

Surveillance | Executive Summary

“The observation and monitoring of Black communities in the United States is not new and has continued to proliferate with the advent of technological innovation and accompanying institutional partnerships that have expedited the automation of the all-seeing eye.”

Surveillance requires both a target that is being monitored and an all-seeing eye – a monitor of the “other.” In the United States, Black communities have continued to be marked as this targeted “other” – a community whose actions have been deemed necessary to track. The monitoring of Black communities in the United States is not new and has continued to proliferate with the advent of technological innovation and institutional partnerships that have expedited the automation of the all-seeing eye. The monitoring and subsequent criminalization of Black communities has expanded from the criminal punishment system to social services, education, medical systems, and the [family policing system](#).

Racializing surveillance does not simply imply the maintenance of a racial order; rather, it suggests that things are ordered racially by way of surveillance. For Black individuals, racialized surveillance is tied to ideologies from the European colonial expansion and transatlantic slavery which sought to “structure social relations and institutions in ways that privilege Whiteness.” Today, the surveilling eye continues to exist as a compounding and insidious White gaze, one that enacts violence and harms Black communities.

The system not only mimics punitive forms of “justice seeking” akin to the criminal punishment system, it also works collaboratively with law enforcement agencies like the police, FBI, and ICE. However, unlike the often more obvious harms of mass incarceration and prisons, the family policing system has inconspicuously destroyed generations of Black familial and community bonds. [It] does so by investigating calls of suspected maltreatment, referring parents and children to classes and therapies, monitoring family progress, and in the case of many Black families, forcing family separation. Each “service” requires the physical and digital tracking of families to ensure that the child is “protected” to the standards of the system.

“The overrepresentation of Black families within the system is not an accident, but rather a consequence of various policies including the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) that has contributed to the proliferation of surveillance and policing of Black communities.”

There is a path in which we do not require or seek assistance from the family policing system, one that rejects racialized surveillance and denounces family separation. Abolition is in no way a utopian fix to the issues that underlie our communities – but it is a chance to address conflict in a way that challenges structural harms, prioritizes those who have been harmed, and relies on community for care. Reforms fail to challenge the anti-Blackness that undergirds the system – instead, reforms have led to an uptick of technological advances that reify racialized boundaries and borders. The path forward involves an understanding of the ways the system continues to surveil families. It requires repealing mandatory reporting laws. It requires creative ways of coming together to support rather than report families. It requires the complete end of family policing.