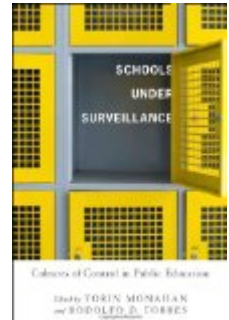


Torin Monahan, Rodolfo D. Torres, eds.. *Schools under Surveillance: Cultures of Control in Public Education*. Critical Issues in Crime and Society Series. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010. vi + 264 pp. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8135-4680-3.



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In the fall of 2009, Lower Merion High School in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, was caught remotely activating the cameras on its laptop computers and photographing its students outside of school hours. The administration claimed that it was merely trying to recover missing machines and that none of the thirty thousand pictures it took were salacious or inappropriate. One family has filed a lawsuit, arguing that their son was wrongly punished when a technician saw him eating candy in his bedroom and mistook it for drugs. Others are understandably upset. The incident caught many commentators by surprise and provoked widespread hand wringing in the press. Yet, at the very moment the scandal unfolded, Rutgers University published *Schools under Surveillance*, a collection of essays edited by Torin Monahan and Rodolfo D. Torres that pays close attention to authorities' disciplinary gaze over schoolchildren. Read in light of the Lower Merion incident, what is most shocking is the public's lingering capacity for shock. The surreptitious use of laptop cameras was already underway in a Canadian classroom

fifteen years ago, and in the decade after the Columbine shooting and the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, school administrators have cast an ever-widening net of observation and control over their pupils, raising important questions about safety, privacy, and student rights (p. 87).

The thirteen chapters of *Schools under Surveillance* are grouped into five parts. Part 1 deals with the police and military presence in public schools; part 2 with schools as markets for surveillance equipment; part 3 with the social/psychological basis of the postmodern "security culture"; part 4 with accountability regimes and the disciplinary aspects of neoliberalism; and part 5 with student resistance to surveillance (p. 121). All five parts begin with a Foucauldian analysis of surveillance as an exercise of power before exploring several recurring themes.

The first theme explored is the profound fallibility of surveillance systems. While anxious administrators assume that money spent on cameras, metal detectors, and security guards will im-

prove safety, there is little evidence to support that position (pp. 51, 75). Heavy advertising and federal subsidies encourage schools to purchase ever more sophisticated equipment but provide few guidelines for its use: most cameras are not actively monitored, and students continue to smuggle weapons into school buildings. Ironically, as Monahan and Rodolfo point out, it was the security cameras already in place at Columbine High School that provided indelible images of the massacre there (pp. 2-3). Even when technology works as it should, human error and prejudice continue to disproportionately criminalize males and students of color.

The second theme is the habituation of surveillance in the lives of today's youth. As one author puts it, while the nineteenth-century panopticon "produced a fear of being watched (an internal paranoia in the form of a symbolic prohibition)," twenty-first-century technology "produces a fear of not being watched" (p. 146). Some students find security in surveillance. Others are put off by it. Most ignore it. The presence of cameras has become so commonplace that they no longer deter violence: students that know they are being watched have begun to engage in riskier and more performative behavior (p. 239). In a particularly telling instance, a student caught fighting in the hall cheerfully asked, "Can I get that tape?" (p. 51).

The third theme is the role of surveillance in the neoliberal program of school privatization. Like junk food, testing, and supplementary educational service corporations, security firms see public schools as "one of the last and largest unexploited markets in the world" and are eager to tap into parents' fears or—as Ronnie Casella points out—the anxieties of the school boards to sell their products (pp. 75-76, 89). Michael Apple worries about the loss of local democracy and the rise of a broader "audit culture" in which public institutions are subjected to narrow business metrics, found wanting, and turned over to private firms

for restructuring and even closer scrutiny (p. 179). In addition to lessening opportunities for democratic participation, he argues, this process leaves parents and students that cannot navigate the complexities of the marketplace foundering or "criminalized" (p. 179). Several authors refer to the "school-to-prison pipeline" as a conduit not only for disadvantaged students but also for public monies, as state legislatures consistently fund the latter at the expense of the former (p. 40).

The fourth and final theme of *Schools under Surveillance* concerns the antiauthoritarian potential of "sousveillance" or watching from below (p. 224). Students have learned to hack into school networks and frequently record their teachers on mobile phones or other devices to the point that classrooms have been caught up in a sort of digital arms race (p. 94). Several authors see in these developments the promise of organized resistance although there is disagreement about how consciously students use technology to undermine school authority.

