

Big Brother GPS?

Suspecting that Antoine Jones was dealing drugs, the FBI attached a global-positioning-system device to his car in a public parking lot – without his knowing. And, beginning in September 2005, it tracked his movements at all hours of the day for four weeks – without a warrant. Sure enough, the data showed that Jones, a resident of Washington, D.C., had frequented a stash house in Maryland. The bureau brought charges, and a federal jury convicted Jones of drug trafficking.

But Jones appealed, citing that oft-forgot middle child of the Bill of Rights, the Fourth Amendment. Warrantless GPS surveillance constituted an “unreasonable search” under the Constitution because “it [involved] a uniquely intrusive technology that [operated] by converting an individual’s vehicle into a satellite-data transceiver at the government’s service,” Jones’s lawyers argued. Luckily for them, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit agreed.

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