

POWERLINE

Was Snowden justified?

by Scott Johnson
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The Volokh Conspiracy's Nicholas Rosenkranz [links](#) to the "particularly lively" Intelligence Squared debate this week in New York City: "Resolved: Snowden Was Justified." Arguing for the motion were Daniel Ellsberg, the guy who delivered the Pentagon Papers to the New York Times and other media outlets in 1971; and Ben Wizner, legal adviser to Edward Snowden and attorney for the ACLU. Arguing against the motion were Andrew C. McCarthy, the guy who prosecuted the Blind Sheikh; and Ambassador R. James Woolsey, former director of the CIA and chairman of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

Rosenkranz links to the "details, results, video, etc.," available [here](#). I commend the video of the debate below to your attention. Watching the debate, I have the impression that it gets bogged down in side issues and that the central issue largely escapes engagement.

Nevertheless, one can find illumination in stray notes. Note, for example, Wizner's repeated invocation of the (supposedly constructive) role of journalists in the dissemination of Snowden's trove of documents. Note Ellsberg's professions of faith in Snowden's judgment. Note Andy McCarthy's plea for the exercise of common sense in calculating the damage Snowden has done (well into the debate at about 1:24:00). Note McCarthy's closing statement at about 1:27:00.

I don't think the arguments in favor of the proposition have merit or that the question is close, but the subject is important and there is something to be learned from the give and take of debaters who know what they are talking in a format that lets them talk. And moderator John Donovan, let it be noted, does a good job.

Quotable quote, from Ellsberg: "Edward Snowden has given me hope."

FOOTNOTE: Of interest in this context is Gabriel Schoenfeld's ["Rethinking the Pentagon Papers."](#)