

# THE BIOPOLITICAL JUSTIFICATION FOR GEOSURVEILLANCE

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**ABSTRACT.** Biopolitical use of geosurveillance can create and sustain a politics of fear. Although the majority of surveillance literature focuses on individuals, in this article I focus on groups and populations, drawing on Michel Foucault's analysis of biopolitics. After discussing the forms and history of geosurveillance I argue that three particularly important factors contribute to these politics: divisions, geospatial technologies, and the risk-based society. In order to combat the negative unintended consequences of these factors I suggest that more attention be paid to the mutual relationships between geospatial technology and politics, rather than on assessments of the value of individual surveillant technologies. *Keywords:* *biopolitics, fear, geosurveillance, 9/11.*

(09-11-06) 12:01 PDT SAN FRANCISCO—A United Airlines flight that was diverted to Dallas this morning after an unclaimed electronic device was discovered onboard has landed at San Francisco International Airport, an airport spokesman said.

The flight crew on United flight 351 from Atlanta to San Francisco elected to stop in Dallas around 7 a.m., said SFO spokesman Mike McCarron, after finding a backpack on board that no one claimed. The unattended backpack contained a PDA device, McCarron said, "like a Blackberry."

Authorities searched the plane in Dallas and found nothing unusual, he said.

—Marisa Lagos, 2006

There was a time, perhaps not too long ago, when finding a BlackBerry would have meant "finders keepers, losers weepers." Now however, it is grounds for emergency action by the state.

The diversion of United Airlines flight 351 to Dallas, Texas, on the fifth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks is by no means a unique event. United Airlines flight 919 was diverted in 2004 when Yusuf Islam, the pop singer formerly known as "Cat Stevens," was found to be on board. The U.S. government refused to disclose what connection, if any, he had with terrorism, and he was returned without charge. In May 2005 Alitalia flight 618 was similarly diverted to Bangor, Maine, after a passenger's name was found to match one on the no-fly list. After being briefly detained, the passenger continued his flight, again without charge. (In October 2006, the CBS television show *60 Minutes* revealed that the no-fly list was riddled with errors [Kroft 2006].) Over the 2005 New Year, the media suddenly became concerned about terrorists shining laser beams into pilots' eyes in order to make planes crash—a story that then faded away. A number of women have reportedly been forced to drink their own breast milk to demonstrate its safety even if it was in the allowable 3-ounce bottles, and in both August and September 2006 flights were diverted be-

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