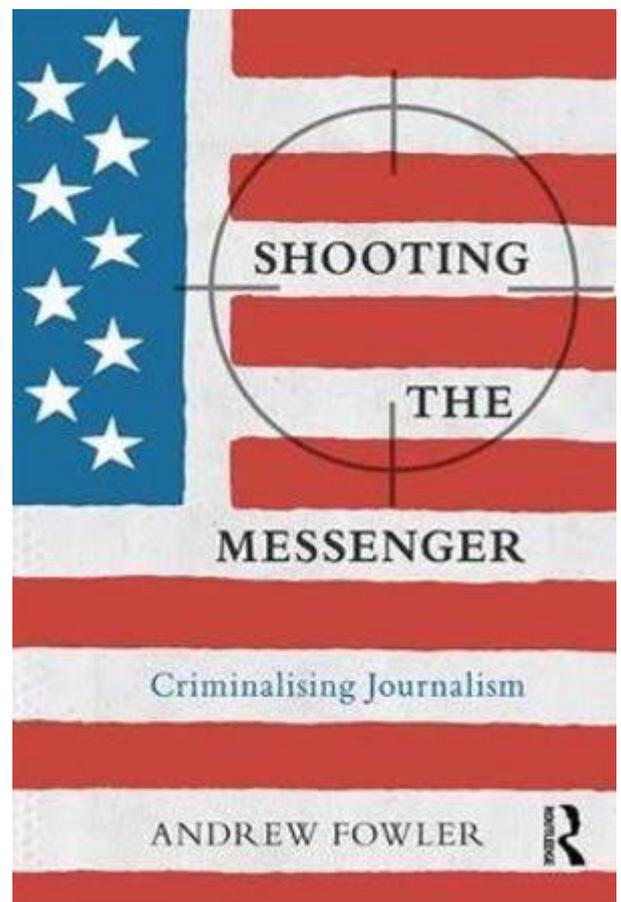


***Shooting the Messenger* by Andrew Fowler: Book Review**

by Owen Hsieh, January 23rd 2019

Published by Routledge Press , *Shooting the Messenger: Criminalizing Journalism* is a valuable contribution to understanding the decline of the media landscape in both the corporate and state press. Featuring a number of case studies, from the media coverage of the Iraq and Afghanistan invasions based on the weapons of mass destruction lies, the protection of journalist sources with reference to the Pentagon Papers, to the future of the conventional media in the faces of declining revenues, and the restrictions on their craft though onerous “War on Terror” legislation.



This wide ranging, critical foray is the work of Andrew Fowler, a former investigative journalist for the ABC TV Four Corners program. Fowler was the reporter behind the special on the conspiracy to extradite Julian – ‘Sex, Lies and Julian Assange’ in 2010 (which can be streamed [here](#)). Since then he has authored a biography of Julian Assange entitled *The Most Dangerous Man in the World* (2011), *The War on Journalism – Media Moguls, Whistleblowers, and the Price of Freedom* (2015). *Shooting the Messenger* (2018) is his latest work.

One chapter of *Shooting the Messenger* deals with the Snowden revelations around mass surveillance. It serves as an interesting case study of mistakes in handling sensitive information obtained in the public interest, with proof of many missed opportunities.

Fowler takes aim at the coterie of Glenn Greenwald, Laura Poitras and *The Guardian* for their mismanagement of the Snowden leaks.

To focus only on Greenwald’s comedy of errors

He failed to install the PGP software Snowden requested. “It was Poitras that received the all important communication from Snowden by encrypted email. Greenwald had failed to install the program despite detailed prompts and even lessons from Snowden.”

In a breathtaking example of irresponsibility, he failed to prevent the Government obtaining the documents. This occurred when his partner was traveling from the UK home to Brazil, trusted as courier of hardware and information pertaining to the Snowden leaks. Of course he was detained in Heathrow Airport by intelligence personnel wherein his laptop, external hard drive were seized. At that time they seized a “written note giving the key” to access information stored on a number

of memory sticks holding an index of the information stored.

Fowler also accuses Greenwald of using the information as its personal fiefdom, becoming a “gold mine for The Intercept” and using the exclusive information given in privilege to form the basis for founding his website, *The Intercept*.

‘The documents thus far leaked by Greenwald are very US-centric, at the expense of information around the other 5 eyes countries’. Fowler further notes, ‘the documents in the Snowden leaks are fast losing their currency, and are being leaked at an inordinarily slow rate.’

‘Though the leaks were handled responsibly in the early days, instead of making the information widely available, they have leaked the documents when it best suited them. They have not utilized the expertise of a lot of leading academics and journalists.’

Taken from an interview with a colleague, Fowler states: “it was unfortunate that Snowden gave the information to just two people”.

A damning indictment.

Fowler’s book reads like a fleshed out version of Pilger’s Vichy journalists speech delivered at the Free Julian Assange rally organised by the Socialist Equality Party in 2018 ([watch here](#)), in which Pilger said:

“The Guardian, reputedly once a great liberal newspaper has conducted a vendetta against Julian Assange. Like a spurned lover, the Guardian has aimed its personal, petty and inhuman cowardly attacks on a man who’s work they once published and profited from.. ..Part of a plan to raise cover price, to make money, often big money. While Wikileaks and Julian struggled to survive, with not a penny for Wikileaks.. .. they also revealed the secret password Julian had given the guardian in

confidence, which was designed to protect a digital file containing the US embassy cables.. ..this is how low the craft of Journalism has sunk."

Although largely an academic text, it is still an insightful and enjoyable read. *Shooting the Messenger* is a powerful contribution to a full examination of recent history and its coverage in conventional media sources.

Shooting the Messenger – Criminalising Journalism

Andrew Fowler

2018

Routledge, New York