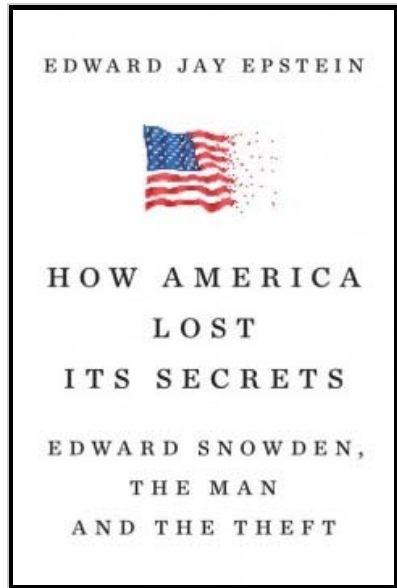


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How America Lost Its Secrets

by Edward Jay Epstein

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From the Publisher: A groundbreaking exposé that convincingly challenges the popular image of Edward Snowden as hacker turned avenging angel, while revealing how vulnerable our national security systems have become—as exciting as any political thriller, and far more important. After details of American government surveillance were published in 2013, Edward Snowden, formerly a subcontracted IT analyst for the NSA, became the center of an international controversy: Was he a hero, traitor, whistleblower, spy? Was his theft legitimized by the nature of the information he exposed? When is it necessary for governmental transparency to give way to subterfuge? Edward Jay Epstein brings a lifetime of journalistic and investigative acumen to bear on these and other questions, delving into both how our secrets were taken and the man who took them. He makes clear that by outsourcing...

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About The Author

Edward Jay Epstein

EDWARD JAY EPSTEIN is an investigative journalist and a former political science professor at UCLA. He is the author of many books, including *Inquest: The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth*, *The Hollywood Economist 2.0: The Hidden Financial Reality Behind the Movies*, and...and has written for publications including *The New York Review of Books*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic*, and *The New Yorker*.

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What We Say

Edward Jay Epstein's new investigation of Edward Snowden is a useful corrective to the knee-jerk hero worship that the most famous whistleblower/traitor of modern times has inspired. By focusing on the timeline of what Snowden did when, Epstein strongly suggests that intentionally or not, the hacker-turned-activist handed over a wealth of intelligence info to Russia, an enemy of the US, and compromised its ability to track terrorists and other rogue groups, at least over the short term. Epstein points to Russia's ability to mass military for the illegal seizure of parts of Ukraine as well as the Paris attacks as recent events that might have played out very differently if Snowden had not exposed the inner workings of the US

