

# Conversations about Mass Surveillance, Social Control, and Safer Cities

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## About:

This slideshow serves as an interactive workshop on the scope of mass surveillance in the United States, particularly in Detroit and other urban communities. It is meant to explore surveillance's effects on privacy, policing, and community life. Media including documentaries, databases, and short-form content is featured throughout. These clips have been chosen to foster complex discussions on the effects of surveillance and what role it should play in communities. Participants are encouraged to evaluate their own relationships with surveillance, whether through group discussion or creating their own materials on surveillance (journal reflections, zines, collages, etc.).



Introduction to America's Surveillance Network (click image to watch video)



How many surveillance cameras do you think there are in Detroit? In the United States?

Database of Flock Cameras (DeFlock)

A single Flock Camera costs \$2,500 per year to operate, and the city of Detroit has committed **\$11.25 Million** across two major projects for the construction and operation of their Flock camera fleet.



What does America's Surveillance Network look like? Is it possible to avoid? (click image to watch video)



When hearing about the extent of surveillance in Detroit & the US:

- What are your immediate thoughts?
- What purpose do you think these cameras serve?



Thomas Drake — former US Army Analyst and NSA Whistleblower —  
Discusses the goal of mass surveillance technology (click image to watch video)



Drake describes being surveilled as a “pathological condition” and deems it a tool of **social control**. What do you think he means by this? How can being surveilled change our behavior?

**Context:** A private company, led by the man in the suit, developed a surveillance plane designed to record crime in urban areas. The company is trying to establish a contract with the city of Baltimore for the plane to be deployed over “high crime” neighborhoods. To achieve this, they have hired community liaisons, like Archie in this clip, to organize meetings with community and city council members to convince them the plane will make Baltimore safer. Some community members are skeptical.

**As you watch,** listen to the different arguments community members make for or against the plane. In particular, pay attention to the anonymous man and the two people who respond to his argument.



(Click image to watch video)

# Discussion Questions:

If you were in the room, with which side of the argument would you find yourself agreeing?

Are there any important factors their discussion left out?

Some of the community members argue that the surveillance plane would be a **meaningful crime deterrent**.

Do you agree?

Is this worth the other secondary effects of being surveilled?

Quotes from the clip:

“To give up all of my personal rights to solve crime: it’s a false premise. A false truth”

“We use crime as a bait because we know it gets people very emotional”

“Most of the crimes happen on the street but the deterrents are in the hospitals and banks”

“If you can answer “how many murders are there in this town?” then you ought to be willing to apply something to curb it”



The Debate Continues... (click image to watch video)

# Discussion Questions:

Many in the room argue that technology offers some level of **social control**, acting as a crime deterrent. Another points out that when communities rely on crime to survive, cameras are ineffective at deterring them.

What do you think? Can these cameras change behavior in ways other than just deterring crime?

Archie argues at the beginning of the clip that there are **no other solutions to the crime problem**.

Do you agree? Could surveillance money be spent in other ways that would still deter crime?

## Quotes from the clip:

“It’s a deterrent of crime because the person wanting to commit the crime knows they’re being watched.”

“These kids don’t care about no camera. They know they’re being watched. It isn’t cameras that are going to deter anything – it’s mentality”

“There’s nobody else coming with any solutions”



What are some ways  
surveillance budgets  
could be redirected to  
deter crime?

# Community Violence Prevention

**Community Violence Prevention (CVP)** and **Community Violence Intervention (CVI)** programs, usually led by residents with firsthand experiences in the community, implement strategies that interrupt violence by collaborating and establishing relationships with people involved with or effected by violence.

CVP in  
Baltimore

# What's changing in 2026?

**Automated License Plate Readers (ALPRs) remain prevalent in Michigan.**

- Over 4,000 cameras in 2026
- 125 cities and counties use ALPRS in daily operations

**Michigan cities that have ended their partnerships with Flock in 2026:**

- Westland
- Clawson
- Bay City
- Milford
- Ferndale

**What do you think surveillance will look like in Michigan in 2030?**



# Organizations Advocating Against Mass Surveillance

## [Surveillance Technology Oversight Project \(STOP\)](#)

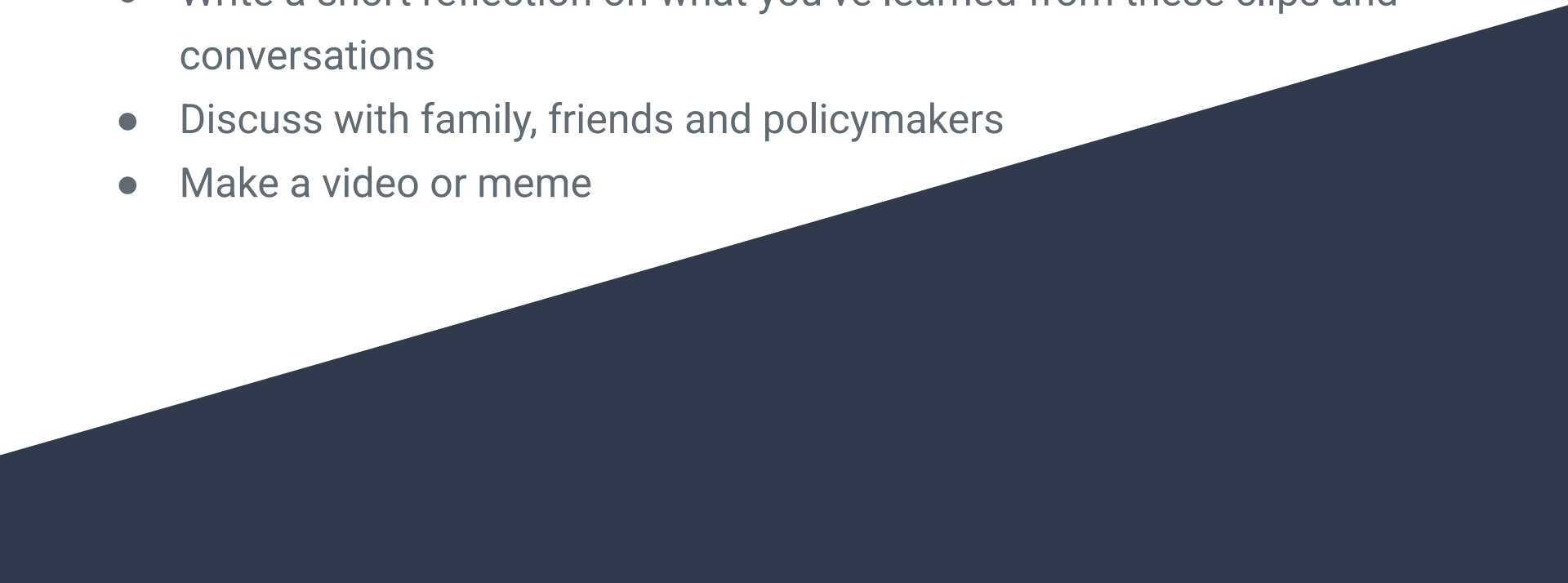


## [ACLU's "Get The Flock Out" Campaign](#)



Search the [Atlas of Surveillance](#) data for a listing of the policing technology in your area.

# Activities

- Create signs, sculptures or zines about surveillance
  - Write a short reflection on what you've learned from these clips and conversations
  - Discuss with family, friends and policymakers
  - Make a video or meme
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