

# Giving up our privacy without much thought

In 'Privacy: And How To Get it Back' author B.J. Mendelson says we're up against the power of apathy in a battle which only wealthy tech companies win

## PRIVACY



"Privacy: And How To Get It Back," by B.J. Mendelson

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The problem with universal basic income is that proponents haven't suggested a good source for the money it would take to fund such a project. As luck would have it, B.J. Mendelson has a suggestion. In his book, "Privacy: And How To Get It Back," he suggests that we "let the ad and tech industries pay people an annual license fee in exchange for their data." We currently live in a world where only one side — the wealthy tech side — benefits. In exchange for "free" services, such as a profile on Facebook or a curated search-results list on Amazon, not to mention annoying and often irrelevant pop-up or banner ads, Big Tech knows everything about you. So does the government. And, according to Mendelson, so does any halfway decent hacker. But it's our data. Shouldn't its access be our choice?

Maybe you don't care about privacy because you think you've got nothing to hide. Mendelson acknowledges that he can't get you to care; he would also like to remind you that "your credit score, just as one example, could be determined in part by your Twitter profile." You can choose not to believe that — it certainly would be a less scary situation. The only thing that changes is how much time we have to change it.

Maybe you think there's nothing we can do. Mendelson would agree, if you're thinking about the federal level. But at a state and local level, the people can make things happen. And, speaking of the federal level, Mendelson wants to remind you of the power of apathy. Mendelson writes:

"As The Washington Post reported, close to 100 million people didn't come out to vote. That's more

than the number of people who voted for each of the respective candidates. The people who did not vote, for whatever reason, decided, through inertia, that Trump was an acceptable candidate. It might sound extreme to say this, but we're dealing with a similar situation when it comes to your data and the ramifications of it being collected by companies that I outlined in this book. Left to their own devices, the tech companies and members of the advertising industry will make themselves rich, jobs will be wiped out through the utilization of that data and automation, billions of dollars in taxes (that we badly need) will go unpaid, and algorithms will be used to discriminate against you in ways you won't even hear about until it's too late."

It comes down to what kind of world you'd like to live in now and in the future. As Mendelson points out, the future depends on both how we understand and respond to the warnings we're receiving, and how very difficult it is for humans to make decisions based on those warnings. We evolved to handle immediate threats fairly well; anything that doesn't immediately impact our life is harder to take action on, both from a motivational and a logistical standpoint. You may not care about what Big Tech and the government are doing with your data now, but it's not hard to imagine what they may use it for in the future, which is a good reason to take Mendelson's warnings seriously.

"Privacy" is a quick read that outlines some big, scary problems. It posits at least one viable solution — a way to fund universal basic income. It's a solution that will be difficult to attain, but it's well worth a shot.

Courtesy of Real Change News, Street Roots' sister paper in Seattle.

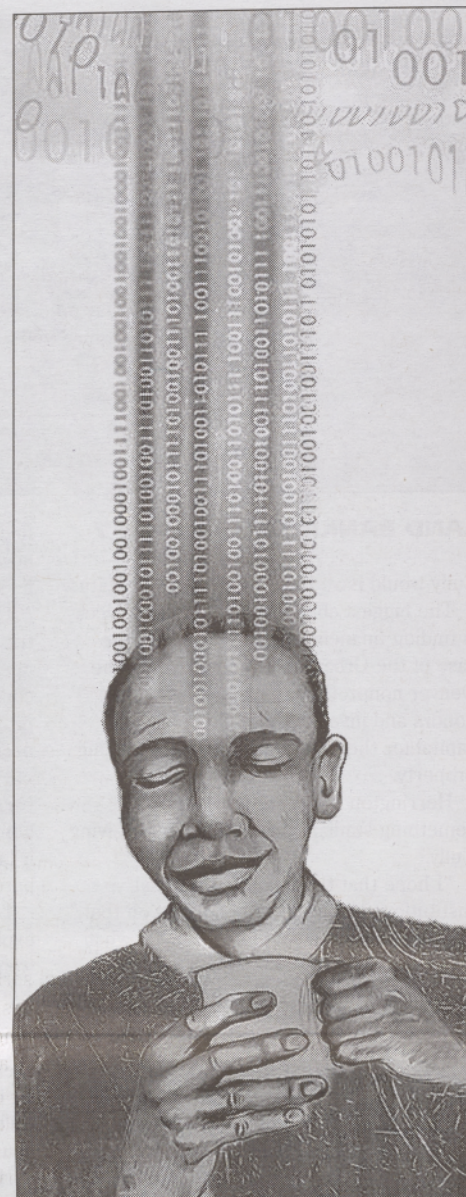


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