intelligence community to Russia, probably China, and many others. At the very best, it's a sobering reminder of the risks even a well-intentioned whistle-blower is taking with the fate of nations when they seize access to literally millions of highly sensitive documents and take them overseas. Epstein does this by raising reasonable questions about what Snowden did when -- most significantly, it's well established by what Snowden has said and done when contacting journalists that he had already accessed most of the actual "NSA is tracking the phone calls of US citizens" BEFORE he switched jobs as an out-sourced techie to gain access to state secrets that had nothing to do with the US surveillance of its own citizens. None of those documents were apparently handed over to the serious journalists Snowden contacted and who treated the documents he did give them with the sober due diligence one expects from major media outlets. Why did he do this? To have bargaining chips? Because he had become a patsy -- or soon would -- for Russia? Epstein builds his case well. Unfortunately, this serious and convincing probing of what Snowden did comes well into this modest book, most of which uses tone-deaf arguments and petty put-downs to diminish Snowden and everyone he works with in the media. It's unlikely anyone who isn't desperately searching for anti-Snowden material will persevere when Epstein intentionally or not shows himself to be so hostile to both Snowden and the basic desire expressed by most Americans and indeed most people around the world for greater privacy from surveillance by their own governments and multi-national corporations. Epstein grudgingly admits most people think Snowden is a hero and raised legitimate questions, but it's clearly annoying to him and only due to "confirmation bias" (they've already decided he's a hero so ignore any uncomfortable facts that contradict this) or a lack of info his book intends to correct. This forces him to twist into a pretzel: he describes Snowden as a loser who crapped out at college and the military and even his job at the CIA, which Snowden quit before he was investigated further. Never as bright as he thinks and dismissive of his bosses, Snowden has an aggrandizing online name, rails against surveillance, embraces hackers and their ethics and can't even be consistent: online, he speaks caustically about how Chelsea Manning deserved much harsher treatment for revealing secrets. On the other hand, Epstein paints a picture of Snowden as almost preternaturally brilliant, pulling off a final heist of state secrets in a manner Epstein atypically describes as akin to a scene from "Mission: Impossible," though even this is intended to reinforce Epstein's belief that Snowden was already cooperating with Russia or had help from an insider (which is almost certain and yet doesn't diminish the skill of what he did). Epstein paints journalists as wrapped around Snowden's fingers, doing his bidding almost at will (except when they don't). Snowden disappears off the map for days after arriving in Hong Kong, outs himself to the world and then gets ensconced in Russia as a hero of the left (a real trick, that one), popping into media events by Skype and the like, lionized and praised. Pretty amazing for a loser. Epstein's bias or confusion colors everything, down to his inability or unwillingness to understand the basics of privacy. He seems to think Snowden's online profile name Wolfking Awesomefox is vainglorious, rather than self-mocking. He sarcastically points out that for a guy who champions privacy it sure seems odd that Snowden wouldn't mind that his girlfriend posted sexy photos of herself online for all the world to see. (She had aspirations to a modeling career.) But of course that's not contradictory at all. People want control over their own data, their own information; they can choose to live stream their lives 24/7 but that should be their choice, not the choice of a corporation or a government. Later, in building his case that Snowden was intentionally a traitor and not just a whistleblower, Epstein points to Snowden stealing information on the budgets of the entire intelligence community. That's not whistle-blowing, insists Epstein because those budgets are signed off on by the President and the House and Senate. Surely Snowden didn't think that needed to be made public? But of course someone who takes issue with the massive surveillance apparatus indeed WOULD think the massive amounts of money spent by the intelligence community absolutely should be made public. Similarly, Epstein points out that often Snowden was stealing info about legal actions taken by the gov't and private technology companies, as if that meant those battling to curtail surveillance couldn't take issue with that. In fact, even some tech companies took issue with legal warrants demanding information from them which they could try and fight but never even publicly admit they'd received. Epstein also takes issue with Snowden stealing information about the surveillance of other countries on their own citizens. Again, he insists this isn't "whistle-blowing" about the US spying on its own people so clearly that too reveals Snowden was doing much more than whistle-blowing. But of course multi-national corporations and governments cooperate all over the world. It's possible one can object to the US spying on its citizens without their knowledge AND the UK doing the same; wanting to reveal all of it is consistent. In the silliest idea, which Epstein repeats throughout, he says Snowden is LYING when he says he's trapped in Russia, because of course Snowden was always free to come to the US. Uh-huh. In his mind, real whistle-blowers must pay a price, must suffer and go to jail or their whistle-blowing is not in the classic mode of public service that Epstein is willing to recognize. Epstein's attitude towards everyone in Snowden's orbit is similarly dismissive. Laura Poitras is described as a child of wealth and an "activist film-maker." He later says her film "Citizenfour" would be "commercially" released (as opposed to non-commercially?) and "win an Academy Award for her," all of which implies mercenary interest in lucre