What’s at stake: Rejecting national relativism, undoing the damage done to civil liberties particularly by the Bush administration but also by the Obama, and preventing new assaults on civil liberties. Anyone who criticizes one’s own country’s wrongdoings is often asked why he or she is not exposing the wrongs committed by other countries. Snowden’s reply is that critics have no possibility of stopping crimes and follies in other countries. Only those of our own countries are known to us and possibly susceptible to reform. To attend to other countries would be another distraction, like take a luxury cruise, when the wrongs persist because too few people are focused on ending them. At the end of the files Snowden had written Laura Poitras and Glenn Greenwald an explanation for why he was leaking the files, which Greenwald read near the end of his flight to Hong Kong to meet Snowden. Snowden’s note ends with these words: “Many will malign me for failing to engage in national relativism, to look away from [my] society’s problems toward distant, external evils for which we hold neither authority nor responsibility, but citizenship carries with it a duty to first police one’s own government before seeking to correct others. . .I will be satisfied if the federation of secret law, unequal pardon, and irresistible executive powers that rule the world that I love are revealed for even an instant.” (No Place to Hide, p. 32). Michael Moore--who wrote: “I can’t stand living in a country like this, and I’m not leaving.—undoubtedly honors Edward Snowden. —Dick

Reviewer on rogerebert.com called Poitras's "Citizenfour" the most important film of the 21st century.
My blog:
War Department/Peace Department

http://jamesrichardbennett.blogspot.com/

Newsletters

http://www.omnicenter.org/newsletter-archive/

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An informed, vocal, insistent citizenry—preeminently our hero whistleblowers—is the best defense of our democracy, not ten U.S. Navy carrier strike groups.

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Nos. 1-5 at end

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What Are Movies Good For?

Awakening a sense of wonder and flooding a cinema with crucial realities.

Stuart Klawans


GCHQ satellites in Bude, England, from Citizenfour

Any film festival worth your while ought to revive a chronically unsettled debate—what are movies good for?—and provide, if not new arguments about the subject, then at least fresh ways to restate the old ones. We all know that movies make a lot of money for a few people, provide a living for many, and help most of us pass the time—which is fine, as far as it goes. But beyond that, why should anyone care?

Toward its conclusion, this year’s New York Film Festival gave such an overpowering answer to that question, with the world premiere of Laura Poitras’s Citizenfour, that it almost undid every other case the NYFF had been making. Faced with the urgency of this documentary about Edward Snowden, it was easy to forget, or dismiss, the apologetics for cinema that had been implicit in the festival’s other selections: appeals to joy, curiosity, fellow feeling, support for young artists and personal loyalty to older ones. I’ll get to those reasons for moviegoing and the examples that supported them this year. First, though, let me deal with the pressing issue of Poitras’s film, which is more than the record of a historic event. It is, in itself, one of the instruments of that history.

The bulk of Citizenfour consists of substantial excerpts from videos that Poitras shot in a room in the Mira Hotel in Hong Kong over the course of eight days in June 2013, when Snowden brought his evidence of pervasive surveillance by the National Security Agency to her, Glenn Greenwald and Ewen MacAskill and decided, with their help, when and how to reveal his identity. For explanatory purposes, Citizenfour augments these scenes with a variety of other footage that Poitras has shot or assembled over the course of several years: hearings in Washington and Brasília, conferences in New York City, a courtroom scene in San Francisco, the construction site for the NSA’s new data center in Utah. These contextual materials serve what I might call, without prejudice, the film’s muckraking agenda. But then, a thousand newspaper articles and cable-news reports have already raked up most of the factual muck you find in Citizenfour. What more can a movie give you?
It can give you the experience, at once deeply serious and nervously exhilarating, of being locked in hiding with Snowden, from the moment before he takes his irrevocable step to the day he flees the hotel as an asylum-seeker. At its core, Citizenfour is a highly charged chamber drama (with plenty of gallows humor) combined with an intensive character study, which enables you to judge for yourself the clarity of purpose in Snowden's bearing, the concern for the people closest to him, the respect for his own abilities and steady disregard for his own future, the progressive darkening of the circles around his eyes.

