

# Demeaning Human Dignity

by RAMSEY CLARK

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## THE ASSAULT ON PRIVACY: Computers, Data Banks, and Dossiers

by Arthur R. Miller

University of Michigan Press, 333 pp.,  
\$7.95

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The computer as the future repository of knowledge, calculation, and control is central to any consideration of the quality of life in any society. The very nature of knowledge will be determined in large measure by cybernetics—the comparative study of automatic control systems by which we organize, store, and recall data. Arthur R. Miller, a brilliant young professor at the University of Michigan Law School, scrutinizes in this book the impact of the computer on one vital aspect of our lives—privacy. He came to the subject through chance. In the fall of 1966 a university colleague telephoned him to inquire about the legal consequences of placing copyrighted materials into computers. Mr. Miller quickly saw that law had not come to grips with the implications of this new technology. Moreover, he soon realized that the copyright problem, fascinating as it is, barely touches the range of legal issues arising from the computerization of data. This brought him to the potential threat of computers to privacy. The result is a well-organized, tightly reasoned, and thoroughly documented exploration of the inroads already made

RAMSEY CLARK, former Attorney General of the United States, is the author of *Crime in America*. Now in private practice, he is part of the legal team that will defend Philip Berrigan and other alleged conspirators against charges that they plotted to kidnap Henry Kissinger.

SR/APRIL 17, 1971

by computers on privacy—a pioneer work in a field that has vital implications for the very character of our people.

Of late [he writes] lawyers and social scientists have been reaching the conclusion that the basic attribute of an effective right of privacy is the individual's ability to control the circulation of information relating to him—a power that often is essential to maintaining social relationships and personal freedom. Correlatively, when an individual is deprived of control over the spigot that governs the flow of information pertaining to him, in some measure he becomes subservient to those people and institutions that are able to manipulate it.

Although his deep concern is apparent, Professor Miller is balanced and unemotional in his analysis; he knows that computers are necessary and can be beneficial, but he is aware of the dehumanization that their irresponsible use can cause.

... Many people have voiced concern that the computer, with its insatiable appetite for information, its image of infallibility, and its inability to forget anything that has been stored in it, may become the heart of a surveillance system that will turn society into a transparent world in which our homes, our finances, and our associations will be bared to a wide range of casual observers, including the morbidly curious and the maliciously or commercially intrusive. These fears have been exacerbated by the clarion call in certain quarters for the establishment of a National Data Center, by the emergence of surveillance data systems as well as computer-based credit-reporting services, and by the hypnotic attraction for electronic record-keeping being exhibited throughout government, industry, and academe.

Endless quantities of personal data are compiled but the individual is un-




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dicts," although he concedes that both their power and their requirements necessitate sophisticated forms of self-discipline and control.

When the National Crime Information Center was initiated in January 1967, only self-restraint and budgetary limitations kept it from computerizing personal data of concern to police. Who is suspicious? Who has been arrested? Who associates with people believed dangerous? Why not put all data about every suspect into a single computer instantly available to every policeman? Because we realize the imperfection of all men, including police. Because we hold some values higher than safety—among them, freedom. Because we believe in the individual, in his worth, integrity, and dignity. What is left of a man if every jealousy, hatred, or fear of him, every mistake and misconception about him, every foible, idiosyncrasy, and vice, and every fact and fiction are recorded for all to see?

*The Assault on Privacy* is an enormously important book. With wit, grace, reason, and humane concern Professor Miller has not only grappled with the challenge of change in a mass, technologically advanced society but exercised the type of foresight that will be essential to the mastery of technology. For technology does not make moral judgments. It can destroy as well as create. Even now it threatens privacy. And our failure to address this problem—to secure the essential enrichments of the computer while avoiding its potential ravishment—can destroy human dignity.

**FRASER YOUNG  
LITERARY CRYPT NO. 1446**

*A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer No. 1446 will be found in the next issue.*

CSD GKT IVS FDKINNH, UOWS

CSD GKT EUSSN JIBUH, IVS

IUGIHE NVTFB TA PKS AIRP.

—JSVPVIDB VFEEUU

*Answer to Literary Crypt No. 1445*

*A man only understands what is akin to something already existing in himself.*

—FREDERIC AMIEL.

