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Round the Clock Surveillance:

Is This the Price of Living in a ‘Free, Safe’ Society?

By John W. Whitehead

*Immediately following the devastating 9/11 attacks, which destroyed the illusion of invulnerability which had defined American society since the end of the Cold War, many Americans willingly ceded their rights and liberties to government officials who promised them that the feeling of absolute safety could be restored.*

John, can you provide the name of any government official who promised "absolute safety?" Who in their right mind would even believe such an insane promise? Absolute safety cannot be found even in the grave. Even after you're dead, your corpse might be defiled by grave robbers. Why would you even make such a ridiculous statement?

*In the 12 years since, we have been subjected to a series of deceptions, subterfuges and scare tactics by the government, all largely aimed at amassing more power for the federal agencies and extending their control over the populace.*

John, our government is made up of individuals. Are you claiming that everyone in government is involved in this conspiracy to amass control? If not, then who are the individuals you are accusing; and which deceptions, subterfuges, and scare tactics are you referring to?

*Starting with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq,*

John, are you claiming that the war in Afghanistan was a deception, a subterfuge, or a scare tactic? How so?

And regarding Iraq, I'm aware of the deceptive tactics that Saddam Hussein engaged in, to convince the world that he had weapons of mass destruction in order to scare away would be interveners. Which deception are you claiming that America engaged in? If America, Russia, China, and all other western nations believed that Hussein was hiding WMD's, which they did, what scare tactics are you referring to?

*continuing with the torture of detainees at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay,*

John, since the government admitted to waterboarding and other tactics used against captured, suspected terrorists, what deception, subterfuge, or scare tactics are you referring to this time?

*and coming to a head with the assassination of American citizens abroad,*

John, I noticed that you didn't specify *which* American citizens, and *why*, but simply wrote your sentence, so as to give the impression that it could happen to any innocent American citizen abroad. Now I see what you mean by *deceptive,* John.

*the importing of drones and other weapons of compliance,*

John, don't you mean *exporting* ? And what have drones got to do with deception, subterfuge, or scare tactics. Drones are designed to kill, not scare.

*and the rise in domestic surveillance, we have witnessed the onslaught of a full-blown crisis in government.*

John, 9/11 was a full-blown crisis. Increases in domestic surveillance are required in this new environment in order to protect Americans from future attacks. Sacrifices of privacy are the price we have to pay for that increased security.

John, these are not things that I should have to tell you. This is just common sense. Whenever I run into arguments that run counter to common sense, and like this essay, are laced with logic errors and dishonesty, it is always because someone is trying to promote an idea ... which lacks evidence.

*Still Americans have gone along with these assaults on their freedoms unquestioningly.*

John, if your statement is true, how do you explain this essay? How do you explain the thousands of essays just like it?

John, your statement is false; and the proof is on your own web page, and thousands just like it.

*Now, in the wake of the Boston Marathon bombing, we are once again being assured that if we only give up a few more liberties and what little remains of our privacy, we will achieve that elusive sense of security we’ve yet to attain.*

John, I'm still waiting for you to provide names of those who assured us of that "absolute sense of security."

*This is the same song and dance that comes after every tragedy, and it’s that same song and dance which has left us buying into the illusion that we are a free, safe society.*

John, it's your delusion ... not mine. Most rational people understand that a free and safe society is a relative term. You can be freer and safer than others, or less free and less safe than others, but no one is guaranteed safety ... at least not on this planet.

*The reality of life in America tells a different tale, however.*

See John, when you embrace reality instead of biased rhetoric a more accurate picture becomes available.

*For example, in a May 2013 interview with CNN, former FBI counterterrorism agent Tim Clemente disclosed that the federal government is keeping track of all digital communications that occur within the United States, whether or not those communicating are American citizens,*

John, if they are tracking *all* communications, then of course Americans will be included.

*and whether or not they have a warrant to do so.*

John, why doesn't this essay explain why the government tracks communications without obtaining warrants? Don't you think your readers would like to hear the government's excuse so they could decide for themselves if that eavesdropping is justified?