The character study (which has been Poitras’s basic genre to date, in My Country, My Country and The Oath) is necessary—the film is necessary—because the effort to distract people from the substance of Snowden’s revelations has consistently, and predictably, entailed an effort to disparage him as a person. Part of the drama you see in the hotel room concerns just that: Snowden’s coming to terms with the inevitability of his becoming a story in himself. And so, in effect, Citizenfour also falls into the category of the making-of documentary, taking you behind the scenes of the video that Poitras posted on The Guardian’s website on June 9, 2013, showing Snowden to the world.

When Citizenfour screened at the festival, it flooded Alice Tully Hall with crucial realities in a way that few other selections attempted, and with a force that none could match. But I would argue that it did so as cinema, demonstrating one of the things that movies are good for.

SNOWDEN AND ACLU

“EDWARD SNOWDEN WIRED.” Stand (Summer 2014, pub. by the ACLU). Conversation recorded between Snowden and ACLU Exec. Director Anthony Romero, who traveled to Moscow for a one-on-one interview on why Snowden disclosed the files.

LETTER FROM SNOWDEN

James—6-4-2014

It’s been one year.

Technology has been a liberating force in our lives. It allows us to create and share the experiences that make us human, effortlessly. But in secret, our very own government—one bound by the Constitution and its Bill of Rights—has reverse-
engineered something beautiful into a tool of mass surveillance and oppression. The government right now can easily monitor whom you call, whom you associate with, what you read, what you buy, and where you go online and offline, and they do it to all of us, all the time.

Today, our most intimate private records are being indiscriminately seized in secret, without regard for whether we are actually suspected of wrongdoing. When these capabilities fall into the wrong hands, they can destroy the very freedoms that technology should be nurturing, not extinguishing. Surveillance, without regard to the rule of law or our basic human dignity, creates societies that fear free expression and dissent, the very values that make America strong.

In the long, dark shadow cast by the security state, a free society cannot thrive.

That’s why one year ago I brought evidence of these irresponsible activities to the public—to spark the very discussion the U.S. government didn’t want the American people to have. With every revelation, more and more light coursed through a National Security Agency that had grown too comfortable operating in the dark and without public consent. Soon incredible things began occurring that would have been unimaginable years ago. A federal judge in open court called an NSA mass surveillance program likely unconstitutional and “almost Orwellian.” Congress and President Obama have called for an end to the dragnet collection of the intimate details of our lives. Today legislation to begin rolling back the surveillance state is moving in Congress after more than a decade of impasse.

I am humbled by our collective successes so far. When the Guardian and The Washington Post began reporting on the NSA’s project to make privacy a thing of the past, I worried the risks I took to get the public the information it deserved would be met with collective indifference.

One year later, I realize that my fears were unwarranted.

Americans, like you, still believe the Constitution is the highest law of the land, which cannot be violated in secret in the name of a false security. Some say I’m a man without a country, but that’s not true. America has always been an ideal, and though I’m far away, I’ve never felt as connected to it as I do now, watching the necessary debate unfold as I hoped it would. America, after all, is always at our fingertips; that is the power of the Internet.

But now it’s time to keep the momentum for serious reform going so the conversation does not die prematurely.

Only then will we get the legislative reform that truly reins in the NSA and puts the government back in its constitutional place. Only then will we get the secure technologies we need to communicate without fear that silently in the background, our very own government is collecting, collating, and crunching the data that allows unelected bureaucrats to intrude into our most private spaces, analyzing our hopes
and fears. Until then, every American who jealously guards their rights must do their best to engage in digital self-defense and proactively protect their electronic devices and communications. Every step we can take to secure ourselves from a government that no longer respects our privacy is a patriotic act.

We’ve come a long way, but there’s more to be done.

Edward J. Snowden, American

P.S. Check out and share the ACLU’s new video about the last year in the surveillance debate, “They knew our secrets. One year later, we know theirs.”

Please note: If you forward or distribute, the links will open a page with your information filled in.

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SNOWDEN AND THE ACLU

1. Edward Snowden is a Patriot | American Civil Liberties Union
https://www.aclu.org/.../edward-snowden-...

American Civil Liberties Union
Dec 17, 2013 - By Anthony D. Romero, Executive Director, ACLU at 5:44pm ... rifling through many Americans' minds as to why Edward Snowden should not ...

2. Anthony D. Romero | American Civil Liberties Union
https://www.aclu.org/.../anthony-d-romer...

American Civil Liberties Union
Anthony D. Romero is the Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union. He took the helm just four days ... Edward Snowden is a Patriot. 12/17/2013.
3. **Edward Snowden Is a Patriot | Anthony D. Romero**
   www.huffingtonpost.com/anthony...romero/edward-...

