



## Whether for Commerce or Law Enforcement, Facial Recognition Raises Privacy Concerns

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“Biometric technology” (e.g., facial recognition, fingerprint technology, or retina scans) has increasingly become part of our digital lives. While using such technology in place of more traditional tools such as cash, paper or plastic IDs, and credit cards may be convenient, it also raises concerns about the threat to privacy that it represents.



Irish journalist Quentin Fottrell explored such privacy issues in a September 10 article for MarketWatch.

The article related the story of professor Aram Sinnreich who, forgetting his wallet at home, used his iPhone to pay for his groceries, unlocking his phone using facial recognition. The shopper suddenly realized: “We are just one small step away from paying with our bodily features alone.”

Fottrell noted that with in-store facial-recognition machines, which are already in use, the shopper wouldn’t even need his smartphone. He quoted Sinnreich’s observation about an ongoing development — how removing the last physical barriers — smartphones, watches, smart glasses, and credit cards — between our bodies and corporate America is the final frontier in mobile payments.

“The deeper the tie between the human body and the financial networks, the fewer intimate spaces will be left unconnected to those networks,” said Sinnreich, author of *The Essential Guide to Intellectual Property*.

The use of facial recognition or fingerprint sensors in devices such as smartphones has become increasingly common. “Every technological necessity exists in the real world and is used commercially,” Sinnreich said. “It just hasn’t all been integrated into one biometric-payment method yet because it would creep people out.” He said: “It’s the neoliberal takeover of the human body.”

Potential threats to privacy posed by facial recognition have been explored in several articles posted by *The New American*. A [November 2018 article](#) discussed how Orlando, Florida, law enforcement is testing technology developed by Amazon, Inc. to keep the city’s residents under constant surveillance. The story, broken by BuzzFeed, detailed the Orlando police department’s potential deployment of



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Amazon's Rekognition, the giant firm's facial recognition software.

The article summarized BuzzFeed's description of how Rekognition works as follows:

Amazon's facial recognition technology allows police and other law enforcement agencies to conduct dragnet surveillance in real-time without submitting the use of those surveillance apparatuses to the demands of the law [i.e., warrants], state or federal.

The article observed:

Whether it's Amazon or some other technological titan, the sort of surveillance symbiosis as currently contracted by Amazon and the city of Orlando spells serious civil liberty liabilities when one of the world's largest, wealthiest, and most diverse technology companies is the supplier of software to municipal governments that will give it the power to put every person within their jurisdictions within the range of their virtual vision.

Joe Wolverton, the author of the article, concluded:

The Fourth Amendment [which mandates that no warrants shall issued without probable cause] must be enforced or cities in America will become nothing more than glorified gulags where citizens are nothing more than inmates being watched by the wardens of the Panopticon on the Potomac.

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Related articles:

["Facial Recognition" Body-cams for Police Prove Unreliable in California Test](#)

[Orlando Testing Facial Recognition Technology Provided Free by Amazon](#)

[How the CIA Secretly Collects Biometric Data](#)

*Warren Mass has served The New American since its launch in 1985 in several capacities, including marketing, editing, and writing. Since retiring from the staff several years ago, he has been a regular contributor to the magazine. Warren writes from Texas and can be reached at [wmass@thenewamerican.com](mailto:wmass@thenewamerican.com).*



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