

WHISTLEBLOWER

Someone who tells people in authority or the public about dishonest or illegal practices at the place where they work
Longman Dictionary

United Stasi of America!

DANIEL ELLSBERG

In my estimation, there has not been in American history a more important leak than Edward Snowden's release of NSA material – and that definitely includes the Pentagon Papers 40 years ago. Snowden's whistleblowing gives us the possibility to roll back a key part of what has amounted to an "executive coup" against the US constitution.

Since 9/11, there has been, at first secretly but increasingly openly, a revocation of the bill of rights for which this country fought over 200 years ago. In particular, the fourth and fifth amendments of the US constitution, which safeguard citizens from unwarranted intrusion by the government into their private lives, have been virtually suspended.

There are legitimate reasons for secrecy, and specifically for secrecy about communications intelligence. That's why Bradley Manning and I – both of whom had access to such intelligence with clearances higher than top-secret – chose not to disclose any information with that classification. And it is why Edward Snowden has committed himself to withhold publication of most of what he might have revealed.

But what is not legitimate is to use a secrecy system to hide programs that are blatantly unconstitutional in their breadth and potential abuse. Neither the president nor Congress as a whole may by themselves revoke the fourth amendment – and that's why what Snowden has revealed so far was secret from the American people.

In 1975, Senator Frank Church spoke of the National Security Agency in these terms:

"I know the capacity that is there to make tyranny total in America, and we must see to it that this agency and all agencies that possess this technology operate within the law and under proper supervision, so that we never cross over that abyss. That is the abyss from which there is no return."

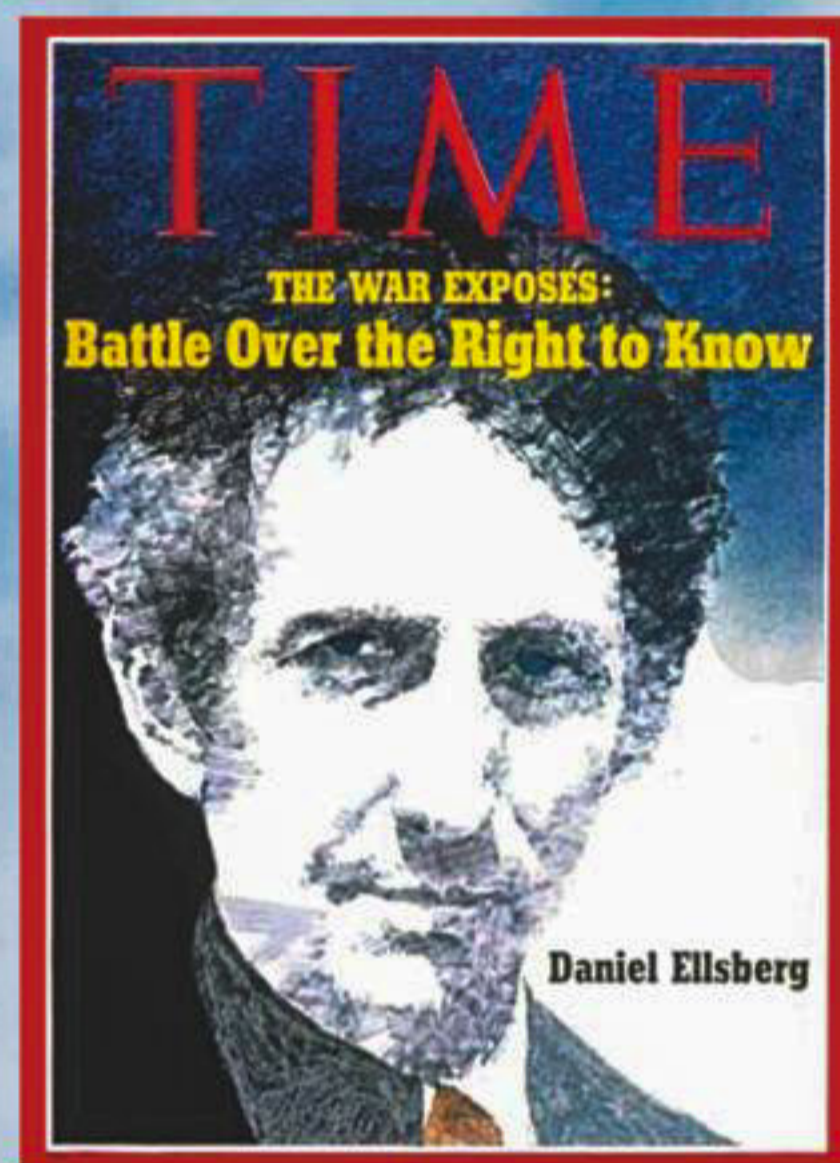
The dangerous prospect of which he warned was that America's intelligence gathering capability – which is today beyond any comparison with what existed in his pre-digital era – "at any time could be turned around on the American people and no American would have any privacy left."

That has now happened. That is what Snowden has exposed, with official, secret documents. The NSA, FBI and CIA have, with the new digital technology, surveillance powers over our own citizens that the Stasi – the secret police in the former "democratic republic" of East Germany – could scarcely have dreamed of. Snowden reveals that the so-called intelligence community has become the United Stasi of America.

So we have fallen into Senator Church's abyss. The questions now are whether he was right or wrong that there is no return from it, and whether that means that effective democracy will become impossible. A week ago, I would have found it hard to argue with pessimistic answers to those conclusions.

But with Edward Snowden having put his life on the line to get this information out, quite possibly inspiring others with similar knowledge, conscience and patriotism to show comparable civil courage – in the public, in Congress, in the executive branch itself – I see the unexpected possibility of a way up and out of the abyss.

