern crime fighting-techniques and daily life. Video surveillance is one of the most popular forms of contemporary surveillance. It is employed by local police departments and federal agencies alike. Even though it is useful for solving and deterring crime, there are various aspects of video surveillance that are dangerous to American liberty. The encroachment of video surveillance on American society is an inherent threat to American's liberties, and the American government's power should be checked in this realm. If left unchecked, the American government will infringe upon its own population's rights and could create a dystopian surveillance state.

To understand how the expansion of video surveillance across the United States of America affects American's liberties, one must first understand what is meant by liberty in America. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, liberty is defined as "the quality or state of being free: freedom from arbitrary or despotic control: a right or immunity enjoyed by prescription or by grant: PRIVILEGE" (Liberty). In America, the idea of liberty is formed from rights bestowed upon its citizens by the United States Constitution. According to the article *Constitutionally Protected Right to Privacy, for Some* by Linda E. Coco, Americans have certain "privacy rights, as recognized by the US Supreme Court, and [are] provided for in the US

Constitution.” Therefore, the idea of privacy and freedom from government is instilled in American citizens by the constitution and is a core concept of liberty.

There are two sides to video surveillance in America. On the one hand, it is an effective and useful tool for crime prevention and crime-solving. According to the article *CCTV surveillance for crime prevention* by Eric L Piza, Closed Circuit TV surveillance systems are one of the most common forms of video surveillance systems employed in the United States. They are especially effective at reducing crime in car parks, and also demonstrate a significant reduction of crime across residential areas. In these instances, the mere presence of cameras is effective at reducing crime. In the case of general video surveillance systems, such as basic CCTV systems, the collective-good of having this crime preventing tool outweighs individual citizens’ rights to privacy. According to the article *Personal Rights in the age of Omnipresent Cameras* by Jay Stanley, outside of a few private areas where people have a “reasonable expectation to privacy,” such as bathrooms and changing rooms, the first amendment to the constitution provides the right to photograph and record in public spaces. This means that on a basic level, video surveillance does not threaten citizens’ liberty, as it provides for the common good. This, of course, is the definition of the social contract, we as citizens give up certain rights, such as the freedom to not be watched in public, to provide for the common good and security

In some instances, cameras can even protect citizens’ liberty. According to Jay Stanley, citizens can use cameras to keep the government in check. Police body cameras force police officers to act within their prescribed powers, and people are using cameras to record and document police action, protecting fellow citizens against governmental abuse. But while citizens can use cameras to empower themselves, the government can use expanding facial

recognition and tracking technology to infringe upon citizens' liberty to live their lives as they please without the government watching their every move.

There are various forms of facial recognition, and not all of them are threatening to citizens' rights or their liberty. According to the article *Facial Recognition and the future of privacy: I always feel like somebody's watching me* by Brenda Leong, the various forms of facial recognition include facial detection, facial characterization, facial verification, and finally facial identification. While facial detection does not pose a real threat to liberty, the latter few forms do. According to the article, there are various ethical issues that stem from facial recognition surveillance systems. There are concerns that there can be lapses in the system; this could result in innocent people being misidentified and being put on government watch lists. Companies could use these systems to create data-bases of quote know offenders, possibly denying individuals service without due process. Machine-learning systems could even reflect human biases, automating them in practice. These ethical concerns can, in many ways, infringe upon people's liberty, as it has the possibility to wrongly take away people's personal authority to do and live as they please. The ethical concerns and threats to liberty that facial surveillance outweigh the good they provide to the public in a way that CCTV systems do not.

For these ethical concerns, privacy must be defined in America. According to the article *Government Surveillance and Why Defining Privacy Matters in a Post-Snowden World*, there are two conflicting arguments regarding privacy, privacy as control and privacy as access. There are many questions revolving around these two arguments, and few regulations, leaving many aspects of privacy up for interpretation. According to the article *Perceived Privacy Violations: Exploring the Malleability of Privacy Expectations* by Scott A Wright, corporations are also

guilty of abusing the lack of regulation and often sell and trade with collected data. For these reasons, privacy must be defined and regulated so that the government does not overstep its boundaries and infringe upon privacy rights and personal liberty.

In conclusion, the government needs to be checked and regulated in regards to expanding video surveillance systems. While some systems, such as CCTV systems, provide for the common good, expanding facial recognition technologies pose various ethical concerns, and threaten people's individual liberties. If left unchecked and allowed to continue, corporations and the government alike could abuse these systems, creating a dystopian and discriminatory state.