The Case Of Edward Snowden: A Hero Or Traitor

The US history is full of infamous leaks that blew the government wide open, but there‘s one set of leaks that stands head and shoulder above the others. In 2013, a contractor with a national security agency, or the NSA, quietly handed a cache of documents to the Guardian, detailing how the NSA had been hovering up information on millions of citizens while lying to Congress. It is the story of the decade and as important to the American public and the U.S government as the 9/11 attacks which paved the way for the Patriot Act that was enforced by the Bush administration, the act gives more privileges to security agencies to collect more data about citizens. The man behind the most notorious leak in American history is Edward Snowden.

Edward Joseph Snowden is a young computer expert from North Carolina. Snowden is today infamous and currently seeks asylum in Russia. He’s both loved and loathed by millions, Snowden was born on June 21, 1983, and he was born into a family with deep military connections. Snowden’s maternal grandfather, Edward J.Barret, was an admiral, and his father Lonnie Snowden worked in the coast guard. For Snowden, that meant a childhood instilled with a deep respect for the service. On March 20, 2003, the US invaded Iraq, further, the main fighting was over by the end of May. A call for recruits went out nationwide, Snowden felt compiled to join up the military to support his country. In May 2004, he reported for duty at Fort Benning, Georgia. Snowden didn’t last in his training and he claims that he broke both legs. After barely a month, Snowden was discharged in 2005 and became a security guard at Maryland’s Center for Advanced Study of Language. The center was backed by the NSA which was desperate to recruit computer geeks. Later on, in 2006 Snowden got a job offer from the CIA which turned out to be a key decision in his life. Snowden later started posting tweets stating that he was against government programs like social surveillance programs. In 2009, Snowden had a new job, a contractor for Dell working on NSA projects, he was working on anti-cyber spying software in Tokyo. On April 5th, 2010, WikiLeaks’ Julian Assange, previewed a leaked military video at a national Press club Event, the video leaked showed 2 journalists mistaken for terrorists in Baghdad in 2007, the video was the first major scoop in the history of WikiLeaks and it made a huge clash worldwide. Later on, in 2011, Snowden moved to dell and was stationed at Maryland, where he made the decision to download confidential war logs and surveillance documents that he would soon release.

In 2012, Snowden contacted the Tor Project, an online community dedicated to providing everyone with the tools to encrypt their internet activity. In a matter of fact, Tor was deeply connected to WikiLeaks, many have suggested that Snowden made contact with Tor as a way of getting to Assange through WikiLeaks in order to give them the documents. On December 1, 2012, Guardian columnist and vocal WikiLeaks defender Glenn Grunewald and Laura Poitras got an email from Snowden suggesting to set up PGP encryption software on his laptop. On June 1st, 2013, Glenn Grunewald and Laura Poitras managed to meet Snowden in the lobby of the Mira Hotel in Hong Kong. Snowden told Greenwald how NSA could hack any phone in the world, turn it into a microphone that spied on its owner and can go as far as opening its camera without the user even noticing it. He explained that nearly every social media platform had been compromised by the U.S. government and he gave them some of the documents he has. On June, 6th, 2013, at 7 pm, the first story went viral detailing how the phone company Verizon had

allowed the NSA to collect data on millions of Americans, it was a bombshell. In June 8th, 2013 the agency used digital footprints to identify Snowden as the likely leaker, and this was the moment where Snowden's life ended. The NSA estimates 1.7 million documents went missing of which only 1% have been released. Some people think the rest of the documents found their way to the Kremlin and others believe that Snowden wasn't lying when he said he took no copies to Russia.

On June 14, the U.S justice department charged the missing contractor with espionage and an Arrest warrant was sent to the Hong Kong authorities. On June 22nd, 2013, the U.S. authorities canceled his passports. After that Snowden boarded a flight from Hong Kong to Moscow, supposedly intending to ask for asylum. Vladimir Putin the Russian president claimed Snowden's Arrival in Moscow was "An unwanted Christmas Gift". Snowden was stuck in the international transit lounge of the Russian airport for a month. Later on, the whistleblower was granted temporary refugee status in Russia, and he has been there ever since.