   The Huffington Post

   Dec 17, 2013 - Edward Snowden is a great American and a true patriot. My colleagues and I at the ACLU are proud to be his legal advisors. We are committed ...

4. **"Edward Snowden Has Done This Country a Service ...**
   www.democracynow.org/.../edward_snowden_has_do...

   Democracy Now!

   Oct 10, 2013 - Anthony Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union. ... as a form of repression, is the ACLU representing Ed Snowden?

5. **ACLU Chief: Greenwald Will Reveal Spying on US Muslims**
   www.theatlantic.com/.../anthony-romero...aclu/373862/

   The Atlantic

   Jul 2, 2014 - The civil-liberties advocate Anthony Romero said new information about ... although the ACLU represents Edward Snowden, these stories are ...

6. **Does NSA make us safer? Opening statements | MSNBC**
   www.msnbc.com/.../snowdens-revelations-good-for-us...

   Jun 30, 2014

   Keith Alexander and the ACLU’s Anthony Romero set up the debate with opening ... on the NSA's ...

7. **Free Speech TV - "Edward Snowden has done this country ...**
   https://www.facebook.com/freespeechtv/posts/10151647818535981

   "Edward Snowden has done this country a service." - Anthony Romero, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union Do you agree with Romero?...

8. **News for Edward Snowden and Anthony Romero, ACLU**

   1. **Exclusive: Amy Goodman Interviews Julian Assange in ...**
      Havana Times - 2 days ago

      ... efforts to assist National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden. ..... including Human Rights Watch, Anthony Romero of the ACLU, ...

   2. **ACLU Chief: NSA Spied on US Muslims**
      Daily Beast - 6 days ago

      More news for Edward Snowden and Anthony Romero, ACLU

   9. **ACLU Chief: NSA Spied on U.S. Muslims - The Daily Beast**
      www.thedailybeast.com/.../aclu-chief-nsa-spied-on-u-s-m...
The Daily Beast

7 days ago - The group represents Edward Snowden, whose documents ... Nevertheless, Anthony D. Romero said Muslims were "subject to the kind of ... 

10. Former NSA Chief Clashes With ACLU Head in Debate ... www.nextgov.com/cybersecurity/2014/.../aclu/.../87823/
Nextgov.com

6 days ago - Anthony Romero of the ACLU, academic Jeffrey Rosen and former ... The two teams also spent time arguing about Edward Snowden and ...

11. Lawfare › The Atlantic Reports that the ACLU Reports that ... www.lawfareblog.com/.../the-atlantic-reports-that-the-aclu-reports-that-gl...

6 days ago - Anthony D. Romero, executive director of the American Civil ... although the ACLU represents Edward Snowden, these stories are being ...

1. Snowden Needs Your Help
Ad www.aclu.org/Help-Snowden

INTERVIEWS

Interview of Snowden by Katrina vanden Heuvel and Stephen F. Cohen

The Pierre Omidyar Insurgency

By Andrew Rice, New York Magazine

04 November 14

The eBay founder was a mild-mannered Obama supporter looking for a way to spend his time and fortune. The Snowden leaks gave him a cause — and an enemy.
On October 6, *Nation* editor and publisher Katrina vanden Heuvel and contributing editor Stephen F. Cohen (professor emeritus of Russian studies at New York University and Princeton) sat down in Moscow for a wide-ranging discussion with Edward Snowden.

Throughout their nearly four-hour conversation, which lasted considerably longer than planned (see below for audio excerpts), the youthful-appearing Snowden was affable, forthcoming, thoughtful and occasionally humorous. Among other issues, he discussed the price he has paid for speaking truth to power, his definition of patriotism and accountability, and his frustration with America’s media and political system. The interview has been edited and abridged for publication, compressing lengthy conversations about technological issues that Snowden has discussed elsewhere.

**The Nation:** It’s very good to be here with you. We visit Moscow often for our work and to see old friends, but you didn’t choose to be in Russia. Are you able to use your time here to work and have some kind of social life? Or do you feel confined and bored?

**Snowden:** I describe myself as an indoor cat, because I’m a computer guy and I always have been. I don’t go out and play football and stuff—that’s not me. I want to think, I want to build, I want to talk, I want to create. So, ever since I’ve been here, my life has been consumed with work that’s actually fulfilling and satisfying.

