

J608 Monthly Essay 2

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WikiLeaks

WikiLeaks is a non-profit organization that acts as the middleman between whistleblowers and the press. They, “publish original source material alongside our news stories so readers and historians alike can see evidence of the truth,” (ColdFusion). They have released more censored documents than all of the world’s media combined. The organization was founded in Iceland in 2006 by Julian Assange and has become a multinational conflict. They receive sensitive or classified information from whistleblowers that are uploaded to a secure, anonymous online dropbox system (ColdFusion). Assange’s justification for publication is that leaders should be saying the same in public as they are in private (Casebook). Assange has been targeted by U.S. officials for 10+ years because of his efforts to increase public consciousness.

According to Assange, organizations that are abusive must be in the public eye. When their behaviors are revealed, they have two choices: “Reform in such a way they can be proud of their endeavors and proud to display them to the public,” or, “Lock down internally and cease to be as efficient,” (Casebook). Assange is frustrated with the way the government claims “American lives are in jeopardy!” every time military or intelligence organizations are exposed by the press. He simply wants to provide an unvarnished story of how the government makes decisions that cost us our lives and money. Out of all the documents published on WikiLeaks, 11,000 are marked ‘secret,’ 9,000 are marked ‘noform,’ or not to be shared with other countries, and the rest labeled ‘secret/noform,’ ‘confidential,’ or unclassified (Casebook). Regardless of their labels, none are intended for public view. This is the issue, according to Assange, and to

which I agree. Assange claims, “Americans have the right to know what’s being done in their name,” (Casebook).

I don’t think Assange is wrong in his efforts to educate the public on how they may or may not be manipulated by the very organization put in place to protect them. WikiLeaks and Assange alike are practicing Henry David Thoreau's Civil Disobedience. WikiLeaks could be considered the cookiecutter of Civil Disobedience, perhaps, in “trying to make the world more civil and act against abusive organizations that push in the opposite direction,” (Casebook). Assange saw an abuse of power and ran with it. He is brave and confident that he’s providing the truth the government so desperately wants to deflect. Most of the heavy analytical lifting and review is done by volunteer professional journalists and human rights activists. Stories are formed, then news articles, then increased community involvement seeking to dig deeper and gain more perspective. Assange is not doing anything illegal nor trying to target specific individuals or organizations. He said in an interview with the New York Times, “We don’t have targets other than organizations that use secrecy to conceal unjust behavior,” (Casebook). Acting as only the middleman, WikiLeaks and its volunteers do not do any of the hacking or uncovering of information themselves (ColdFusion).

Although Assange’s acts are not punishable by law, that has not stopped efforts by governments to try nor has it stopped representatives from slandering him. Bob Beckel, a political commentator and analyst, called Assange a “traitor,” that he has “broken every law in the U.S.,” and even wishes he was “illegally executed,” (ColdFusion). Candice Miller, a U.S. representative in Michigan, referred to WikiLeaks as a “terrorist organization,” that, “threatens our security,” (ColdFusion). I think Assange is accurate in his perspective of government and correct for wanting the public to know about their secrets. He ensures secrecy for sources, not for abuses

(Casebook). Overall, I applaud his bravery and decision-making. The only thing that makes me question his morals and distaste for abuse is that he has pending charges of sexual assault in Sweden.

It's also interesting to note how long Assange has been involved with the U.S. government. He has been a hacker since 1987 and has previously hacked the Pentagon, U.S. Department of Defense, the Navy, NASA, Motorola, and more. He was arrested for these acts many years ago and let out on good behavior. Shortly after he was released he began working with the police and hacking for their benefit (ColdFusion). I think it's both ironic and comical that the government is totally fine with his behavior when he's providing them with something. When he turns around to expose the truth of their abuses, all of a sudden he's terrorist and putting lives in jeopardy.

As for Private Bradley Manning, he most likely was going through the truth versus loyalty dilemma (Kidder). He knew the truth of what the government was hiding in relation to Iraq and Afghanistan. He also had loyalty to the U.S. military. However, I think his intentions were pure in trying to get the public to spark a debate against foreign policy and what happens behind closed doors. Manning said, "when I made these decisions, I believed I was going to help people, not hurt people," "I felt like we were risking so much for people who seemed unwilling to cooperate with us, leading to frustration and hatred on both sides," (Childress). What he provided to WikiLeaks did not do any major harm, only made some officials embarrassed. I do not think he deserves the punishment he received nor a dishonorable discharge. He put the truth above his loyalty to corruption at the expense of his youth, career, and life.

The New York Times included itself in the conversation by publishing thousands of documents from the U.S. State Department and Department of Justice. With similar grounds as WikiLeaks, to provide an unvarnished story about how the government makes important decisions and offer analysis to readers. They knew the American public ought to know about these documents or they would not have published them. They also knew their rights of press and the limitations of censorship. I agree with their decision to publish because the only way to exercise the right to publish, is to publish. For me, seeing the way the government and its representatives aggressively reacted to publishers of 'secret' documents tells us all we need to know. That they are guilty of something. As Assange said, "organizations can either be efficient, open, and honest, or they can be closed, conspiratorial, and inefficient," (Casebook). It's no secret that the government prioritizes war, military, and money over the American people. It's also not a secret that the government knows all about secrets.

Sources:

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