These are all important issues, but the book's treatment of them raises two criticisms. First, several authors punctuate their analyses with overheated rhetoric. Is it really "true that school districts now effectively sell students to corporations" (p. 6)? Or that "metal detectors sternly remind teachers and school administrators each morning of the power [of] central administration" (p. 42)? To what degree do school police officers represent an "authoritarian system of state monitoring" or "a culture of coercion that stifled oppositional voices" (p. 161)? There are a few examples to support these claims—the school run in an abandoned New Orleans prison or the military recruiter who substitute teaches "free of charge"—but these are clearly exceptions rather than the norm (pp. 66, 111). The everyday intrusions into student privacy—the racial imbalance in surveillance and criminalization or police officers who sexually harass female students, provoke and arrest males, and dilute the search and seizure

rights of both--are troubling but afford enough ambiguities and counterexamples to undercut the authors' alarmist claims (pp. 21-22, 40, 43). For example, while some school police officers engage in inappropriate behavior, others are coaching track teams, writing letters of recommendation, and mentoring students (pp. 25-27). The argument that they are not properly trained for these roles could extend to teachers as well as other school-community partners. Similarly, while several of the authors only ascribe the development of "maximum-security schools" to shadowy state and business interests, the decentralized structure of school governance suggests that many other stakeholders have played a part (p. 10). Scattered throughout the book, one finds all sorts of groups supporting increased school surveillance: police departments, mayors, and principals, predictably, but also teacher unions, bus drivers, parents, and sometimes students (pp. 31, 48, 75, 78, 214). Casella touches on surveillance's broad appeal in his chapter on consumerism and is critical of one-dimensional readings of "government oppression and a surveillance society gone awry"; unfortunately, that description applies to some of his co-contributors (p. 81).

The second major flaw of *Schools under Surveillance* (readers of this review will be displeased to learn) is that except for half of a paragraph on Joseph Lancaster and monitorial instruction, it includes no historical analysis (p. 231). The omission is unfortunate for several reasons. A historical perspective might have tempered some of the outrage at the George W. Bush administration and hinted that "the election of Barack Obama to the presidency in 2008" *did not* "signal a bubbling recognition that something fundamental must change in government [educational] policy" (p. 172). It also might have challenged the implicit assumption that increasing community control will protect students' privacy, empower teachers and parents, and restore social harmony. Even a cursory look at the history of local governance suggests that it would not. As in-

herently politicized spaces, schools have always been sites of hierarchy and exclusion, and the exercise of petty political power has usually ensured even more intense (if less technological) forms of surveillance than those described above. Scrutinizing oneself and one's neighbors for signs of sinfulness was the very basis of Puritan education. Rural schools strictly policed the behavior of female teachers through chaperones and home visits well into the twentieth century.[1] During the Progressive Era, most teachers owed their jobs to patronage and were closely watched by janitors and other school board lackeys.[2] Even surveillance technology has a long and colorful history: in California in the 1960s, a member of the John Birch Society gave his son a tape recorder in a hollow-out book to catch his teacher making leftist remarks.[3]

I offer these examples not to excuse the rise of surveillance regimes or to deny the danger they pose to democracy in schools in Canada and the United States but to raise questions that *Schools under Surveillance* seems to skirt. Which kinds of surveillance count as democratic and which do not? While the authors harshly criticize the No Child Left Behind legislation, how would they ensure civil rights enforcement and the proper use of federal funding without its testing provisions? While they applaud children engaging in counter-surveillance, does their approval extend to the Fox News exposés that use the same strategies to discredit biology and world history teachers? What about students' surveillance of their peers--mentioned only once--and the new forms of bullying and exclusion that have resulted from it (p. 215)? More broadly, how can the public best ascertain the appropriate balance between safety and privacy?

Overall, *Schools under Surveillance* is a thought-provoking anthology. Excerpts would be appropriate for undergraduate or graduate courses in educational foundations, sociology, or criminology. One could skip much of its discussion of

neoliberalism, which is trenchant but covered in more detail elsewhere.[4] Some of its theoretical writing is overwrought and could be skipped altogether. The most original and accessible material is found in the first and last two chapters, particularly in the prose of Jen Weiss, formerly the director of a New York City writing program, and Andrew Hope, a British sociologist.

Notes

[1]. Paul Theobald, *Call School: Rural Education in the Midwest to 1918* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), 100-101.

[2]. David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 98.

[3]. Donald W. Robinson, "The Teachers Take a Birching," *Phi Delta Kappan* 43, no. 5 (1962): 182-188.

[4]. See, for example, Michael Apple, *Educating the "Right" Way: Markets, Standards, God, and Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 2006); or Patricia Burch, *Hidden Markets: The New Education Privatization* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

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