*Clemente dropped his bombshell during a CNN interview about authorities’ attempts to determine the nature of communications between deceased Boston bombing suspect Tamerlan Tsarnaev and his widow Katherine Russell. In the course of that conversation, Clemente revealed that federal officials will not only be able to access any voicemails that may have been left by either party, but that the entirety of the phone conversations they had will be at federal agents’ finger tips.*

John, dudes with mistresses are probably getting pretty nervous right about now, aren't they?

*Clemente stated “We certainly have ways in national security investigations to find out exactly what was said in that conversation. All phone conversations occurring in America are being captured as we speak whether we know it or like it or not.”*

John, George Orwell's book 1984 has come true. But Orwell got it wrong. What Orwell tried to portray as a great evil, has turned out to be one of society's most powerful tools against evil.

John, when I read that book as a kid, even then I had enough skepticism in my bones, not to blindly accept everything I read. I saw the fallacy in Orwell's theme. You did not. Your acceptance of his flawed theme made me suspicious so I investigated your background a little deeper. Guess what I found? Just as I suspected from your lack of critical thinking ... you are a Ghost Worshipper.

Why am I not surprised?

*A few days later, Clemente was asked to clarify his comments, at which point he said, “There is a way to look at all digital communications in the past. No digital communication is secure.”*

*In other words, there is no form of digital communication that the government cannot and does not monitor—phone calls, emails, text messages, tweets, Facebook posts, internet video chats, etc., are all accessible, trackable and downloadable by federal agents.*

John, as a Ghost Worshipper you accept all those privacy violations from a murderous invisible ghost, who can send you to eternal torture if He doesn't like what He finds. So it seems like this would be far less of a stretch for you to accept ... than for me.

Yet it is the other way around. I wonder why?

*At one time, such actions by the government would not only have been viewed as unacceptable, they would also have been considered illegal.*

John, we call that 'progress'. At one time, slavery was considered acceptable and legal ... but don't try it now.

*However, government officials have been engaged in an ongoing attempt to legitimize these actions by passing laws that make the lives of all Americans an open book for government agents.*

John, for an attorney, that was an incredibly naive statement. Passing laws IS how actions are legitimized. You of all people should know that.

*For example, while the nation was caught up in the drama of the Boston bombing and the ensuing military-style occupation of the city by local and federal police,*

John, that was very deceitful wasn't it? A military style occupation describes an enemy siege of a population. This operation was the exact opposite; they were there to protect the citizens from a dangerous, at-large terrorist.

Let me guess, John; you started out as a defense attorney?

*Congress passed a little-noticed piece of legislation known as the Cyber Intelligence Sharing and Protection Act (CISPA).*

John, you are such a manipulative, dishonest little twit. It was anything but "little-noticed." You described it that way to make lawmakers appear as though they were trying to sneak laws by people, when in fact, it was hotly debated all over the internet.

Now I know you started out as a defense attorney.

*In short, the law dismantles any notion of privacy on the internet, opening every action one undertakes online, whether emailing, shopping, banking, or just browsing, to scrutiny by government agents.*

Well then John, sounds like you had better keep your nose clean. For some reason that really seems to bother you ... a lot. My experience has taught me that the ones who scream loudest about their privacy, just happen to be the ones ... with the most to hide.

*While CISPA has yet to clear the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation,*

John, you just said, and I quote "*Congress passed a little-noticed piece of legislation."* Now you admit that it hasn't even cleared committee yet. John, are you always this easy to take down?

On television we are bombarded constantly by ads from the law firm of Larry H. Parker who brags that he has a 91% success rate. I could believe that if all of his cases ... were against you.

*the spirit of it is alive and well. In fact, officials in the Obama administration have for some time now been authorizing corporate information sharing and spying in secret through the use of executive orders and other tactics.*

John, why did you single out the Obama administration? Did this all begin in 2009?

*The Justice Department, for instance, has been issuing so-called “2511 letters” to various internet service providers like AT&T, which immunize them from being prosecuted under federal wiretapping laws for providing the federal government with private information. Despite federal court rulings to the contrary, the Department of Justice continues to assert that it does not require a warrant to access Americans’ emails, Facebook chats, and other forms of digital communication.*

John, as an attorney, you should know that if that information is obtained illegally, it will not hold up in court. So why are your Jockeys halfway up your butt?