Snowden did what he did because he recognised the NSA's surveillance programs for what they are: dangerous, unconstitutional activity. This wholesale invasion of Americans' and foreign citizens' privacy does not contribute to our security; it puts in danger the very liberties we're trying to protect.



Daniel Ellsberg



A demonstrator wearing a Guy Fawkes mask holds a banner during a protest rally in Berlin yesterday. The banner reads in German: Shelter in Germany for Edward Snowden.

PHOTO: REUTERS

SOURCE: THE GUARDIAN

HALL OF FAME



Daniel Ellsberg

A former US military analyst employed by the RAND corporation, in 1971, Ellsberg leaked a top-secret Pentagon study of the US government's rationale behind its decisions during the Vietnam War. These documents, known as the Pentagon Papers, were widely published by The New York Times, The Washington Post, and other American newspapers.



Aaron Swartz

Creator of the social news site Reddit, at age 24, Swartz hacked into JSTOR, an academic journal database, and systematically downloaded over four million articles through the MIT computer network. He was arrested in 2011, and was subjected to a barrage of charges. In January, Swartz was found dead in his Brooklyn apartment, where he had hanged himself.



W Mark Felt, aka Deep Throat

Better known as "Deep Throat," W Mark Felt was an FBI agent who leaked information about the Watergate scandal to Washington Post journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein. Following US President Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974, Felt denied his role as a whistleblower for thirty years before revealing himself in a 2005 Vanity Fair article.

Bradley Manning

While deployed in Iraq, US Army Pvt Bradley Manning downloaded a trove of military and diplomatic information, including over 500,000 army reports and classified combat videos, to WikiLeaks. One of these videos, a recording of a US Apache helicopter opening fire on a group of civilians in Eastern Baghdad, has over 13 million views on YouTube.



SOURCE: POLICYMATIC.COM

Their exploits on celluloid

If Hollywood is anything to go by, we can expect a multimillion-dollar adaptation of Snowden's operation once all the details come to light. As the whistleblower remains stuck in the transit zone at a Moscow airport, let's take a look at five others who received the Hollywood treatment.

THE INSIDER

Russell Crowe plays Jeffrey Wigand, the former vice-president of research and development for Brown and Williamson, a cigarette company looking to develop a reduced-harm cigarette. Of course, he instead exposes the lies spread by Big Tobacco.

ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN

All The President's Men follows two Washington Post journalists as they investigate the infamous Watergate scandal. What they find ends up being responsible for bringing down the Nixon presidency.

ENRON: THE SMARTEST GUYS IN THE ROOM

This Academy Award-nominated documentary gave viewers their first real taste of the culture of corruption that's crept into the corporate landscape in the past few decades.

ERIN BROKOVICH

Julia Roberts here portrays Brockovich, a single mother who mounted an impressive legal case against Pacific Gas and Electricity for tainting groundwater and causing hundreds of cases of cancer.

SILKWOOD

When Karen Silkwood discovers that the plutonium plant she works at has been cutting corners on its safety provisions to meet a deadline, she threatens to expose it. As with most whistleblower stories, this one ends with her giving up everything to fight for what she believes in.



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ERIN BROKOVICH: JEFFREY WIGAND: RUSSELL CROWE; THE INSIDER

The better part of valour is discretion.

Shakespeare

A hero or traitor?

A nation can survive its fools, even the ambitious. But it cannot survive treason from within.

Cicero

Since Edward Snowden leaked news of National Security Agency's surveillance programmes, political pundits throughout the world are busy weighing in on what he has done. In recent articles at The New Yorker, John Cassidy and Jeffrey Toobin, staff writers of the magazine for around two decades, argue why Snowden is a hero or a traitor.

Snowden is a hero. In revealing the colossal scale of the US government's eavesdropping on Americans and other people around the world, he has performed a great public ser-

vice that more than outweighs any breach of trust he may have committed. Like Daniel Ellsberg, the former Defence Department official who released the Pentagon Papers, Snowden has brought to light important information that deserved to be in the public domain, while doing no lasting harm to the national security of his country.

Doubtless, many people inside the US power structure—President Obama included—and some of its apologists in the media will see things differently. James Clapper,

Obama's director of National Intelligence, has said that Snowden's leaks have done "huge, grave damage" to "our intelligence capabilities."

Before accepting such claims at face value, let's remind ourselves of what the leaks so far have not contained. They didn't reveal anything about the algorithms that the NSA uses, the groups or individuals that the agency targets, or the identities of US agents. They didn't contain the contents of any US military plans, or of any conversations between US or foreign officials.

So, what did the leaks tell us? They confirmed that the US government, without obtaining any court warrants, routinely collects the phone logs of tens of millions, perhaps hundreds of millions, of Americans, who have no links to terrorism whatsoever.

Snowden is neither a hero nor a whistleblower. He is, rather, a grandiose narcissist who deserves to be in prison.

What, one wonders, did Snowden think the NSA did? Any marginally attentive citizen, much less NSA employee or contractor, knows that

the entire mission of the agency is to intercept electronic communications.

And what of his decision to leak the documents? Doing so was, as he more or less acknowledges, a crime. Any government employee or contractor is warned repeatedly that the unauthorised disclosure of classified information is a crime. These were legally authorized programmes. So he wasn't blowing the whistle on anything illegal; he was exposing something that failed to meet his own standards of propriety. The question, of course, is whether the government

can function when all of its employees (and contractors) can take it upon themselves to sabotage the programs they don't like. That's what Snowden has done.

Snowden was so irresponsible in what he gave the Guardian and the Post that even these institutions thought some of it should not be disseminated to the public. The Post decided to publish only four of the 41 slides that Snowden provided. Its exercise of judgment suggests the absence of Snowden's.