Raise your voice to ensure Snowden is innocent until proven guilty.
This is according to new revelations contained in documents leaked by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden. Among the targets were the ...

1. **Report: FBI, NSA Monitored Muslim-Americans' Emails**
   Voice of America - 6 hours ago

2. **The FBI eavesdropped on American Muslim lawyers**
   Wired.co.uk - 12 hours ago

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More news for Edward Snowden WIRED

1. **News for Edward Snowden WIRED**

SNOWDEN AND WIRED MAGAZINE, Google Search, July 9, 2014

1. **Latest Snowden Leaks: FBI Targeted Muslim-American**
   Wired - 17 hours ago

2. **Edward Snowden | WIRED**
   www.wired.com/tag/edward-snowden/
   Wired
   Jun 3, 2014 - Morgan Marquis-Boire is the director of security for First Look Media, the most prolific publisher of Edward Snowden's remaining secrets.

2. **Inside Edward Snowden's Life as a Robot | Threat**
   www.wired.com/2014/06/inside-edward-snowdens-life-as-a-robot/
   Wired
   Jun 12, 2014 - Since he first became a household name a year ago, Edward Snowden has been a modern Max Headroom, appearing only as a face on a ...

3. **Out in the Open: Inside the Operating System Edward**
   www.wired.com/2014/04/tails/
   Wired
   by Klint Finley - Apr 14, 2014 - Photo: Josh Valcarcel/WIRED. When NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden first emailed Glenn Greenwald, he insisted on using email ...

4. **Snowden's First Move Against the NSA Was a Party**
   www.wired.com/2014/05/snowden-cryptoparty/
   Wired
May 21, 2014 - Edward Snowden. Photo: Barton Gellman for The Washington Post, via Getty. It was December 11, 2012, and in a small art space behind a ...

5. Edward Snowden's E-Mail Provider Defied FBI - Wired
www.wired.com/2013/10/lavabit_unsealed/

Wired

Oct 2, 2013 - The U.S. government in July obtained a search warrant demanding that Edward Snowden's e-mail provider, Lavabit, turn over the private SSL ...

6. Snowden's Crypto Software May Be Tainted Forever - Wired
www.wired.com/2014/05/truecrypt/

by Robert McMillan - May 29, 2014 - Edward Snowden saw the power of TrueCrypt. Before he became famous for leaking NSA documents to the press, he spent an afternoon in ...

7. Our Top-Secret Message to NSA Whistleblower Edward - Wired
www.wired.com/2013/06/signed-bda0df3c/

Our Top-Secret Message to NSA Whistleblower Edward Snowden. By Kevin Poulsen; 06.14.13 | 3:58 pm | Permalink · Share on Facebook. 0...

8. Glenn Greenwald on Why the Latest Snowden Leak - Wired
www.wired.com/2014/07/greenwald-q-a/

6 hours ago - NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden provided the list to Greenwald last year, which included more than 7,000 email addresses, at least 200 of ...

9. Where Was Edward Snowden in March and April 2013 - Wired
3dblogger.typepad.com/wired.../where-was-edward-snowden-in-march-a...

by Catherine Fitzpatrick - A grinning Snowden answering a question about moles in the NSA in the film made ... In continuing to contemplate my compendium of material on Edward Snowden and his WikiLeaks enablers Julian Assange, Jacob ...

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I, Spy: Edward Snowden in Exile

Alan Rusbridger and Ewen MacAskill, Guardian UK, Reader Supported News, July 19, 2014
Excerpt: "A year into his exile in Moscow, he feels less, not more, isolated. If he is depressed, he doesn't show it. And, at the end of seven hours of conversation, he refuses a beer. 'I actually don't drink.'"

READ MORE

HONORING AND DEFENDING SNOWDEN

Fear retaliation?

Rick, Public Citizen to James

Dick,
Imagine what it must be like when a worker with access to inside information at the NSA, FBI or CIA recognizes that the government is secretly violating the rights of American citizens.

You believe what the intelligence agency has been doing is not only morally wrong, but against the law. Do your colleagues agree? Does your boss?

Imagine the fear you must overcome to right such a wrong — especially when you lack protection from retaliation if your boss disagrees. If your boss fires you for speaking out, you can't even take your boss to court.

