

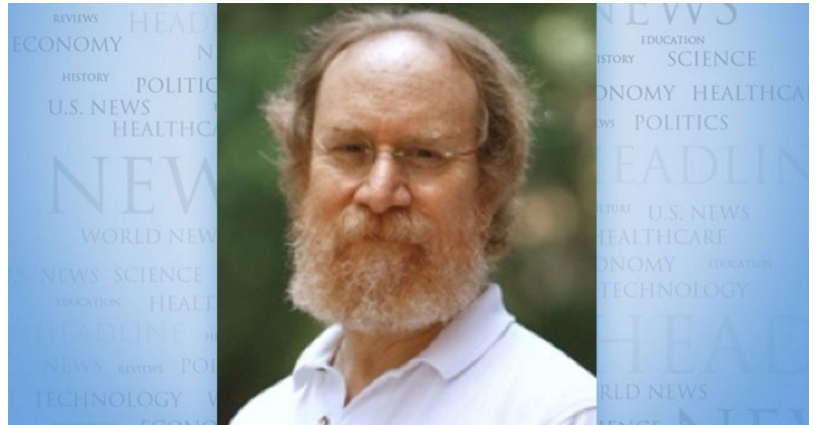


Written by [Sheldon Richman](#) on June 28, 2013

Big Brother, not Snowden and Greenwald, Is the Story

“Instead of being adversaries to government power ... [the media of Washington, D.C., are] ... servants to it and mouthpieces for it.”

So said the [Guardian's Glenn Greenwald](#), who broke the story of Edward Snowden's disclosure of NSA spying on the American people, after Greenwald's confrontation with *Meet the Press's* David Gregory. Greenwald needn't have limited his observation to the D.C. media. Plenty of reporters and cable-news talking heads are playing the same role in the NSA drama.



Indeed, if they spent half the time investigating Obama's Big Brother operations that they spend sneering at Snowden and Greenwald, Americans might demand that the government stop spying on them.

But to much of the mainstream (and not-so-mainstream) media, Snowden and Greenwald — not the NSA, the Obama administration, and the supine Congress — are the story — a story of villainy.

The examples are endless. The day after Snowden revealed himself as the whistleblower, Joe Scarborough, the former Republican congressman and host of MSNBC's *Morning Joe*, ordered his director to take the image of “that weasel” off the screen. The other day, his sidekick, Mika Brzezinski, asked, “Is there anything we can do to track him down?” (Emphasis added.) She meant the government.

Brzezinski went on to accuse Snowden of [taking the job](#) with NSA contractor Booz Allen Hamilton “to screw over our government.” That's how one who speaks power to truth spins it. Snowden's service to



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the American people is [hardly undercut](#) by his having taken the job intending to expose government violations of the Fourth Amendment.

MSNBC's self-identification as a progressive network is hard to square with its unrelenting assaults on Snowden and Greenwald, and its de-emphasis of NSA surveillance. Andrea Mitchell, who functions as the network's chief diplomatic stenographer, wondered why the NSA was hiring contractors when it could be recruiting people with the "right value system" from the military. (She's forgotten that whistleblower Bradley Manning is in the military.) Chris Matthews of *Hardball* says that any foreign government that won't turn Snowden over to the U.S. government is "no buddy of ours."

MSNBC personnel routinely describe Greenwald as "defensive," which apparently is their code word for people who push back at stupid questions. For example, when Gregory asked Greenwald if he could be indicted for "aiding and abetting" Snowden, and Greenwald asked in return how a journalist could equate reporting with criminal activity, he was treated with disdain. Gregory even questioned Greenwald's journalistic credentials, as did [Paul Farhi](#) of the *Washington Post*.

I've focused on MSNBC because it has so egregiously and persistently circled the wagons around the government. It's an old story: TV hosts and reporters need access to government officials, but access is jeopardized if they antagonize those officials. Better to play it safe and sneer at Snowden and Greenwald.

You don't have to work for MSNBC to suck up to power. Op-ed writers from



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conservative David Brooks to progressive Richard Cohen have tried to portray Snowden as an alienated oddball, as though no one could have a legitimate purpose in unmasking government surveillance. (*Brooks* thought it relevant to write that Snowden “has not been a regular presence around his mother’s house for years.” Really!) Pundits repeatedly refer to Snowden’s having dropped out of high school, which apparently signals some serious moral or mental defect in the young man. More likely he was bored with the dull and regimented curriculum so typical of government high schools.

Others have tried to read much into Snowden’s stops in Hong Kong and Moscow. He might be a spy, they suggest. But wouldn’t a spy have kept his identity secret while selling his information to “the enemy”? It doesn’t occur to the pundits that Snowden’s priority right now is to stay out of the clutches of the U.S. government. Snowden has no moral obligation to be a martyr. Let’s not forget how Bradley Manning has been treated for his disclosures of government wrongdoing. He faces life imprisonment.

Snowden and Greenwald have not “aided the enemy” — unless the American people are the government’s enemy. What they have done is embarrass the Obama administration by exposing criminal activity.

For the media’s defenders of power against truth, that’s inexcusable.

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