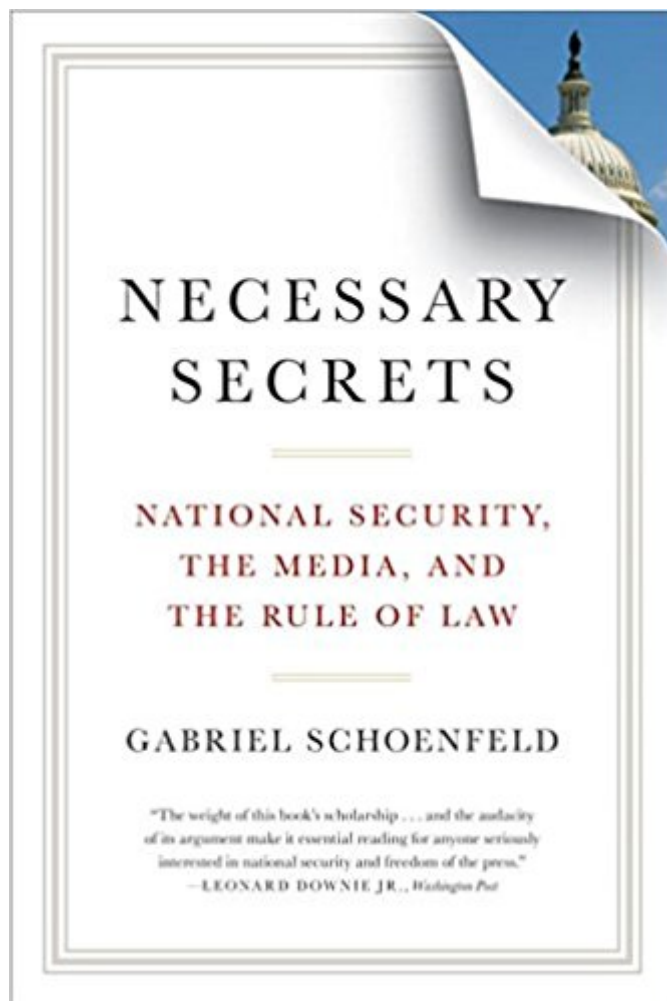


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Necessary Secrets: National Security, The Media, And The Rule Of Law



Synopsis

"Essential reading for anyone seriously interested in national security and freedom of the press."
—Leonard Downie Jr., Washington Post
Gabriel Schoenfeld "brilliantly illuminates" (Wall Street Journal) a growing rift between a press that sees itself as the heroic force promoting the public's "right to know" and a government that needs to safeguard information vital to the effective conduct of foreign policy. A masterful contribution to the enduring challenge of interpreting the First Amendment, *Necessary Secrets* offers a gripping account of how our national security, now and across the American past, has been compromised by disclosure of classified information.

Book Information

Paperback: 320 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company; Reprint edition (May 23, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393339939

ISBN-13: 978-0393339932

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 stars 7 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #291,426 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #22 in Books > Law > Business > Securities #50 in Books > Law > Administrative Law > Federal Jurisdiction #52 in Books > Law > Media & the Law

Customer Reviews

The December 2005 publication of a front-page New York Times piece about an NSA wiretapping program is the inciting incident at the heart of this provocative consideration of the conflict between the need for government secrecy and the role of a free press. Schoenfeld (*The Return of Anti-Semitism*), senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, publicly accused the paper of violating the law when it published the article. Here, the author concerns himself less with the specifics of the 2005 incident than the larger theoretical and historical questions it raises. The book goes back to the First and Second Continental Congresses to show that the founders believed the defense of national security made complete transparency impossible. It then jumps ahead to the 1917 Espionage Act, the critical legislation, in Schoenfeld's thesis, locating where secrecy and security trump freedom of the press—as it did until Daniel Ellsberg's leak of the classified Pentagon Papers to the Times. If Schoenfeld's argument sometimes feels one-sided, he succeeds in scrutinizing an issue of

