

Under Obama, Tyranny is the New Transparency

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President Obama has instituted a kind of “equal opportunity retaliation” regime against whistleblowers. “All that was required of Manning and Snowden to harvest the bounties of white privilege was that they look the other way when faced with war crimes and sweeping invasions of privacy domestically and worldwide.” These days, anybody can be “taken out” without benefit of due process.

Bradley Manning and Edward Snowden may never get the opportunity to meet and compare notes about reshaping the world’s understanding of the US surveillance-cloaked-as-national-security-state. Yet their courage in blowing the whistle on high governmental criminality has recast the US Empire in ways unimaginable since the 1960’s. Both whistleblowers are of European descent—a heritage still laden with privilege in the US. The Obama administration’s zeal when it has encountered dissent has broadened the State’s parameters for seek and destroy missions. Gone are the comforts of skin privilege with Obama-as-agent-for-the-1% sending clear signals that in these United States *everyone is a suspect*—except the politicians and their overlords.

On July 31, Army Pfc. Bradley Manning was acquitted of the most serious charge of aiding the enemy that could have carried a sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole. However, he still faces nearly two dozen additional charges in connection with his leak of classified information to WikiLeaks. While unexpected, these charges could possibly land Manning in prison for over a hundred years. Meanwhile, Edward Snowden, after exposing wide-spread illegal surveillance of American citizens and foreign governments fled the US to Russia to avoid the incarceration and torture that Manning has endured.

Manning and Snowden were both on tracks that enjoyed the many advantages of white privilege. Manning, a high school graduate, was not assigned to the mess hall as a cook but rather trained as an intelligence analyst, receiving a Top Secret/Sensitive Compartmented Information (TS/SCI) security clearance. According to No FEAR employment data a significant level of complaints have been filed against the Army by African-Americans for job discrimination. Many African Americans with the same level of education as their fellow white troops find themselves in positions that do not lend themselves to upward mobility. Edward Snowden was also a high school graduate, a former employee of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and later hired by Booz Allen as a technical contractor for the United States National Security Agency (NSA). According to Snowden, his life was “very comfortable,” earning a salary of “roughly US \$200,000.” With this substantial salary, Snowden was stationed in Hawaii and enjoying the American dream—a dream that most African-Americans with a high school degree can only imagine and far removed from Dr. King’s celebrated vision.

All that was required of Manning and Snowden to harvest the bounties of white privilege was

that they look the other way when faced with—in Manning’s case—war crimes, including the callous slaughter of innocent civilians and its cover-up by his superiors in Iraq—and in Snowden’s case—sweeping invasions of privacy domestically and worldwide. Both witnessed government corruption. And both put duty to their fellow citizens above their own personal benefit, effectively throwing any possibility of a comfortable life and “rewarding” career overboard when they decided to expose the lies, crimes and corruption inside the US government.

(“Edward Snowden: NSA whistleblower answers reader questions.” The Guardian (London). [June 14](#), 2013.)

Jesselyn Radack in a recent August 2nd *Washington Post* article titled, *Bradley Manning’s Conviction Sends a Chilling Message* [writes](#): “With the guilty verdict against Pfc. Bradley Manning, President Obama has won what Nixon could not: an Espionage Act conviction against a government employee accused of mishandling classified information. Obama’s administration has relied heavily on the draconian World War I-era law—meant for prosecuting spies, not whistleblowers—in its ruthless, unprecedented war on ‘leaks,’ invoking it seven times (more than all other U.S. presidents combined) to go after people who reveal information embarrassing to the United States or worse that exposes its crimes.”

But that was the point! The Espionage Act enacted June 15, 1917 has traditionally been used as a political cover to intimidate dissidents and whistleblowers. Among those charged under this act are Julius and Ethel Rosenberg (executed: June 19, 1953), John Kiriakou (CIA official who first exposed CIA torture programs who is now serving 20 months in federal prison), Thomas Drake (former senior executive at NSA who exposed government waste but whose case was dropped) and Pentagon Papers whistleblower, Daniel Ellsberg.

The government has used Manning’s prosecution and the demonization of Snowden to send a chilling message to any potential whistleblower, but pointedly to white people. Many of the mechanisms that have been reserved to hunt down and eviscerate the lives of African Americans are now being used to destroy white lives. Call it equal opportunity retaliation. The message is clear: Power will tolerate no measure of dissent or opposition. Despite these clear messages, whistleblowers like Snowden and Manning continue to disdain the personal perks of privilege for the greater good of informing their fellow citizens of the strange fruit their government wants no one to see hanging in the courtyard of national security.

Can’t Buy Me Love

To senior government officials whose very election to so-called public office is largely predicated upon being bought and sold by corporate campaign donations, there is no more frightening a threat than a conscientious subordinate who cannot be bought. Unlike those who—despite their crimes—will have presidential libraries erected in their name and quarter million dollar honoraria for speaking engagements that perpetuate their lies, Manning and Snowden did not sell out. It must give our noble public servants pause to know that these whistleblowers disdain the elite’s crowning cynicism—that everyone has a price.

According to a Huffington Post, [July 26 article](#), entitled: “Edward Snowden Won’t Face Death Penalty, Attorney General Eric Holder writes to Putin seeking Edward Snowden’s extradition:

“I can report that the United States is prepared to provide to the Russian government the

following assurances regarding the treatment Mr. Snowden...First, the United States would not seek the death penalty for Mr. Snowden should he return to the United States” and that “Mr. Snowden will not be tortured. Torture is unlawful in the United States.”

One can only conjecture that on its face this letter attempts to remove any rationale for Mr. Snowden’s needing asylum. Given the [United Nations’ condemnation](#) of the treatment of Pfc. Manning while imprisoned at Quantico as cruel and inhuman: “The special rapporteur concludes that imposing seriously punitive conditions of detention on someone who has not been found guilty of any crime is a violation of his right to physical and psychological integrity as well as of his presumption of innocence,” why would anyone take Mr. Holder’s assertions seriously? This, especially since any mention of bringing George W. Bush *et al* to justice for the torture regimen that was instituted during his presidency have been dismissed as happening “in the past” and that we as a people “need to move forward.”

We need to move forward into what, exactly? Noam Chomsky commenting on the government’s assurance that Snowden would not be tortured [writes](#): “But U.S. government spokespersons assured the world that Snowden will be granted the full protection of American law—referring to those same laws that have kept U.S. Army soldier Bradley Manning...in prison for three years, much of it in solitary confinement under humiliating conditions. Long gone is the archaic notion of a speedy trial before a jury of peers.”

The regressive Wolfowitz Doctrine of preemptive strike, generally viewed as a military strategy has now found its domestic application. An extrapolation of this doctrine is that everyone is considered an enemy combatant—and can be taken out by executive decree—without due process, without habeas corpus, without charge, without a public trial and without the president, the Congress or the courts even batting an eyelash.

Welcome to President Obama’s brave new world of transparency.

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