




Book Review: No Place to Hide, by Glenn Greenwald

Glenn Greenwald, the facilitator in bringing  to light Edward Snowden's staggering revelations over the NSA's surveillance of Americans, titled [his book](#) from a comment made by Senator Frank Church back in 1975. As head of the U.S. Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence Activities, Church said:

The United States government has perfected a technological capability that enables [them] to monitor the messages that go through the air....

That capability at any time could be turned around on the American people, and no American would have any privacy left. Such is the capability to monitor everything: telephone conversations, telegrams, it doesn't matter.

There would be no place to hide.

Greenwald opens his book as if it were a John Grisham thriller, giving his reader a running start toward the reluctant connection he almost missed with Cincinnatus, the code name Snowden used in his first attempt to reach Greenwald on December 1, 2012. Greenwald ignored Snowden's e-mail, partly because of scheduling and deadlines as a writer for *The Guardian*, and partly because he was put off by Snowden's demand that all communications be encrypted, using PGP, with which Greenwald was unfamiliar.

The story gets traction with his first meeting with Snowden in Hong Kong in May 2013, using all manner of techniques and strategies (a la James Bond) to keep NSA's listening ears from tracking and recording their five-hour conversation.

By June the first of Snowden's disclosures was published. On June 14 the Department of Justice charged Snowden with espionage, and a few days later the State Department revoked his passport.

Greenwald discovered that the documents provided by Snowden revealed that the agency has an ability to monitor and collect information from hundreds of millions of people around the globe, that it has broken into the communications links of major data centers across the world, that it has circumvented or cracked much of the encryption that protects sensitive data on the Internet, and that, according to its own records, it has broken privacy laws or exceeded its authority thousands of times a year.

It took some time to build the trust between Greenwald and Snowden. Said Snowden:

Here I am ready to risk my liberty, perhaps even my life, to hand this guy thousands of Top Secret documents from the nation's most secretive agency — a leak that will produce dozens if not hundreds of journalistic scoops — and he can't even be bothered to install an encryption program!

Greenwald tells how Snowden, during his stint as an NSA contractor in Japan, began to discover the vast surveillance capabilities of the agency, enhanced by agreements with communications giants such as Verizon (under the code name STORMBREW). The more he learned, the more concerned he became. When asked about his primary motivation in deciding to blow NSA's cover, Snowden revealed that video games taught him certain moral lessons. He quoted Snowden:



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on May 27, 2014

The protagonist is often an ordinary person who finds himself faced with grave injustices from powerful forces and has the choice [either] to flee in fear or to fight for his beliefs.

History also shows that seemingly ordinary people who are sufficiently resolute about justice can triumph over the most formidable adversaries.

At his desk Snowden could watch drones surveil people who could be killed. He watched with fascination as the technology allowed him to see people type words into their e-mail processors:

I could watch drones in real time as they surveilled the people they might kill. I watched NSA tracing people's Internet activities as they typed.

I realized the true breadth of this system. And almost nobody knew it was happening.

Greenwald's book contains PowerPoint charts that expand not only the revelations from Snowden but also highlight the superior attitude behind the NSA's ability to monitor millions during their daily lives. One of them, entitled "New Collection Posture," noted the vast scale and purpose of the surveillance capabilities: "Sniff it all. Know it all. Collect it all. Process it all. Exploit it all. Partner it all." As Greenwald noted in an interview from his residence outside Rio de Janeiro:

The NSA wrote that slide because they believed they were doing this in total secrecy — that nobody was watching them.

They were speaking in ways that no public official would ever speak if they thought they were being overheard.

It's precisely why privacy is so important.

Greenwald isn't reticent about criticizing members of the national media for their reluctance to expose the government's illegal and unconstitutional activities, and for that he has suffered the slings and arrows of those participating in the coverup. Michael Kinsley, a *Vanity Fair* columnist, reviewed Greenwald's book for the *New York Times* and openly challenged Greenwald about who decides what secrets are to be kept and what secrets are to be exposed:

The question is: who decides? It seems clear, at least to me, that the private companies that own newspapers, and their employees, should not have the final say over the release of government secrets [giving them] a free pass to make them public with no legal consequences.

In a democracy [sic] ... that decision must ultimately be made by the government.... That someone cannot be Glenn Greenwald.

Others in the kept media repeated Kinsley's canard endlessly without questioning it. When Greenwald learned what Kinsley had written, he responded:

So let's recap: *The New York Times* chose someone to review my book about the Snowden leaks who has a record of suggesting that journalists may be committing crimes when publishing information against the government's wishes.

That journalist then proceeded to strongly suggest that my prosecution could be warranted. Other prominent journalists — including the one who hosts *Meet the Press* — then heralded that review without noting the slightest objection to Kinsley's argument.

Do I need to continue to participate in the debate over whether many U.S. journalists are pitifully obeisant to the U.S. government? Did they not just resolve that debate for me?



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What better evidence can that argument find than multiple influential American journalists standing up and cheering while a fellow journalist is given space in *The New York Times* to argue that those who publish information against the government's wishes are not only acting immorally but criminally?

The 272-page documentary, following Greenwald's initially reluctant connection with Snowden through the publishing of the documents that sparked a vital and necessary conversation about the conflict between security and privacy — which, until Snowden's revelations, were all being resolved in favor of the government — was followed by his written contempt for the kept media. His book is an important piece of history. It is perhaps the most important piece of history in the last 40 years. It will no doubt successfully continue the conversation about secrecy, privacy, and its guarantees found in the Fourth Amendment.

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