



American Expression E0648 Edward Snowden

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Edward Snowden is an American whistleblower and former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor who made headlines in 2013 when he leaked classified documents to the media, exposing extensive global surveillance programs conducted by the U.S. government and its allies. Born on June 21, 1983, in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, Snowden's actions sparked intense debates about government surveillance, privacy, and civil liberties.

In his position as an intelligence contractor, Snowden had access to a vast amount of classified information. In May 2013, he leaked thousands of classified documents to journalists Glenn Greenwald, Laura Poitras, and Barton Gellman, detailing the existence of several large-scale surveillance programs operated by the NSA and its Five Eyes alliance partners (United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand). The leaked documents revealed how these programs collected and analyzed vast amounts of electronic communications data from individuals and organizations around the world.

The most significant revelation was the existence of PRISM, a surveillance program that allowed the NSA to access data directly from major tech companies like Google, Facebook, Microsoft, and Apple. Snowden's disclosures also shed light on other surveillance initiatives, including bulk data collection of phone records and internet communications.

Concerned about the massive scope of the surveillance programs and the potential abuse of power, Snowden chose to make the documents public despite the risk of severe consequences. He believed that the public had the right to know about the extent of government surveillance and its impact on privacy and civil liberties.

After the leaks, Snowden fled the United States and sought refuge in Hong Kong. The U.S. government charged him with multiple violations of the Espionage Act, leading to a high-profile international manhunt. In June 2013, while in transit to Latin America, Snowden became stranded in the transit area of Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport after the U.S. government revoked his passport. He was later granted temporary asylum in Russia.

Snowden's actions sparked both praise and condemnation worldwide. Supporters viewed him as a courageous whistleblower who exposed government overreach and defended the right to privacy. Critics, however, labeled him a traitor, arguing that his leaks compromised national security and endangered intelligence-gathering operations.

In the wake of the revelations, there were significant changes in public and political attitudes towards government surveillance. The leaks prompted a global debate on the balance between security and privacy, leading to legal reforms, increased transparency, and calls for greater oversight of intelligence agencies.

In conclusion, Edward Snowden is a former NSA contractor who gained international attention in 2013 when he leaked classified documents exposing extensive global surveillance programs conducted by the U.S. government and its allies. His actions sparked debates on government surveillance, privacy, and civil liberties, and he remains a polarizing figure, seen by some as a whistleblower and by others as a traitor. Snowden's disclosures triggered significant changes in public perception and government policies related to surveillance and transparency, leaving a lasting impact on the ongoing discourse surrounding digital privacy and national security.

Questions for Discussion

1. Edward Snowden's actions ignited a global debate on government surveillance and privacy. How do you perceive the balance between national security and individual privacy in today's digital age, and what steps can be taken to strike a better equilibrium?
2. Snowden's leaks raised concerns about the scope of intelligence agency operations and the potential abuse of power. What reforms or oversight mechanisms do you think are necessary to ensure that government surveillance remains lawful, transparent, and accountable?
3. The issue of whistleblowing raises ethical dilemmas. In Snowden's case, some view him as a hero for exposing government overreach, while others consider him a traitor. How should society define and protect the rights of whistleblowers who expose government secrets, and what protections should be in place for individuals who disclose classified information in the public interest?
4. Snowden's asylum in Russia remains a contentious issue. What are the implications of his situation for international relations and human rights considerations? How can countries address the complexities of providing refuge to whistleblowers while addressing concerns related to extradition and national security?
5. Since Snowden's leaks, significant changes have occurred in public perception and government policies on surveillance. Do you believe these changes have been sufficient to safeguard privacy rights in the digital age, or do more reforms need to be implemented? How can individuals and governments ensure that technological advancements do not compromise privacy and civil liberties? cultures, and what do these varying perspectives reveal about global attitudes toward government transparency and freedom of information?