No one should have to fear retaliation for standing up to government lawbreaking.

Tell Congress to restore whistleblower protections for intelligence contractor workers.

For more about the urgent need for strong whistleblower protections, read the earlier email, copied below, from Public Citizen President Robert Weissman.

Thanks,

Rick Claypool

Dick,

Intelligence agencies — like the NSA, FBI and CIA — are supposed to protect the American people.
But what if they go too far? What if they violate the rights of the very people they’re supposed to be protecting?

That’s when we need those who work at intelligence agencies to step forward and expose violations without fear of retaliation.

Tell Congress: Reinstate safeguards for workers who blow the whistle when our rights are violated or our taxes are wasted.

Intelligence contractor whistleblowers can be fired for exposing government waste, fraud and abuse — and they are denied a day in court to hold their bosses accountable.

A well-known example is Edward Snowden, who, while working for an NSA contractor, exposed the agency’s privacy abuses and then fled the country for fear of retaliation.

Many months before Snowden went public, lawmakers in the U.S. House of Representatives repealed protections for contractor employees who blow the whistle through proper government channels.

Send a message urging your members of Congress to restore protections for the whistleblowers who alert us to government misconduct.

Snowden has repeatedly explained that a major reason he chose to leak was that he had seen how those who worked within the system were harassed and prosecuted.

No one should have to circumvent the law to fight government illegality.

Congress has the authority — and the obligation — to restore these rights.

Tell your members of Congress to restore and strengthen intelligence contractor whistleblower rights.

Thank you for taking action today.

Onward,

Robert Weissman
President, Public Citizen

The Anti-Empire Report #129

By William Blum – Published June 6th, 2014
Edward Snowden

Is Edward Snowden a radical? The dictionary defines a radical as “an advocate of political and social revolution”, the adjective form being “favoring or resulting in extreme or revolutionary changes”. That doesn’t sound like Snowden as far as what has been publicly revealed. In common usage, the term “radical” usually connotes someone or something that goes beyond the generally accepted boundaries of socio-political thought and policies; often used by the Left simply to denote more extreme than, or to the left of, a “liberal”.

In his hour-long interview on NBC, May 28, in Moscow, Snowden never expressed, or even implied, any thought – radical or otherwise – about United States foreign policy or the capitalist economic system under which we live, the two standard areas around which many political discussions in the US revolve. In fact, after reading a great deal by and about Snowden this past year, I have no idea what his views actually are about these matters. To be sure, in the context of the NBC interview, capitalism was not at all relevant, but US foreign policy certainly was.

Snowden was not asked any direct questions about foreign policy, but if I had been in his position I could not have replied to several of the questions without bringing it up. More than once the interview touched upon the question of whether the former NSA contractor’s actions had caused “harm to the United States”. Snowden said that he’s been asking the entire past year to be presented with evidence of such harm and has so far received nothing. I, on the other hand, as a radical, would have used the opportunity to educate the world-wide audience about how the American empire is the greatest threat to the world’s peace, prosperity, and environment; that anything to slow down the monster is to be desired; and that throwing a wrench into NSA’s surveillance gears is eminently worthwhile toward this end; thus, “harm” indeed should be the goal, not something to apologize for.

Edward added that the NSA has been unfairly “demonized” and that the agency is composed of “good people”. I don’t know what to make of this.

When the war on terrorism was discussed in the interview, and the question of whether Snowden’s actions had hurt that effort, he failed to take the opportunity to point out the obvious and absolutely essential fact – that US foreign policy, by its very nature, regularly and routinely creates anti-American terrorists.

When asked what he’d say to President Obama if given a private meeting, Snowden had no response at all to make. I, on the other hand, would say to Mr. Obama: “Mr. President, in your time in office you’ve waged war against seven countries – Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, Libya and Syria. This makes me wonder something. With all due respect, sir: What is wrong with you?”
A radical – one genuine and committed – would not let such a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity pass by unused. Contrary to what his fierce critics at home may believe, Edward Snowden is not seriously at war with America, its government or its society. Does he have a real understanding, analysis, or criticism of capitalism or US foreign policy? Does he think about what people could be like under a better social system? Is he, I wonder, even anti-imperialist?