and fame. (Not exactly the thing that typically motivates people making documentary films.) In contrast, Epstein might have more accurately and generously described the journalist/filmmaker that Snowden reached out to at the time as an Oscar-nominated filmmaker who had already garnered a Peabody for her journalism, as well as a MacArthur "genius" grant. Journalist Glenn Greenwald is treated with similar subtle disdain. Later Epstein speculates that if things had played out differently, EVEN The Guardian might have hesitated before printing some of the information Snowden provided, as if the Guardian was no better than an out of control supermarket tabloid looking to boost circulation. All of them would share a Pulitzer Prize for the work they produced surrounding Snowden and the revelations he offered information on. Towards the end, Epstein sees dark purpose in Snowden insisting on revealing himself to the world via a short video. Why did he have to leave the US at all? Why not just share the documents he'd successfully stolen revealing legitimate (to Epstein) grievances about US surveillance of its own citizens? Snowden could have just delivered them anonymously via TOR. Mind you, Epstein has already and repeatedly made clear that all of the attempts to maintain privacy and anonymity including TOR were no match for a focused government group like the NSA. In fact, Snowden's public unveiling was the safest way to protect himself from disappearing from view forever by the machination of any government, be it the US, Russia or anyone else. Hide in plain sight. He may have made a deal with the devil when it came to a "safe" haven in Russia and that should indeed give Snowden's unquestioning supporters serious pause. Many lessons should be learned from this leak and unfortunately Epstein makes clear they have not. First, Snowden himself pointed out the vulnerabilities to security by letting system administrators like himself download data on their own say so. He suggested a fix and it was never done. Years later, he would exploit this flaw. Second, the intelligence community has outsourced a huge amount of its essential work to third party companies with a profit motive. They've even outsourced the vetting of these workers, which means third party companies that save money by NOT doing thorough background checks are clearing people every day. This will be very expensive to end but it must. Third, the CIA all but kicked out Snowden, but outdated rules didn't permit it to red flag him when Snowden was hired by a subcontractor to do work for the intelligence community. Surely anyone getting access in any way to the US intelligence community (including cleaning their bathrooms) should be blocked if an agency has placed a red flag on them, no explanation necessary. Such details should be shared government-wide. (It's the same reason bad cops can be fired in one city and go to work in another city far away.) Mind you, this will be less important if the intelligence community stops outsourcing much of its employees and essential if boring work just to save money, security be damned. These steps would have prevented Snowden from ever becoming a problem in the first place. A broader focus would include the treatment of prisoners in the US. Chelsea Manning was treated so cruelly that Amnesty International and the UN Special Rapporteur on torture spoke out criticizing the US. A US State department spokesperson resigned in protest. Soon, it's likely most countries will recognize solitary confinement as torture and cruel and unusual punishment for any prisoner, much less one seen by most as a political prisoner. This long-standing treatment of prisoners surely influenced Snowden in fleeing the country. He knew he might never protect himself or define himself in the public eye without doing so, for starters. And while Epstein goes to great lengths to suggest Snowden didn't HAVE to go to Russia, it was widely reported that Snowden's choice of countries were severely limited because the US pressured allies that might have given him safe haven not to do so. Like so many administrations in the past, the Obama administration became obsessed with leaks and prosecuted people at a much higher rate than the past. Not wanting to let Snowden off the hook by finding safe haven in say Iceland or Brazil (the US could have officially objected but given quiet permission), they in fact left Snowden with only two terrible options: China or Russia. By taking a hard line, they might very well have sent a devastating cache of intelligence documents right into the hands of Putin. In hindsight, this must be seen as a tragic mistake. If Snowden DID have a chance at a safe haven in Iceland, with the eyes of the world on him so no secret targeting by the US would be likely, the damage he inflicted on the NSA and others and the security of the country

might have been dramatically lessened. And of course if he had other options and still chose to take haven in Russia, Epstein and others wouldn't have to divine the secrets of his soul. We would know that when he had a genuine choice, he chose poorly. -- Michael Giltz

What Others Say

"Powerful and convincing." —*The Hollywood Reporter*

"Nuanced... A wild and harrowing detective story and impressively evenhanded portrait of a very sticky case."
—Kirkus *starred review*

"Ed Epstein's startling, powerfully argued book on the Edward Snowden affair is a true game changer. One of the great investigative journalists of our time, Epstein has laid down a powerful challenge to the common view, embraced by much of the press and by Hollywood, of Snowden as a civil rights hero. He asks the questions others haven't asked, and he provides disturbing answers that his just-the-facts-ma'am approach makes it impossible to ignore." —Richard Bernstein, coauthor, *The Coming Conflict with China*

"*How America Lost Its Secrets* reads like a thriller, yet poses the most critical public policy question of the modern era: Can we maintain a robust democracy while still protecting our interests and our citizens in an increasingly dangerous world?" —Randall Rothenberg, former CMO, Booz Allen Hamilton

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