



# How America Lost its Secrets: Edward Snowden, The Man and The Theft. By Edward Jay Epstein. New York, N.Y.; Alfred A. Knopf, 2017.

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***How America Lost its Secrets: Edward Snowden, The Man and The Theft.* By Edward Jay Epstein. New York, N.Y.; Alfred A. Knopf, 2017. ISBN: 9780451494566. Photographs. Notes. Selected Bibliography. Index. Pp. 350. \$27.95.**

Edward Jay Epstein is a well known and respected investigative journalist. He attended Cornell University as an undergraduate and completed the requirements for his Ph.D. at Harvard University. While at Harvard, Epstein studied under James Q. Wilson, to whom this book is dedicated. Before becoming a full-time author and investigative journalist, Edward Jay Epstein taught political science at MIT and UCLA. He has authored a number of books including, *Inquest: The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth; Dossier: The Secret History of Armand Hammer* and *Deception: The Invisible War Between the KGB and the CIA*. Epstein has also written for publications including *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Atlantic*, and *The New Yorker*.

This work by Epstein is as thrilling as a good spy novel. Unfortunately, the consequences for the United States and some of its closest allies are not fictional, but all too real. Experts in the shadow world of Intelligence quoted by the author estimated the damage done by Edward Snowden in terms of decades. Epstein, however, is careful to present a balanced picture of Snowden, even going to the extent in his Epilogue of giving Snowden some credit. He points out the resulting national conversation about the collection and the use of data amassed through an enormous surveillance effort headed by NSA. Epstein also points out that Snowden's actions focused attention on some serious concerns about the security of the intelligence secrets held by NSA and other entities. He does make a very strong case that in spite of these results, Edward Snowden is not, and was not, a whistle blower as he portrayed himself. Oliver Stone's film *Snowden* helped form an image in the minds of many people that promoted Snowden as a hero, only concerned with protecting civil liberty. This ridiculous characterization is thoroughly dispelled in Epstein's book.

Edward Jay Epstein traveled to all the locations mentioned in the book. He also conducted several interviews with key people involved in the actual events, as well as professionals in the espionage field. These individuals provided great insight into much of Snowden's activities. Epstein's contacts enabled him to interview Victor Cherkashin, a former KGB officer, who recruited and managed Aldrich Ames, of the CIA; Robert Hassen, of the FBI; and Ronald Pelton, of the NSA. Cherkashin's explanation of how these

traitors were targeted and recruited, along with his assessment of their motivations, are fascinating. As to the question of Snowden's motivation, and whether he might have been duped under a "false flag" approach; that question may be one that will not be definitely answered for many years, if it is ever answered.

Epstein divides his book into five major parts. In part one Epstein paints a picture of Snowden as a loner with delusions about his own importance. Interestingly, Snowden tried to join the Special Forces. He enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserve in May 2004, and he reported for basic training. Apparently, Snowden fell short in completing the three week jump school training and was discharged in September 2004.

Snowden, a high school dropout, was offered a job with the CIA in 2006 at \$66,000 a year. This offer was made in spite of the fact the CIA minimum requirements specified a higher level of education and a good academic record. Snowden had also acquired an attractive girl friend, Lindsay Mills, who was nineteen when they met, and who maintained the relationship. She joined him in Russia where he fled after the theft of America's secrets. Although the CIA has never explained why Snowden was hired, it might be noted his grandfather Barrett was a retired Coast Guard Rear Admiral. In his official duties the Admiral had formed close contacts with several government agencies, including the CIA.

Snowden lasted two years before he had to take a routine polygraph and undergo an evaluation at the CIA. He received a derogatory report and ultimately was told to resign quietly or face a punitive investigation. This action did not revoke Snowden's security clearance and he was hired by a private contractor, Dell, in large part because of his clearance. Because of the Privacy Act restrictions Dell, Booz Allen, and eventually NSA, never knew about the circumstances of Snowden's two year CIA career. Also, by then Snowden closely identified as a Libertarian. He was very critical of the United States government and his own treatment by the government. Later Edward Snowden became involved with Julian Assange, co-founder of WikiLeaks, and some of his associates. Like Bradley (now Chelsea) Manning, Snowden saw an opportunity with WikiLeaks, and organizations of the same ideological mind set, to advance his personal agenda.

