



SEARCHLIGHTS AND SUNGLASSES

LEARNING LAYER

Spying on Americans, seizing reporter records

People want the option to keep some things to themselves. But computerized communication makes privacy more difficult. Unless you actively protect yourself, companies can track your browsing, purchasing and now, with Global Positioning System enabled phones, your location. Add to that the personal details being shared through social media. Companies routinely use this data to sell products and services tailored just for you. Digitization also makes it easier for national security agencies to spy on Americans and seize information from journalists without asking.

Class activities at three levels:

Flashlight: Global media mogul Rupert Murdoch had to close a newspaper and appear before the British Parliament because his journalists hacked into people's telephone messages to get stories. Have students look up the case. Discuss: When does reporting turn into invasion of privacy? Even if laws are not being broken, are there still lines journalists should not cross? Are there some things you shouldn't report? What is gained and lost when journalists observe boundaries?

Spotlight: In states with shield laws, news outlets can fight when law enforcement officials want to learn the identify of confidential sources. But journalists got no warning before federal government grabbed months' worth of phone records from offices where more than 100 Associated Press reporters worked. Investigators wanted to know who told the AP about a CIA operation in Yemen that stopped a 2012 al-Qaida plot to blow up a U.S.-bound plane. This reignited a debate over a federal shield law, strongly supported by journalism organizations but also with journalistic opponents. Have students research the issue and post their shield law comment to a recent news story on the topic.

Searchlight: In 1977, reporter Carl Bernstein's Rolling Stone article, "The CIA & The Media," found that a number of journalists were U.S. spies abroad. In 2013, federal officials seized the emails of a Fox News reporter on the grounds that he was a criminal "co-conspirator" working against the United States. Discussion questions for students: Has the relationship between government agencies and journalists shifted from one extreme to the other? What are the appropriate roles of government and the media? The Justice Department issued

new guidelines after the AP and Fox cases. Do they do the job?

Extra credit: Examine this testimony from journalist and national security expert Scott Armstrong. Armstrong leads “The Dialogue,” a project to find ways journalists could report on important national security issues without having their records seized. Read this about Armstrong’s opposition to a federal shield law. Which of his remedies do you agree with? Post your views in a place where others can engage with them.