



# **Overseers of the Poor: Surveillance, Resistance, and the Limits of Privacy (Chicago Series in Law and Society)**

*John Gilliom*

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In *Overseers of the Poor*, John Gilliom confronts the everyday politics of surveillance by exploring the worlds and words of those who know it best—the watched. Arguing that the current public conversation about surveillance and privacy rights is rife with political and conceptual failings, Gilliom goes beyond the critics and analysts to add fresh voices, insights, and perspectives.

This powerful book lets us in on the conversations of low-income mothers from Appalachian Ohio as they talk about the welfare bureaucracy and its remarkably advanced surveillance system. In their struggle to care for their families, these women are monitored and assessed through a vast network of supercomputers, caseworkers, fraud control agents, and even grocers and neighbors.

In-depth interviews show that these women focus less on the right to privacy than on a critique of surveillance that lays bare the personal and political conflicts with which they live. And, while they have little interest in conventional forms of politics, we see widespread patterns of everyday resistance as they subvert the surveillance regime when they feel it prevents them from being good parents. Ultimately, *Overseers of the Poor* demonstrates the need to reconceive not just our understanding of the surveillance-privacy debate but also the broader realms of language, participation, and the politics of rights.

We all know that our lives are being watched more than ever before. As we struggle to understand and confront this new order, Gilliom argues, we need to spend less time talking about privacy rights, legislatures, and courts of law and more time talking about power, domination, and the ongoing struggles of everyday people.

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