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What Happened to Glenn Greenwald?



The simplest answer may be inertia, and time—essentially, nothing—but for better or worse I have a particular fixation on this question, and there is no denying Greenwald has become, shall we say, more problematic over the last couple of years.

Glenn Greenwald needs no introduction, so suffice it to say: he first came to prominence as an anti-Bush blogger, became a sort of celebrity when he published much of the Snowden reporting in *The Guardian*, and subsequently (along with Jeremy Scahill and Laura Poitras, with funding from eBay founder Pierre Omidyar) co-founded *The Intercept*, where he worked until his apparently [acrimonious exit](#) this week.

Lately most Greenwald columns tend towards highly specific media criticisms of mainstream liberal outlets, like MSNBC and the *New York Times*. At least I think they do—I haven't read one of his columns fully in months, because they're insufferable. At this point, Greenwald seems to have almost no ideology besides reflexive contrarianism. Perhaps this is simply the

end result of spending hours on Twitter every day for years, or spending two (or four?) years focused laser-like on the Russia inquiry. His incessant—and often finely detailed, and articulate—criticisms have transformed the man into a kind of fanatic.

More problematic, obviously, this tendency towards contrarian criticism has increasingly aligned him with the far right. Some of this can clearly be chalked up to the simplification of information within the context of social media; self-reinforcing media bubbles are created. But we pick our bubbles, and Greenwald appears to be comfortable with his niche.

It is worth noting that the rhetorical overlap between Greenwald and the far right was always there, but could, in the past, usually be plausibly discounted as both-sides hostility towards a corrupt elite—consider the comparisons between Trump and Bernie. Or at least that's how I felt. No longer. Take a look at Greenwald's Twitter feed, which reads as an unending stream of right-wing grievance against cultural liberalism, and/or specific and almost exclusive amplification of right-wing media.

Greenwald and others in his niche (like Matt Taibbi, who has taken a similar turn) might counter that they serve as reliable, and perhaps anti-partisan, media critics, in reaction to a hegemonic, neoliberal media elite. This may be partially true, but the justification appears increasingly irrelevant as they come to identify—admittingly or not—with one side of the partisan divide. This is to say nothing of the fact that their insistence to the contrary ultimately lends cover to the far right, who are able to launder their media through the 'contrarian' niche.

At face value one wonders how Greenwald, who made such a name for himself as an opponent to the national security state, and who lives as a prominent gay journalist, married to a Socialist congressman, in Bolsonaro's Brazil, can now spend so much time and energy effectively running cover for the American fascist right. But, as I suggested above, the answer may be uncomplicated. Clearly, Greenwald's fixation on the vapidness of the American liberal media elite—coupled with his experience of American domestic politics through a curated, algorithmic Twitter feed—has narrowed, and hardened, the aperture through which he sees the world. Moreover, as the targets of his criticism increasingly and desperately associate cultural liberalism with a neoliberal agenda, both become targets for Greenwald, and he finds himself neatly aligned with the far right. Still, this is a charitable reading, given Greenwald's intelligence and presumed awareness of the dynamic.

I often compare Glenn to his colleague Jeremy Scahill, whose podcast, Intercepted, I regularly listened to over the first couple years of the Trump administration—and who recently released an audio documentary recapping, quite artfully, the last four years of Trump. Scahill, like Greenwald, had a natural skepticism of the obvious bizarreness of the Russia fixation. Unlike Greenwald, he covered this and related topics with nuance, emphasizing that while Trump-as-Manchurian-candidate was clearly crazy, serious questions of corruption remained. More importantly, also unlike Greenwald, Scahill never cedes any

ground to what was and is obviously a fascistic, right-wing movement, one Greenwald repeatedly dismisses as an imagined liberal hysteria (or, indulges).

I will conclude by emphasizing that Greenwald was instrumental in my own political understanding around 2015-2016, and I recall his piece following the last election was one of the first and most sensible I read after Trump had won. Clearly, he has held this role for others. But at this point, unless he alters course, he is a spent—and possibly dangerous—voice in US politics.

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