The government contract which employees agree upon when they are given their security clearances especially those who have access to sensitive data which must be followed precisely includes a classified information non-disclosure agreement that includes terms and obligations from the employees towards their behavior towards the classified information which states that employees should protect this information and keep it classified unless authorized by the U.S government to share them and that any breach of that agreement would have great consequences for the employee which goes as far as taking legal actions towards them. As an ex NSA employee, Snowden agreed on the classified information nondisclosure agreement, which he has breached to a great extent and threatened the safety, security and the relations of the United States with its allies. Also Snowden has violated some of the United States criminal laws and he was accused with many including theft of government property, unauthorized classified communication of national defense information, willful communication of communications intelligence information to an unauthorized person and provisions of the Intelligence Identities Protection Act which gives the United States government the right to prosecute him for those violations according to the U.S constitution and law which Edward Snowden had broken.

As an employee, rules and work ethics must be respected especially if it's a sensitive job with a national defense agency. These types of jobs require more care and responsibility due to the matters at stake in case of a mistake and the nature of the work these employees do. The NSA trusted Snowden with top secret information by giving him security clearances and allowing him access to confidential files which in their opinion, must stay hidden from the public. Also, employees must not exploit their jobs, or endanger the organizations they work in. All of that did not matter to Snowden, as his ethics and morale were much bigger than that. As an employee in the NSA, your main goal is to protect your country and gather information about anything that could harm your homeland. Snowden saw that what is being done in the name of defending the country was wrong and was a step too far that is proven to have little to negligible impact in keeping a country safe. His manners as an individual drove him to expose something which endangered the privacy and lives of all of the citizens which contradicts with the goal of the NSA, which is protecting them. "I realized that I was part of something that was doing far more harm than good" Snowden said this in September 2013. His concern about what was being done made him expose a highly critical matter which had to be exposed as nobody knew it was being done, and it was hurting more than it was protecting. He knew that going to a federal court or filing a complaint against what was happening to his superiors was not going to be

effective in taking a considerable decision [17], but would make it harder for him to expose the matter. So, he decided that the best way to stop this harm was to expose it to international journals with a hope to make matters better and stop the plague that has been going. To some, he’s a fearless whistleblower who sacrificed everything to do what was right.

Last but not least, When the Snowden leaks broke out, many of the general public saw him as a hero, unlike the U.S government which despise him as a criminal. In conclusion, The Debate of him being a “hero or a traitor” started since the day he leaked those important documents to the public regardless of it being legal or not [8], he still did it. Which makes him both of them at the same time, a traitor and a hero. So, the important question here is “do his good intentions justify his actions? “At least, ethically most of the public opinion agreed with Snowden and defended him and his actions as ethical, justifying his actions for the public good to protect human privacy rights. It is true that Snowden has violated the rules he agreed on and broke the contract between him and the NSA, but that contract is less important than the social contract and responsibility which a democratic country has with its citizens. Even if Snowden is legally guilty, he wasn’t guilty in the eyes of the world especially the U.S citizens as the NSA acts were unfair, unconstitutional and had to be exposed.

In other words, there are two points of view. Firstly, the point of view of the U.S government which says that Snowden is a “Traitor” because he broke the agreement he signed and betrayed his country, which caused huge problems and a diplomatic crisis for the government with its allies. A journalist said that Snowden wasn’t a hero but a criminal by leaking that information rather than reporting it using legal ways or heading to a court. On the other hand, the citizens and most of the people around the world see Snowden as a Hero, Snowden made a great sacrifice for American citizens and everyone around the world as he sacrificed his life, his family and his courier to protect their privacy and expose what has been happening behind the closed doors of the NSA. The Legacy of Edward Snowden had a huge impact on the governments, parliaments and the Congress which passed new laws actually expanding the agency’s powers, keeping those agencies under their surveillance and limiting the chance for another Snowden to arise. Today the NSA operated under close congressional oversight. Snowden revelations arguably led to the EU’s extremely strict GDPR data protection. “When I left Hawaii, I lost everything. I had a stable life, stable love, family, future. And I lost that life, but, I've gained a new one, and I am incredibly fortunate, and I think the greatest freedom that I've gained is the fact that I no longer have to worry about what happens tomorrow because I'm happy with what I've done today.' Snowden movie, 2015.