And he certainly is not a conspiracy theorist, or at least keeps it well hidden. He was asked about 9-11 and replied:

The 9/11 commission … when they looked at all the classified intelligence from all the different intelligence agencies, they found that we had all of the information we needed … to detect this plot. We actually had records of the phone calls from the United States and out. The CIA knew who these guys were. The problem was not that we weren’t collecting information, it wasn’t that we didn’t have enough dots, it wasn’t that we didn’t have a haystack, it was that we did not understand the haystack that we had.

Whereas I might have pointed out that the Bush administration may have ignored the information because they wanted something bad – perhaps of unknown badness – to happen in order to give them the justification for all manner of foreign and domestic oppression they wished to carry out. And did. (This scenario of course excludes the other common supposition, that it was an “inside job”, in which case collecting information on the perpetrators would not have been relevant.)

The entire segment concerning 9/11 was left out of the television broadcast of the interview, although some part of it was shown later during a discussion. This kind of omission is of course the sort of thing that feeds conspiracy theorists.

All of the above notwithstanding, I must make it clear that I have great admiration for the young Mr. Snowden, for what he did and for how he expresses himself. He may not be a radical, but he is a hero. His moral courage, nerve, composure, and technical genius are magnificent. I’m sure the NBC interview won him great respect and a large number of new supporters. I, in Edward’s place, would be even more hated by Americans than he is, even if I furthered the radicalization of more of them than he has. However, I of course would never have been invited onto mainstream American television for a long interview in prime time. (Not counting my solitary 15 minutes of fame in 2006 courtesy of Osama bin Laden; a gigantic fluke happening.)

Apropos Snowden’s courage and integrity, it appears that something very important has not been emphasized in media reports: In the interview, he took the Russian government to task for a new law requiring bloggers to register – the same government which holds his very fate
in their hands.

**REVIEW OF GREENWALD’S NO PLACE TO HIDE** By Dick Bennett

Greenwald offers Snowden the highest praises throughout *No Place to Hide* (18, 23, 31, 36); for example: “Quite simply, he has reminded everyone about the extraordinary ability of any human being to change the world” (253). In addition to this praise of Snowden, Greenwald’s book is a paean to whistleblower. Referring to “remarkable disclosures from courageous whistleblowers,” Greenwald adds: “Everyone living in a democracy, everyone who values transparency and accountability, owes these whistleblowers a huge debt of gratitude,” from Daniel Ellsberg to Chelsea Manning, Jesselyn Radack, Thomas Tamm, Thomas Drake, Bill Binney. (“Acknowledgments”). Greenwald tried “to make his superiors aware of problems in computer security or systems he thought skirted ethical lines. Those efforts, he said, were almost always rebuffed” p. 42). And of course we owe the same gratitude to investigative reporters like Greenwald and his colleague, Laura Poitras.

Something else should be observed about them and their success in bringing to light “the ubiquitous system of suspicionless surveillance” constructed by the U.S. and its allies. It was no simple matter of Snowden dispatching the NSA files to these two reporters, and all was light. The stature of Snowden, Greenwald, Poitras themselves, and of *The Guardian* newspaper, and others, was essential to eventual success. As soon as the first file was published in *The Guardian*, Snowden was hunted for capture by the world’s most powerful surveillance state. Over and over the accounts by Luke Harding (*The Snowden Files*), Greenwald, and others reveal how crucial was the judgment of the central actors in ensuring the privacy of their communications, avoiding arrest, and in deflecting efforts by mainstream media to attack Snowden and minimize the importance of the files. At the end of his book, Greenwald observes: “There is a powerful lesson here for future whistle-blowers: speaking the truth does not have to destroy your life.” But you must be especially brave, expert, articulate, shrewd, and lucky during the process.

*No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA and the Surveillance State* by Glenn Greenwald
“No Place to Hide review – Glenn Greenwald's compelling account of NSA/GCHQ surveillance”

This powerful account of the Edward Snowden case reveals the threat posed by spying

- Share 250

- Henry Porter

- The Observer, Saturday 17 May 2014

- Jump to comments (176)

The NSA's threat operations centre in the Washington suburb of Fort Meade, Maryland. 'The details of intrusion are shocking.' Photograph: Paul J Richards/AFP/Getty Images

Before Glenn Greenwald appeared on Newsnight last October to argue the case for the Snowden revelations on a link from Brazil, the presenter that evening, Kirsty Wark, popped into the green room to have a word with the other guests on the show, one of whom was Pauline Neville-Jones, formerly chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee. The interview, she apparently told them, would show that Greenwald was just "a campaigner and an activist", a phrase she later used disparagingly on air.

