



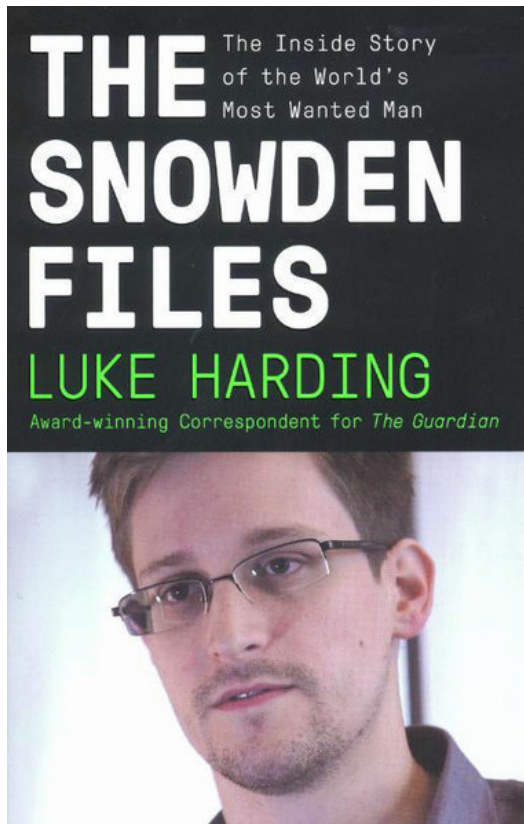
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DAILY NEWS

'Harding's book works on several levels'

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"The Snowden Files: The Inside Story of the World's Most Wanted Man" by Luke Harding. New York, N.Y.: Vintage Books (Random House), 2014, 346 pages, \$14.95.



"I don't want to live in a world where everything that I say, everything I do, everyone I talk to, every expression of creativity or love or friendship is recorded."

— Edward Snowden

This quote, found at the beginning of "The Snowden Files: The Inside Story of the World's Most Wanted Man," the new book by Luke Harding, succinctly captures Snowden's motivation for exposing details of the National Security Agency's data collection operations, which apparently encompass both domestic as well as international communications on an unprecedented scale. Harding is a foreign correspondent for The Guardian. His previous books include "WikiLeaks: Inside Julian Assange's War on Secrecy," co-authored with David Leigh, "The Liar: The Fall of Jonathan Aitken," which was nominated for the Orwell Prize, and "Mafia State: How One Reporter Became an Enemy of the Brutal New Russia."

Snowden is a former Central Intelligence Agency employee and NSA contractor. He made international headlines in June of last year when he released thousands of pages of classified documents outlining the massive data-gathering efforts of the U.S. government. "The Snowden Files," which is based on a series of interviews Snowden gave The Guardian after he released an initial set of these documents, is comprised of 14 relatively straightforward chapters sandwiched between a foreword that sets the stage for what follows and an epilogue that brings the reader up to speed on Snowden's status.

Obviously, the protagonist is a very controversial figure in the public arena. Some see him as a patriot of the highest order for exposing the inner workings of a government fundamentally out of control with respect to its policies and practices. Others see him as a traitor in the most dangerous sense of the word – someone who betrayed the country he was asked to serve and protect. Valid arguments can be made for both characterizations, and while Harding clearly believes Snowden did the world a tremendous favor by illuminating the questionable tactics employed by the NSA and other government agencies, he also does his best to present the complete story in an accurate and comprehensive manner.

Harding's book works on several levels. On the surface, it is an inherently enthralling detective story, with all the elements of a great spy novel. Dig a little deeper and you realize it's also a political treatise – a work that spurs as many questions as it answers regarding the appropriate role of government in our day-to-day lives. The more you reflect on the book, the more you see it as a descriptive study in social interaction; how people respond to what Snowden has done is especially revealing. At its core, "The Snowden Files" is an intimate portrait of a man driven by an overwhelming need to do the proverbial "right thing" despite the dire personal consequences such action will inevitably precipitate. The book succeeds on each of these levels, although I think it is first and foremost a character study.

"Snowden kept himself apart from other staff during the 13 months he spent in Hawaii," Harding explains in "Civil Disobedience," the second chapter. "He was by nature reserved but he had special reason to be guarded. If it came off, his leak would be the most significant since the Pentagon Papers, eclipsing the 2010 release of U.S. diplomatic cables and warlogs by a disaffected U.S. army private, Chelsea (formerly Bradley) Manning. It would lift the lid on massive surveillance, not just of millions of Americans, but the entire world."

As Harding poignantly observes, Snowden was acutely aware of the tremendous resources that would no doubt be deployed in the effort to track him down. Unlike other high-profile whistleblowers in recent years, however, Snowden's extensive knowledge and understanding of how the NSA operated gave him somewhat of an advantage; i.e., it allowed him to stay one step ahead of his pursuers until he decided it was time to go public.

"One moment, Snowden was known only to his friends and family, and a few colleagues," Harding writes in "The Planet's Most Wanted Man," the seventh chapter. "Then suddenly he became a global phenomenon, no longer just an individual but a lightning rod for all sorts of conflicting views about the state, the boundaries of privacy and security, and even the entire modern condition."

Personally, I found the U.S. government's response to Snowden's release of classified documents, as well as the method he used to make the public aware of what the administration was doing through its various reconnaissance programs, to be particularly insightful.

"In his press conference before the summer break, on 9 August, Obama made his first substantial remarks on the crisis," Harding observes in "The Broom Cupboard," the next to last chapter. "The president acknowledged the U.S. had 'significant' spying capabilities. But he said that unlike other, repressive regimes it behaved with restraint, and didn't throw its 'own citizens in prison for what they say online.' His reforms, he said, were designed to ensure Americans could trust U.S. intelligence efforts and have confidence they were 'in line with our interests and values.' All of this sounded reasonable."

As opposed to others who have engaged in similar activities, it was evident from his background, technical expertise and videotaped interviews that Edward Snowden is an intelligent and articulate individual who could not be written off easily as mentally unstable or unworthy of being taken seriously. Anyone who watches his conversations with The Guardian will instantly recognize someone who is in command of his subject matter. So if you want to know more about one of the pivotal issues confronting our modern, globally interconnected and technology-driven world, pick up a copy of "The Snowden Files."

— *Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*