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Privacy in the Age of Digits

Historical roots to notion of privacy

- The state vs. “the people” (notice the modern terminology) in the British Empire, 1640-1780
- Traditionally based in security of one’s goods and property—negative notion of freedom; need a more positive notion of constituitive public space built on private individuals, as in Europe
- Fourth Amendment protects against “unreasonable search and seizure”: there is no prima facia “right to privacy”
- Warrants and judicial review as early protections in the US
Infections to the Notion of Privacy

Should corporations as “legal persons” be protected by the same privacy rights as “real persons”? Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific RR, 1886…

Corporations have a right to privacy but, on the flip side, cannot be punished

Again, issues of accountability

Libertarian notion: “…the right to be left alone,” Judge Thomas M. Cooley, MI Supreme Court (1880), Lewis D. Brandeis, US Supreme Court (1929): a thin foundation…

This leaves public space uninhabited

Need a positive, constituitive notion of privacy, as constructive
A Contemporary Interpretation of Privacy

Fourth Amendment litigation since 1960

- Griswold v. Connecticut, 1964: Sex information as “private,” restriction on its diffusion as invasion of privacy
- Roe v. Wade, 1973: The privacy of reproductive choice decisions
- 2003: MA Court on gay marriage: combo of privacy and equal protection
- 2005: Alito SCOTUS nomination key issue: “is there a constitutional right to privacy?” Very controversial.

1960s rise of databanks, Alan Westin’s work and more—new notion of “constructive” dangers to privacy

Privacy and Freedom (1967) and Databases in a Free Society (1972); Simson Garfinkel, Database Nation (2000)
Westin and Privacy, 1970 and after

Emerging recognition of power of database linking: privacy can be violated (by the state) constructively by record-matching, data mining, and “business intelligence” or semantic matching techniques

Data-doubles as affordances for privacy invasions
- What “data crumbs” do we leave behind in everyday life?
- Can our data doubles be detached from us and used against us?
- Identity thefts and identity “spoofing”

Result: first wave of data-integrity and privacy legislation at Federal and State levels, esp. Privacy Act of 1974
- Note delicate balancing of privacy against FOIA (1966): a public “right to know” vs. personal privacy
Barriers to Privacy Incursions by Business

[caveat: journalism and “public personalities” excluded]

Financial Records

- Fair Credit Reporting Act (1971) & later amendments: right to review; context of credit reporting services; revisions now in Congress, thanks in part to ChoicePoint leakages

Medical records

- Danger of diffusion of private information to third parties (Eagleton imbroglio, 1972)
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (“HIPAA”) A rare instance of “opt-in” approach in the US, as different from Europe, where “opt-in” is usually the rule, especially under the EU’s Privacy Directives

Problem: few protections against data sales to 3rd parties—it’s a “free market”!
Current Business Practices that Impinge on Right to Privacy

Data mining/harvesting and records linkage
- “Constructive” invasions by assembling disparate data
- EFTs, automatic payments; information on consumer purchases
- Insurance records, job applications, [some] health records
- Marketing surveys
- Data resales

“Spam” and junk mail
- Are these privacy invasions or mere annoyances?
- Can we put a cost incurred by consumers on these practices, then charge-back to the culprits?
- Larger issue: if attention is a major personal asset in the information society, when businesses grab our attention, are they stealing from us?
Marketers’ Invasions

- Sociologists meet marketers: using census data for Zip Codes and census tracts
- The market for customer lists; data resales
  - Direct Marketing Association and friends
  - Where does “marketing info” end and privacy invasions begin?
  - Should we consider privacy a right that can be licensed out or, if it is violated, should we be able to collect fees?
- Emergence or real-time tracking and data harvesting
  - loyalty cards: trade privacy for discounts?
  - “smart” devices tracking shoppers
  - RFIDs replacing UPCs & bar codes: powerful data integration
- “Do Not Call” legislation (2003) and the rise of “op-out” as the current mode for privacy protections
The Bad Guys… Solutions?

- Phishing
- Identity theft
- [Industrial espionage]
- Spam, rootkits, zombie machines/hijacking; failure of CAN-SPAM Act

Will government-mandated “back-doors” (under the PATRIOT Act) be used by the bad guys?

Overt discrimination when private info is *not* required

Solution[?]: Pamela Samuelson’s proposal to treat personal data as intellectual property
Public Perceptions of Privacy Issues

- UCLA Internet use study (11/2001): fears of privacy incursions by business as barrier to Net adoption
- Data sales: genies out of the bottle?
- Data integrity: the danger of “false positives”
  - ChoicePoint and other disasters
  - Anti-“terrorist” mistakes--or not(?)
- As noted earlier, vast amounts of data “out there” that can be reassembled
  - Invasive “profiling”
  - Identity theft
- Note well, however: most identity theft arises from dumpster diving, not IT incursions
Dilemmas in Locating Responsibility to Preserve Privacy

- Medical and financial records as the key

- Who really invades more, business or the state?

  - post-911 sea change: government can invade privacy almost at will in search of “terrorists”

  - Should business be allowed to have a similar right to snoop based on notion of preëmptive presumptions about piracy?
Opt-In vs. Opt-Out

Recent legislation as “opt-out”

- Note your recurring Privacy Statements from banks
- A consequence of failure of earlier self-regulation via “privacy policies”: “opt-out” links are often used to validate email addresses
- Spotty record of business’ self-regulation
  - failures historically in workplace safety, environment, etc.
  - currently, a widespread ignoring of NAB’s “Code of Conduct” in broadcasting: end of “fairness doctrine” in 1980s
  - late-1990s: widespread recognition that companies violated their own privacy policies, posted on the Web

Would “opt-in” be more effective?

- A new market for volunteered information?
- This would reflect issues of cost-bearing
Post 9/11 Issues

USA PATRIOT Act, 2001

Not only “preventative detention,” but law allows officials to demand that news of incursions be suppressed

Library circulation info; re: PATRIOT Act vs ALA traditions. USAG’s office claims no use of this provision, while ALA has counted dozens.

Expanded powers to subpoena almost any records in the interest of “national security”

“Back doors” [again], DoJ “letters,” etc.

We know that racial profiling is unacceptable; what of ethnic profiling after 9/11?

Recent Supreme Court caveats on expanded snooping and detention powers…
A “Deep Meaning” to Post-911?

Intercepting Net communications at ISPs—vast change from old telecommunications practices

Old system held telecomm providers harmless for acts of telephone & fax users; now they are subject to contempt of court if they refuse to divulge user info (Verizon issue, 2003):
<http://www.eff.org/Cases/RIAA_v_Verizon/>

Ministry of Homeland Security & other agencies can examine ISP logs without warrants
Following that practice, RIAA, using DMCA, now subpoenas ISPs

The new surveillance régime
Liberty vs. security (Franklin: those who seek the latter to assure the former deserve neither!)
Accountability: requests for info & FOIA requests can put one under surveillance

TIPs TIA, and other snooping initiatives