1.

2.

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And so the BBC went after the man, not the story. However, on this occasion, the man held his own rather well, roasting Wark and Neville-Jones with remorseless trial lawyer logic, making them look ill-prepared and silly in the process. At the time, I remember thinking that Edward Snowden had chosen exactly the right person for the job of chief advocate – a smart, unyielding, fundamentalist liberal outsider.

Some of these characteristics made me wonder if his account of the Snowden affair would be one long harangue, but No Place to Hide is clearly written and compelling. Though I have been writing about the war on liberty for nearly a decade, I found that reacquainting myself with the details of surveillance and intrusion by America's NSA and Britain's GCHQ was simply shocking. As the stories rolled out last year, there was almost too much to absorb – from Prism, the program used by the NSA to access, among others, Google, Microsoft and Apple

...
servers, to the UK’s Tempora, which taps fibre optic cables and draws up web and telephone traffic; from the secret collaboration of the web and phone giants to the subversion of internet encryption and spying on ordinary people's political activities, their medical history, their friends and intimate relations and all their activities online. I published a dystopian novel in 2009 that featured a similarly intrusive program, which I named DEEPRUTH, and let me tell you, I didn't predict half of it.

Greenwald's book is a tough read if you find these things disturbing. The insouciance and dishonesty of politicians – some of whom in the UK last week called for increased access to our data – as well as the muted reaction of the established media last year do not augur well for the future of nations that currently regard themselves as free. Democracy and liberty are not synonyms and what Greenwald's book reminds us is that we may well end up as a series of hollowed-out, faux democracies, where the freedoms that we grew up with vanish almost unnoticed, like the extinction of a species of migrant bird.

He writes: "A citizenry that is aware of always being watched quickly becomes a compliant and fearful one", as well as one that is far less likely to express legitimate dissent, of course. The irony of Snowden's actions is that he may have hastened the chill. There are now legitimate things that many of us will never express in private, unencrypted emails or look up on the web because of surveillance.

I read No Place to Hide wondering how we let the spies probe our lives with such inadequate controls, and how on earth we fell for the propaganda that this massive apparatus was there to protect, not control, us. Greenwald quotes Eric Schmidt, the former CEO of Google, saying: "If you have something you don't want people to know about, maybe you shouldn't be doing it in the first place" – and later amusingly catalogues the lengths to which Silicon Valley bosses "who devalued our privacy" have gone to protect their own. When speaking in public, he often takes on those who say they do not believe that privacy is the core condition of freedom by asking for their private information – passwords, salaries, etc. I have used the same trick. No one ever raises a hand.

The book is organised in three sections, starting with the story of how Greenwald was contacted by Snowden, Greenwald's flight to Hong Kong with film-maker Laura Poitras and their meeting with Snowden, whose bravery and clarity of purpose Greenwald rightly praises. There follows a useful section describing the main revelations, using the original NSA/GCHQ documents, and a third that deals with Greenwald's views on the established media and privacy. It would have been good to have a chart or timeline of the major revelations as well as a proper index. And I did feel the argument lost momentum in the middle, but on the whole this is a vigorously executed and important book.

One of the depressing parts of last summer in Britain was the failure of the quality press and the broadcasting media to react to Snowden, and Greenwald is rightly contemptuous of the journalists on both sides of the Atlantic who act as proxies for authority – better an activist
journalist than a lackey anytime. But let me just say I think the book does a disservice to my colleagues at the Guardian, which after all is established media. The author tips his hat occasionally but does not really acknowledge the importance of the seasoned reporter Ewen MacAskill’s work in Hong Kong, or the team that assembled to sift the documents, decode their inner secrets, prioritise information, gain reaction, shape the stories and provide analysis.

It was one of the most impressive journalistic operations I have ever seen and without it Glenn Greenwald would have floundered and, indeed, have been dismissed more easily as an activist journalist. He has done a great job of exposition and advocacy and for that he should be praised, but credit should be shared.

