



Book Review

Gardner, Lloyd C. 2016. *The War on Leakers: National Security and American Democracy, From Eugene V. Debs to Edward Snowden*. New York: The New Press.

321pp. Hardback. US\$26.95 ISBN 9781620970638.

Pierce Greenberg

Washington State University, Department of Sociology, US.
pierce.greenberg@wsu.edu

The United States (U.S.) has not been shy about declaring “war” on a variety of perceived social ills such as drugs, poverty, and terrorism. But a lesser-known aggression has been simmering for decades amid the shrouded activities of U.S. intelligence agencies—a “war,” like the others, with no defined end and no public consensus on who exactly is the enemy. Lloyd C. Gardner’s book, *The War on Leakers: National Security and American Democracy from Eugene V. Debs to Edward Snowden*, highlights the history of the Espionage Act and how it has been leveraged against those who have leaked government documents and information. This work deftly reviews prominent cases of alleged espionage by leakers—from the aforementioned Debs and Snowden to Daniel Ellsberg, Chelsea Manning, James Risen, and others. These cases illustrate how the surveillance state rose to prominence and, perhaps, transcended the conventional political and democratic sphere.

Gardner begins with an overview of the book’s key contribution: to trace the origins and usage of the 1917 Espionage Act from the early 1900s until today. Indeed, there are stark—and unexpected—similarities between the presidential campaigns that have invoked the act to punish those who leak information about the inner-workings of government agencies. As Gardner states, this trend in federal law enforcement is starkly at odds with the U.S. values of open government and freedom of speech. Nonetheless, presidential administrations from Woodrow Wilson to Richard Nixon to Barack Obama have supported the charges of espionage against government leakers. *The War on Leakers* introduces the threads that tie those cases together in historical detail.

The War on Leakers begins by introducing the historical context of the Espionage Act—which stemmed from an effort to suppress dissent regarding U.S. involvement in World War I. A federal prosecutor charged Eugene V. Debs, a labor activist and Socialist Party member, with espionage after a speech against the military draft in WWI. A judge found Debs guilty of the charge and the Supreme Court upheld the ruling—foreshadowing nearly 100 years of suppressing free speech during times of war. Later, Nixon attempted to use the act to prevent the publication of the Pentagon Papers—an internal government report detailing hesitation about the Vietnam War. Gardner details how the Nixon-era decisions regarding the Espionage Act were made hastily, but set a lasting precedent regarding leakers that continues within the federal government today.

Greenberg, Pierce. 2017. Review of Gardner's *The War on Leakers: National Security and American Democracy, From Eugene V. Debs to Edward Snowden*. *Surveillance & Society* 15(2): 347-348.
<http://library.queensu.ca/ojs/index.php/surveillance-and-society/index> | ISSN: 1477-7487

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The most intriguing part of *The War on Leakers* is the near-history involving the Snowden case and its lengthy fallout. Gardner's overview of key aspects of the case—the media coverage, the political reaction, and the near-term ramifications—provided a useful context for someone who only casually followed the headlines as they unfolded (or perhaps had seen the glossy Hollywood production of *Snowden*). Politicians and figureheads throughout the federal government lined up to denounce Snowden's leaks and sully his character, but rarely criticized the widespread surveillance activities that he revealed. Gardner highlights the remarkable disconnect between the government's stance towards Snowden and the numerous awards that he—and the journalists who covered his leaks—won around the world.

The only downside of *War on Leakers* is that it lacks easily interpretable analysis. The facts and events are presented in an order that conveys a point—and tying those points together can make the reader grow weary. Each chapter begins with a title, prominent quotes from key figures, and then dives into historical facts and events. A reader-friendly introduction and conclusion of each chapter may have assisted with grasping some of the finer points of historical detail. *The War on Leakers* is neither a quick-read nor a beginner's guide to Snowden—and does not portend to be. But newcomers to the history of U.S. intelligence agencies may have difficulty navigating the chapters and associated events—as Gardner sometimes leaps from Snowden to Ellsberg and back again.

Nonetheless, Gardner's work is a valuable contribution to the near-history of Surveillance Studies in the U.S. Given the recent events in U.S. politics, it is natural to wonder how this “war on leakers” will play out under the new presidential administration. Government leaks have been a focal point of Donald J. Trump's presidency thus far. But these leaks are not critical of the surveillance state—they are critical of Trump and his alleged connections to Russia. While some may applaud these revelations due to Trump's alleged treason and other misdeeds, the leaks may also represent an effort by the “shadow government”—in Gardner's terms—to subvert the executive branch. This present context opens new questions about what the future holds for leakers, the national security state, and civil liberties. Gardner's work provides a much-needed roadmap of the past, and will be valuable as the debate over government surveillance enters new—and uncharted—waters.