In part two, Epstein examines how Snowden managed to carry out his thefts. No evidence has been uncovered to conclusively prove Snowden was being managed at this point by a foreign intelligence service. There are strong

indications, according to Epstein, that he had help from one or more conspirators who may still be in place in sensitive positions in NSA. There are compelling reasons to consider those possibilities. Snowden had taken a pay cut to work for Booz Allen as a contractor so he could be in an NSA facility in Hawaii. He promised to deliver to Laura Portias, a *Guardian* reporter, classified documents in six to eight weeks, shortly before he actually went to work at the facility where he committed the thefts. Snowden had to obtain sixteen passwords and work out how to hack into the accounts and transfer the information in about five weeks. All these promises and tasks were set when Snowden was a new employee with no prior contact in the NSA facility and no previous friends or co-workers at the facility. When Snowden then fled to Hong Kong everything was in place for him until Vladimir Putin personally approved his flight to Moscow.

Epstein gives a very good synopsis in part three of how, after beginning as “The Black Chamber” in World War I, NSA came to be the National Security Agency we know today. He includes this quote from James Clapper, Director of National Intelligence in 2013: “There are many things we do in intelligence that, if revealed, would have the potential for all kinds of blowback” (197). Epstein describes how the code-breaking forerunner of NSA, known as The Black Chamber, was closed down under President Herbert Hoover. Then Secretary of State Henry Stimson said: “Gentlemen should not read each other’s mail” (198). With America’s involvement in WW II on the horizon, President Franklin D. Roosevelt brought this capability back as the Signal Security Agency. On October 24, 1952, President Harry S. Truman expanded its scope and re-named it as The National Security Agency. Snowden actually recognized a serious weakness or back door into NSA’s most sensitive secrets. Private companies, working for profit, have taken over many of the functions which should be handled by the government even if the cost is higher. There is apparently little, if any, quality control or oversight. Epstein pointed out in this book how security background checks are now carried out by private firms who paid by the number of investigations completed. This can encourage haste, shortcuts, and sloppy work. The problems can be found in other contracted areas as well.

Moscow is the focus of part four. Snowden took a great number of files that had nothing to do with domestic surveillance, which he did not release to the *Guardian*. He claimed he would never give classified information to foreign intelligence services. This statement is not supported by Russia’s actions. Snowden was allowed to fly into Moscow without a visa and with a passport that had been restricted by the U.S. State Department in a way that would only allow him to return to the United States. Putin personally authorized

him to come to Russia even though he is a very intelligent man and knew this would severely strain relations with the United States, which it did. The potential intelligence gains were so great that had the players been reversed, the United States would not have hesitated to bring such a Russian defector to the United States. He is totally insulated, protected, and managed with no fear of paying any price other than exile for what he did to his country.

In part five Epstein talks about Snowden's four major choices. First, to leave Dell to take a lower paying job at Booz Allen, which would allow him access to NSA. Second, to flee to Hong Kong as his first stop. Third, to publically reveal himself as the man behind the "leak" or the massive theft of documents. The fourth and final decision was to leave Hong Kong—where China's intelligence services may have talked with him—for Moscow. Snowden is now living in sanctuary, in a residence provided by the Russian government, with bodyguards, and has been allowed to have his girlfriend with him. Edward Jay Epstein points out what a massive undertaking the debriefing with Snowden will be for Russian intelligence, and how they will work to mask whatever information they find of use. With NSA's structure and capabilities revealed, Snowden has crippled our intelligence services, those of our close allies, and perhaps damaged our ability to fight the War on Terror. What lessons can be learned from this disaster? Professionals in the area of intelligence, counterintelligence, and espionage in general have been largely in the shadows. At the policy making levels there must be a concentrated effort to get Congress and political leaders to understand that we cannot always afford to take the least expensive route. The world has changed, and for whatever advantages technology offers, it also offers an equal or greater number of dangers. It may be desirable to do a greater in-depth screening of people who are allowed in secure facilities. The additional costs of having Snowden, Manning, and others more completely screened would seem cheap compared to what Snowden's theft and deception is going to cost our country. United States citizens have short memories. After the 9/11 attacks, certain things we have taken for granted have changed forever; but some still complain of screening procedures, and restrictions on what things can be carried on board an aircraft. In today's world, in order to survive as a country, we have to find a way to balance our traditional ideals of personal privacy and liberty with the need to operate at a security level which will provide protection for our citizens and our nation. This may require more effort to protect against anyone using data collection or other intelligence information to stifle dissent, but to still allow professionals to have the ability to protect our country and its citizens.

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