## Book Forum

### Letters from Readers

#### Why We Are in Vietnam

I DISAGREE WITH Richard Halloran's uncritical review of *Roots of Involvement: The U.S. in Asia 1784-1971* [SR, Mar. 27]. Mr. Halloran quotes without comment Marvin Kalb and Elie Abel's statement that "We found no substantial evidence that the United States was driven by imperialist motives . . . to search for markets and raw materials . . . in Vietnam."

The *U.S. News and World Report* of April 16, 1954, carried an article headlined "Why U.S. Risks War for Indochina." That article's lead paragraph contains the following sentence: "Tin, rubber, rice, key strategic raw materials are what the war is really about. U.S. sees it as a place to hold—at any cost."

Inserted in the same article is a box separately entitled "The President Explains the Value of Indochina," which is a summary of President Eisenhower's answers to questions put to him in a press conference on April 7, 1954. A quote from it reads: "In its economic aspects, the President added, [the loss of Indochina] would take away that region that Japan must have as a trading area, or it would force Japan to turn toward China and Manchuria, or toward the Communist areas in order to live. The possible consequences of the loss to the free world are just incalculable, Mr. Eisenhower said."

I think Mr. Eisenhower's statements of April 7, 1954, make out a strong case for the "markets and raw materials" thesis. Indeed, I think it is the only rational (sick!) explanation—since this nation hasn't killed thousands of Asians and spent maybe \$150-billion on killing expenses because we love them so much.

KEITH MCKINLEY,  
Madison, N.J.

#### Sephardim in Iberia

THE REVIEW OF *The Grandees* [SR, Mar. 20] has several historical errors. While Jews may have moved "in the highest circles on the Iberian peninsula" in the fourteenth century, these Jews were an insignificant number of the total Jewry there. In 1391 the Jewish communities of Barcelona, Toledo, and Seville were either totally destroyed and their inmates assassinated or else the Jews in the *aljamas* (the Spanish for the ghettos in Spain) were compelled to convert under fear of death.

Jews had been compelled to reside in the *juderias*, another word for ghetto, since the thirteenth century. The expulsion in 1492 was merely the climax of the persecution of the Jews that began in the fourteenth century. The 500,000 or more Jews who left Spain (actually only Castille and Aragon because Spain was not a political entity until 1516) went to Italy, North Africa, and the Ottoman Empire, except for the 100,000 who went to Portugal.

The Jews did not go to Holland until 1580, and they first received official refuge in 1596, a century after the expulsion.

The Sephardim in the Iberian peninsula were not "aristocrats first and Jews second." One of their greatneses was that they lived as observant and proud Jews and integrated into the milieu of their environment. The poetry, the prayers, and the philosophical works written in the Iberian peninsula between 1050 and 1400 show that their major interest was in their faith.

SEYMOUR B. LIEBMAN,  
Miami, Fla.

#### Derivations

EMIL KNUTZNER'S LETTER [BOOK FORUM, Mar. 3] is a rabid misrepresentation of facts gathered by anthropologists, historians, and archeologists through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is clearly derived from the "thinking" of racists like Count Gobineau, Houston Stuart Chamberlain, and the infamous Alfred Rosenberg in his "Mythos of the Twentieth Century."

The fact is that that the Arabs are Semites like the Jews, the ancient Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, and Phoenicians and, according to the newest findings, the Minoans, Mycenaean, and Cretans. They all share a common heritage in their language and early religion.

The fact is that the Indogermanic people came between 3000 and 1500 B.C. from the Turanian Steppes, and in a three-pronged attack their hordes descended into India, Europe, and Asia Minor, where they subjugated the peaceful original inhabitants.

The fact is that the Arabs after their conquest of Mesopotamia, North Africa, Spain, and Sicily had created an empire and attained a high level of civilization with many Jews, as their distant relatives, in positions of trust, which lasted until the eleventh century in their non-European territories and until the fifteenth century in Spain. The end of this enlightened era came when the Mongolian hordes overran the califate and imposed their own rulers, mostly descendants of Genghis Khan, on the unhappy peoples of many lands. Subsequently the Arab people steadily deteriorated under their foreign rulers, the last of whom were the Ottoman Turks.

Since 1921 the Arabs have been free. But have they made good use of their freedom? They are feuding among themselves in their vast unused territories and won't accede another unhappy people, the Jews, the right to live in their ancient homeland, Judea.

FRANK W. GUTMAN,  
Milwaukee, Wis.