LOW POINT IN KERRY’S CAREER

Mr. Kerry: Here’s Why Snowden Can’t ‘Make His Case’ in ‘Our System of Justice’

Juan Cole, Op-Ed, NationofChange, June 2, 2014: Secretary of State John Kerry said that Edward Snowden should “return home and come back here and stand in our system of justice and make his case.” Kerry seems to have a high opinion of the Department of Justice and the U.S. courts when it comes to national security issues. I can’t imagine for the life of me why. Kerry is either amazingly ignorant or being disingenuous when he suggests that Snowden would be allowed to “make his case” if he returned to the U.S.

JAMES Risen, PAY ANY PRICE

Risen gives “conclusive proof that Snowden could never have triggered a national debate by working within the system” (265). “...a draconian crackdown on leaks by the Obama administration has made it far more difficult for the public to find out how electronic surveillance and domestic spying have grown. Few are willing to face what Diane Roark, Tom Drake, or Edward Snowden have endured” (263-4). As example, Risen describes how fear extended even to the floor of the U. S. Senate and even to Senator Ron Wyden, who had been a critic of the Bush and Obama administrations’ use of “secret Justice Department legal opinions and secret court opinions to pervert the law in order to get away with massive domestic spying operations.” Only after Snowden’s leaks did Wyden “say publicly exactly what he had been warning about for years” (264-65). Read Risen’s chapter, “The War on Truth.” – Dick
Six Memorable Quotes From Edward Snowden's NBC Interview

John Knefel, Rolling Stone, Reader Supported News, June 2, 2014

Knefel writes: “Though Edward Snowden is one of the most scrutinized figures alive today, there was still much to be learned from the broadcast. Here are six of the most memorable moments, in his words.”

Contact President Obama—and all of your friends, your lists, your political leaders all levels, our democracy is in grave danger.

CONTACT THE PRESIDENT, YOUR REPRESENTATIVES, YOUR COLLEGE (if it and the faculty are silent), buy related books (support pro-transparency and democracy publishers and book sellers), protest all who advocate or defend totalitarian methods.

From the White House: Write or Call [TAKE HIM UP ON THE OFFER. Find one official and continue to call, make her him feel your indignation before it’s so repressive it won’t make any difference.]

President Obama is committed to creating the most open and accessible administration in American history. That begins with taking comments and questions from you, the public, through our website.

Call the President

PHONE NUMBERS
Comments: 202-456-1111

Switchboard: 202-456-1414

TTY/TTD
Comments: 202-456-6213

Visitor’s Office: 202-456-2121
Write a letter to the President

Here are a few simple things you can do to make sure your message gets to the White House as quickly as possible.

1. If possible, email us! This is the fastest way to get your message to President Obama.

2. If you write a letter, please consider typing it on an 8 1/2 by 11 inch sheet of paper. If you hand-write your letter, please consider using pen and writing as neatly as possible.

3. Please include your return address on your letter as well as your envelope. If you have an email address, please consider including that as well.

4. And finally, be sure to include the full address of the White House to make sure your message gets to us as quickly and directly as possible:

   The White House
   1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
   Washington, DC 20500

Also see Surveillance/NSA, Secrecy, National Security State and related newsletters. For example:

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Action: Support the USA Freedom Act

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   Liar and Fear-Monger

Jim Hightower, NSA and Snowden

Greenwald, Poitras, Scahill: Welcome to The
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(Some entries offer contexts.)

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July 8/15: Schell, Hero Snowden vs. End of Privacy

July 5: Weisbrot, Helping Snowden

July 5: Pilger, Morales’ Plane Forced Down

June 26: Blum, Dark History of US NSS, vs. Phillip Agee

June 24: Lindorff, Hong Kong, China, Russia vs. Hacker USA


June 19: Greenwald, FISA Fails Oversight

June 13: Greenwald, Snowden, Who Is He?

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Luke Harding, *The Snowden Files*

Hightower: NSA and Snowden, “Why He Matters”

Snowden, US Mass Surveillance Endangers Liberty

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Maiello, Whistleblower, Immunity

Reporting Snowden in Mainstream Media, *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*


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Greenwald, His New Book on Snowden, NSA, and US Corporate Mainstream

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Greenwald’s Reply to Kinsley’s Review of *No Place to Hide*

Greenwald, Earliest Events in the Meeting of Snowden and Greenwald/Poitras

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PBS, *Frontline*, “The USA of Secrets”
Amy Goodman, Democracy Now Interview of Greenwald

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END SNOWDEN NEWSLETTER #6

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Dick Bennett

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