

The Link Between Privacy and Fear in the United States in a Post 9/11 World

One of the most incredible people I have ever had the opportunity to meet was an exchange student from Italy named Luca. Luca had a way of seeing the world with no boundaries. He believed that even in the midst of all the violence and war and tension that exists between countries, the world is actually not as scary as it may seem. Luca accepted all cultures and customs; he looked at every race and nationality with complete equality. He had no suspicions; he passed few judgements. He believed that there is so much beauty in the world that it outshines the bad. And before Luca left, I asked him what his final opinion was of the United States and without hesitation, Luca calmly stated, that Americans are scared.

At the time, being a seventeen year old American girl, having been raised in the presence of strong patriotism and in the company of many relatives who have served in the United States military and fought selflessly for our country, a country which as our national anthem states, is “the land of the free and the home of the brave”, I told Luca as politely as I could, that he was full of crap. Luckily for me, Luca didn’t understand the exact translation of my exclamation of outrage, but he did explain his theory further.

On September 11, 2001, life in the United States was forever changed. On that clear September morning, as two planes were flown directly into the Twin Towers, a terrorist attack took place whose catastrophic effects continue to live on throughout generations. For the first time, many Americans who used to feel safe no longer felt secure. And with this heightening of fear emerged a greater evil, paranoia. Paranoia has the ability to maim an individual of all cognitive thoughts and actions. When a danger is created in the mind which does not exist, it poisons the brain. Rational thoughts are clouded over, adrenaline increases, and the body makes an instinctive decision whether to flee or fight.

In terms of the United States, paranoia has triggered a fight or flight response, one which the country as a whole has chosen to approach in a combative manner. Commonly referred to as the war against terror, the United States made a decision to fight against all the forces which threaten the security and well being of the United States and its citizens. But not all wars are fought out of bravery.

Abused animals attack out of fear. Loaded guns are shot in self defense. Even a fright as insignificant as arachnophobia, leads to the death of many small spiders. In the endless world of fears, some, like spiders, are insignificant and others, like terrorism, have the potential to be legitimate. But what all of these fears have in common, no matter how insignificant or legitimate they may seem, is that they are extremely potent and they capabilities to consume individuals and take charge of their actions.

When the United States was consumed by fear and paranoia, the largest change that took place occurred in the area of security. Of course this is understandable, if a potentially destructive offense is approaching a firm defense must be mobilized in order to offset its advance. But at what cost is this security being created? For the American people, the proud citizens of the land of the free, and for humanity in general, the cost of this increase in security has advanced in direct correlation with the decay of privacy.

In Kasper 's essay "The evolution (or Devolution) of Privacy", the idea of privacy is both dissected and analyzed. In her essay, Kasper states that privacy, both it's definition and how it is treated by society is undergoing a constant revolution. Kasper warns that "the consequences of this transformation of privacy-psychological, cultural, legal, and practical-will be pervasive and significant, but they are still unknown" (Kasper 91). Privacy affects how people live, communicate, and interact with one another. Privacy has extensive effects on a population's

culture, happiness, personal fulfilment and well-being. And while it seems impossible to accurately give a complete and all encompassing definition of privacy during a given instant, the one thing that can be accurately deduced is that as the modern world continues to develop, there are drastic changes taking place. Kasper elaborates:

There has been a shift from transparent and discrete offenses to trespasses that are largely unseen, unknown, and ongoing. The perceived boundaries of privacy seem to be retreating. No longer simply delineated by the tangible physical barriers of property lines, walls, or the body, the realm of privacy now primarily includes one's information, thoughts, and movements. What is more, these facets of privacy are being invaded by the most powerful social agents, over which individuals have little control. (Kasper 91)

A change is taking place in our great nation. And as security is increased in the United States, the walls of personal privacy that protect and define an individual are being removed. In some instances, people are not even aware of the infringements upon their privacy that are occurring. Steps are being taken to protect the greater good from unknown evil, but at what point do measures taken to protect the greater good infringe too far upon the basic rights of an individual. And furthermore, if the personal privacy of others is being removed out of fear, and the United States citizens themselves are viewed as a whole instead of as individual entities, how can the United States continue to be classified as a nation of the free and of the brave?

One of the first visible increases that occurred in security after 9/11 took place in airports. This was an understandable measure, seeing as the September 11 attacks were executed via aircraft. However, years later, the fear of future attacks remains substantial and evident in American Society. And as a result, the airport security has reached an extreme, and in the minds of many individuals, an even uncomfortable level. In Mocks essay, "The TSA's New X-Ray Vision: The Fourth Amendment Implications of Body-Scan Searches at Domestic Airport

Security Checkpoints”, Mock expands upon and evaluates the way in which recent advances in airport security impede upon the general guidelines and rules for human rights defined by the constitution. Mock explains that the “Fourth Amendment secures ‘[t]he right of the people to be secure in their persons . . . against unreasonable searches and seizures.’” (Mock 231). In direct contradiction to the rules of the Fourth Amendment, Mock revealed that “The Transportation Security Administration is currently testing a new form of airport screening technology that renders a virtual naked image of the human body.” (Mock 213). This is an advancement which since the publication of Mock’s essay, has already become commonplace in United States airports. In addition to virtual screening procedures, pat-downs are also regularly performed by airport security. Mock explains that “while the searches are conducted on a same-sex basis, pat-downs require contact with sensitive parts of the body, including the chest and thighs” and that, “furthermore, screening officers conducting the search may, under certain circumstances, expand the scope to even more intimate and sensitive parts of the body, such as under and in-between a woman’s breasts” (Mock 221). All of these newly enforced airport procedures have been characterized by people as humiliating, violating an individual’s right to personal privacy.