*These government-initiated spying programs depend in large part on the willingness of corporations to hand over personal information about their customers to government officials. Aside from allowing government agents backdoor access to American communications, corporations are also working on technologies to allow government agents even easier access to Americans’ communications.*

John, corporations are loaded with cash. Have you seen the profits they have been ringing up during this recession?

*For example, Google has filed a patent for a “Policy Violation Checker,” software which would monitor an individual’s communications as they type them out, whether in an email, an Excel spreadsheet or some other digital document, then alert the individual, and potentially their employer or a government agent, if they type any “problematic phrases” which “present policy violations, have legal implications, or are otherwise troublesome to a company, business, or individual.”*

John, you've switched topics; now you're talking about restricting freedom of speech. But once again, this would be a bonanza for someone in your position. You present yourself as a defender of free speech, so if true, it looks like you're going to get your chance to prove it.

*The reality is this: we no longer live in a free society.*

John, to believe we ever did, requires the mind of a child. When humans began living in societies, they were forced to sacrifice personal freedoms for the common good. It is simply the nature of social structure. There is no other way.

John, it's hard to believe that you are really as naive as you are pretending to be.

*Having traded our freedoms for a phantom promise of security, we now find ourselves imprisoned in a virtual cage of cameras, wiretaps and watchful government eyes.*

John, without those things you just mentioned, the Marathon bombers probably would have succeeded with their plans to kill again in New York. Between that possibility and your desire to keep your affairs private ... I would err on the side of the New Yorkers.

*All the while, the world around us is no safer than when we started on this journey more than a decade ago.*

John, what evidence do you offer to support that claim? You have none. You cannot prove that we are less safe than a decade ago. And we have tons of evidence to prove that we are.

You are out of touch with reality, John, which is pretty much what being a Ghost Worshipper is all about anyway. Google FBI crime stats. Not only has crime decreased, in part due to the aforementioned techniques being employed by government personnel dedicated to protecting Americans, but also, much terrorism has been thwarted, often without our knowledge. These stats don't show up on crime reports, but have contributed to a safer America.

*Indeed, it well may be that we are living in a far more dangerous world, not so much because the terrorist threat is any greater but because the government itself has become the greater threat to our freedoms.*

John, see a shrink. Or better yet, join one of those web sites where you can chat with like-minded loonies. I think they call themselves "targeted citizens." I think you would be a big hit there, and you might even be able to pick up a few clients.

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

The Greening of the Earth

has been pushed way back in time

Conventional scientific wisdom has it that plants and other creatures have only lived on land for about 500 million years, and that landscapes of the early Earth were as barren as Mars. A new study now has presented evidence for life on land that is four times as old — at 2.2 billion years ago and almost half way back to the inception of the planet.

That evidence, involves fossils the size of match heads and connected into bunches by threads in the surface of an ancient soil from South Africa. They certainly were not plants nor animals, but something more simple. The fossils most resemble modern soil organisms called Geosiphon, a fungus with a central cavity filled with symbiotic cyanobacteria.

There is independent evidence for cyanobacteria, but not fungi, of the same geological age, and these new fossils set a new and earlier benchmark for the greening of the land.

This gains added significance because fossil soils hosting the fossils have long been taken as evidence for a marked rise in the amount of oxygen in the atmosphere at about 2.3 billion years ago, called the Great Oxygenation Event. By modern standards, in which Earth's air is now 21 percent oxygen, this early rise was modest, to about 5 percent oxygen, but it represented a rise from vanishingly low oxygen levels earlier in geological time.

Demonstrating that Diskagma are fossils was a technical triumph because they were too big to be completely seen in a standard microscopic slide and within rock that was too dark to see through in slabs. The samples were imaged using powerful X-rays of a particle accelerator.

The images enabled a 3D restoration of the fossils' form: odd little hollow, urn-shaped structures with a terminal cup and basal attachment tube. At last scientists have an idea of what life on land looked like in the Precambrian. Perhaps with this search image in mind, they can find more and different kinds of fossils in ancient soils.

In their conclusion, researchers noted that their newly named fossil Diskagma is comparable in morphology and size to a fossil dating to 2.8 billion years ago and also found in South Africa, but its composition, including interior structure and trace elements, is significantly different.

The new fossil is a promising candidate for the oldest known eukaryote.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

ANONYMOUS

"Prayer has no place in public schools

just like facts have no place in organized religion."