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The Privatization of Snowden's Secrets: Glenn Greenwald responds



By [Paul Carr](#)

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This morning, Glenn Greenwald published a [lengthy response](#) to Mark Ames' investigation, published here on Pando, into Greenwald's "[privatization](#)" of [Edward Snowden's NSA secrets](#).

First things first: I'm pleased Greenwald responded. You won't be surprised to hear that I don't agree with much of what he wrote, but it's important that we have a thorough, two-sided debate around who "owns" information leaked from the government and how it's published. As such, I strongly encourage you to [read Greenwald's post in full](#).

Now. A couple of things that, as Mark's editor, I do need to address. Things that harm, rather than help, the debate.

After we published Mark's piece, I was concerned, based on past experience, that some of Greenwald's supporters might try to divert from the key points raised in our coverage by trying to smear Pando, Mark or others who work here. In some cases, sadly, it seems like my concerns were well founded. In some of the darker corners of the Twittersphere I've seen my history of alcoholism (five years sober) dragged into the debate and I've seen Mark accused of being a child rapist... and that's just from the people I hadn't previously blocked.

I want to be clear that there's no suggestion that Greenwald himself is behind the smears. That said, Greenwald himself comes close to smeary territory several times in his post.

For one thing, he parrots the meme that Pando is somehow secretly "controlled" by Peter Thiel/evil Silicon Valley Libertarians/lizard People. In my [footnote to Mark's post](#) I made a point of mentioning that Founders Fund, in which Peter Thiel is a partner, invested a total of \$200k in Pando long before we were acquired. I reiterated our long standing policy of investigating investors as thoroughly as we cover anyone else. I even included links to highly critical posts that Mark, Yasha and I have written about Thiel and other Pando investors in the past, on Pando and elsewhere. I invited Greenwald to pledge similarly thorough coverage of his own backer.

Unfortunately, Greenwald chose to ignore the invitation and instead opened his post by "revealing" Thiel's investment in Pando as if it were something we hadn't disclosed or, worse, something we were trying to cover up. As Greenwald put it...

'Indeed, Pando.com itself is partially funded by libertarian billionaire Peter Thiel, the co-founder of Paypal and CIA-serving Palantir Technologies. The very same author of this week's Pando post had previously described Thiel (before he was funded by him) as "an enemy of democracy"'

Note the innuendo that somehow Mark's position has changed since we were acquired. Perhaps Greenwald figured that his readers wouldn't bother clicking through to the original Pando post containing the disclosure and the links to the exact same critical pieces that Greenwald cites (sure enough, at time of writing, only a few hundred of his readers have clicked through according to our referrer stats). For the record: no one from Founders Fund has contacted us about our coverage of this story, before or after Mark's piece.

Another strange claim was that Mark's reporting on Greenwald should be ignored because the two of them have a history of fierce disagreement.

In particular, Greenwald claims that Mark's "vendetta" against him stems from an article Mark and Yasha Levine wrote for the Nation about the TSA and which, Greenwald claims, the Nation was forced to retract. There's just one problem with this narrative: the article wasn't retracted. In fact it's still available [right here](#) on the Nation's website.

What's certainly true is that Greenwald pressured the Nation to apologize to one of the people mentioned in the story: a man called John Tyner who was presenting himself as a concerned citizen standing up to TSA oppression (Pando readers might remember him as the "[don't touch my junk](#)" guy). Following pressure by Greenwald, the Nation did indeed post [an apology](#) to Tyner, who it was later revealed works for a private defense contractor, clarifying there was no evidence he was acting as anything other than a regular Joe Libertarian when he took his hidden video camera to the TSA checkpoint. As for the "grassroots" anti-TSA movement which Tyner helped promote — well, you can read Yasha Levine's [follow-up](#) to see how that turned out.

Does a small part of Mark's skepticism of Greenwald's motives stem from their previous history? Perhaps it does. But the idea that Omidyar and Greenwald should only be scrutinized by people who know nothing of his past is, charitably put, daft. Almost as daft as Greenwald's next (and most ludicrous) innuendo, that somehow we are coordinating our messaging with the NSA...

"Moreover, the rhetorical innuendo in the Pando post tracks perfectly with that used by NSA chief Keith Alexander a few weeks ago when he called on the US government to somehow put a stop to the NSA reporting..."

The truth is out there.

Beyond that, Greenwald's post barracked an army of straw men: claims that we're demanding Greenwald be arrested for his work (we're not — he's a journalist and should be afforded the full protection of the law), that we want Greenwald to publicly release all of the NSA documents (we certainly don't), that

we don't think journalists should be paid (NSFWCORP and Pando fiercely believe that writers should be paid for their work, including benefits) and that by questioning Greenwald we are somehow ignoring the revelations contained in Snowden's leaks or are anti-whistleblower (see Mark's feature-length history of American whistleblowing [here](#)).

Lost in all this noise, meanwhile, and in the 4915 words of attempted rebuttal, is the fact that Greenwald still refuses to make a simple statement confirming he will hold Pierre Omidyar to the same standards as anyone else he covers.

The fact is there *are* serious questions to be asked around who owns America's secrets and how billionaire-backed media companies, like the Washington Post, NewCo — and, yes, Pando — can guard against the persuasive (and dissuasive) effects of large sacks of cash.

We're going to continue asking those questions, regardless of what mud is thrown at us and how many thousands of words Greenwald spends putting up straw men while avoiding the points we're actually raising. Likewise, I assume Greenwald will continue arguing that his reputation means it's unreasonable for us to even demand those answers.

That's all good. Debate is healthy. But smears are not. Here's hoping that, as this story develops, both sides stick to the former and publicly distance themselves from the latter.