Unfortunately the fear driven security changes that are taking place in the United States are infringing upon more than just the privacy of the United States people. As a result of recent accusations, it has become apparent that the United States is also growing distrustful of it’s allies. According to a recent CNN news article written by Ed Payne and Khushbu Shah, , it was discovered that the “National Security Agency intercepted more than 70 million phone calls in France over a 30-day period” (Payne, Shah 1) . French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius told reporters that “These kinds of practices between partners, that violate privacy, are totally unacceptable.” (Payne, Shah 1). These shameful actions may be proof that the paranoia of a

seemingly brave nation has grown out of control. If you cannot trust your friends, who can you trust?

But perhaps what is most disturbing of all is the growing distrust that America has for its own people. In addition to listening in on the phone calls of other countries, it has been recently determined that the United States government is also listening in on the calls of its own people. According to Cauley, the NSA has gathered a massive database of Americans' phone calls. Cauley reported that "'It's the largest database ever assembled in the world,' [according] to one person, who, like the others who agreed to talk about the NSA's activities, declined to be identified by name or affiliation." (Cauley 1). Furthermore, Cauley elaborates that the agency's goal is "to create a database of every call ever made" and according to sources, "the NSA's domestic program began soon after the Sept. 11 attacks" (Cauley 1). If as a nation, you cannot trust your own people, isn't it true that hope for your future is growing increasingly dismal?

The United States as a nation was founded on the belief that people should be able to live freely and as a culture, living by the concept that every individual should have equal opportunities in their life, regardless of race or religion. However, recent security measures taken after 9/11 are erasing these basic values in American society and invading the personal rights and privacy of those members of the United States whom the government and other security personnel deem as a threat. In Ashar's legal research, ~~case studies~~ numerous case studies are analyzed in which Arab and South Asian Muslims are discriminated against, questioned by law enforcement and treated with suspicion based solely on their ethnicity. Ashar comments on the disdainful "spate of hate crime attacks targeting Arabs, South Asians, and Muslims across America in the wake of [September 11] the attacks" (Ashar 1). Has the United States forgotten that there is no such thing as a typical American? Doesn't racial profile go against everything

that the United States stands for? A country formed from immigrants that slowly arrived from all over the world, it is highly ignorant to believe that one person is more American than another based merely on race.

What kind of a nation targets its own citizens based on ethnicity and religion? What kind of a country violates the human body for the sole purpose of airport security? What kind of a nation spies on its own allies? Does this sound like the land of the free and the home of the brave to you? Because it doesn't to me. To me, this sounds like a nation which has sacrificed privacy for security and a nation which continues to promote a facade of bravery which is being fueled by a steadily building presence of fear.

According to the most recent statistics issued by the United States Department of State in 2013, approximately 39% of the United States population owns a passport. In other words as Matt Stabile, editor-in-chief of the expeditioner.com summarizes, "this also means that about 3 out of every 5 Americans can't even fly to Canada, let alone travel anywhere else in the world". Do the citizens of the United States choose to remain in their country because they desire for nothing more? Or do they remain in their country because they are afraid of the world which exists out of it? Are they afraid to fly, or are they afraid to accept that which is foreign and unfamiliar because it may pose a threat to all of those ideals of "freedom" which security measures taken against the outside world, continue to sacrifice?

My father has never left the United States once in his entire life. But what is sadder than the fact that he has never accepted or experienced what the rest of the world has to offer, is that he doesn't want to. Constantly bombarded by all of the negative depictions of foreign nations in turmoil that are constantly visible in the media, my father has failed to recognize all that can be learned from other cultures, and he has fallen victim to the ignorance that so many other

Americans have been plagued by for generations: the belief that the world consists of only two parts, the United States, and the smaller portion of lesser significance, everything else. My father is one of the most private people you will ever meet in your life; and even though he will never admit it, my father has fallen victim to the fear.

According to the World Bank, the average life expectancy of a person living in America is 78.6 years old. As the famous Broadway play *Rent* once proclaimed, how do you measure a year in a life? How do you determine days well spent and years that have been lived to the fullest? How can you possibly experience the true beauty of the world without having the courage to move past what is safe and secure and break free from the place where you have lived your whole life? Maybe there is greater danger that exists beyond the boundaries of the United States, but maybe there is something far more incredible than can be imagined, just waiting to be discovered.

Some things in life will never change. My father will probably never leave the country and I don't know where Luca is anymore, but I know that wherever his travels have taken him, he is living life without reservation and I believe that everyone could learn something from his words. Privacy and security are essential, but sometimes, people are more private than they need to be. We set passwords and lock our doors; we intensify airport security and sit idly while our government tracks phone calls. We remain constantly poised as a nation, waiting for the next attack; waiting patiently for a new enemy to appear on the horizon, one who will limit our freedom and steal away all the liberties that this country has worked so hard to obtain. But maybe, our greatest enemy lies within. Maybe by letting fear and precaution run our lives, it is us who are silently stealing our own freedom. Maybe, if we learn to let go and just breathe, the peace we try so hard to create, can finally be found.

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