vital importance and putting it into a much broader context. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In 2006, conservative commentator Schoenfeld published an editorial in which he called for the prosecution of certain New York Times journalists under espionage laws for reporting details of the National Security Agency's warrantless wiretapping activity within the U.S. With this selection, Schoenfeld reasserts his complaint against the Times in the context of a broader discussion about the historical role of secrecy in American government. Examining the Founders' attitudes toward government secrets as well as certain precedent-setting incidents such as Daniel Ellsberg's release of the Pentagon Papers, he argues that the government should more aggressively assert its prerogative to control certain information, particularly that pertaining to national security, by prosecuting leakers and those who would publish sensitive leaked information. His primary frustration, however, is not with the government's demonstrated reluctance to prosecute leakers (often for fear of further disclosures in court) but with the confidently adversarial stance of post-Watergate journalism in general. Though uncovering some fascinating and largely forgotten moments in American history—the 1931 Black Chamber affair, for example—this selection may put off some readers with its polemical tenor. --Brendan Driscoll --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book is an ambitious one, discussing the serious legal, political, and ethical issues raised by media publication of unauthorized disclosures of secret diplomatic, military, and intelligence information. (Because the phrase "classified information" is a relatively modern one, it would be a historical anachronism to use that phrase for secret diplomatic, military, and intelligence information that existed before that phrase came into use.) The author surveys American history -- from the beginnings of the United States to the present -- in an effort to identify the key issues raised by unauthorized disclosures of diplomatic, military, and intelligence secrets and their publication. The author's survey of American history is interesting, and it provides useful context and background information for his discussion of unauthorized disclosures. The author discusses arguments made in favor of publishing leaked secrets, arguments made against the publication of leaked secrets, and the strengths and weakness of the arguments on both sides. For the most part, the author is critical of media publication of unauthorized disclosures of secret diplomatic, military, and intelligence information, and he challenges many of the arguments that have been made in favor of such

publication. But, the author also notes the problem of over-classification of some government information, the value of a free press to an informed citizenry, and the practical and political difficulties of criminal prosecutions of leakers and the recipients of leaks. The author's effort at presenting the pros and cons of unauthorized disclosures and the government's response to unauthorized disclosures is an admirable effort at being fair, but it occasionally may leave the reader with the feeling that the author is ambivalent and perhaps hesitant about some of the positions he takes in the book. Anyone interested in the subject of national security leaks should read this book.

I read NECESSARY SECRETS as a fluke. It isn't my normal fare. At the height of the WikiLeaks and Julian Assange news blitz, I had a conversation with my brother-in-law. I told him I didn't think there was much room for keeping secrets. A secret, of course, is defined as "something kept hidden or unexplained." Thus, it seemed to me antithetical to everything I was taught: that knowledge is power and its application is wisdom. Keeping things hidden and unexplained kept me from knowledge and, hence, from having wisdom. "Necessary" of course means absolutely essential. My brother-in-law reminded me, however, that there was a need for secrecy -- times when it is absolutely essential. Some secrets are necessary. For example, he suggested I probably didn't want anyone knowing my daughter's bank account information. (It gave me pause that he didn't use my bank account information for his example.) Otherwise, he said someone could go in and withdraw willy-nilly. It is necessary, he argued, to keep the critical information secret or unscrupulous individuals or entities will make you regret it. My conversation with him got me thinking more and more about secrecy, more than I ever had before. It even spurred me on to start writing a novel with secrecy, privacy, or confidentiality, or all three, as a theme. It also caused me to start considering those matters -- secrecy, privacy, and confidentiality -- more fully. I ended up, through happenstance, picking up NECESSARY SECRETS to read and learn more about the subject. Obviously, since my immediate take on secrecy with my brother-in-law was to want to do away with it, I wasn't very close to the position of Gabriel Schonfeld, the author of NECESSARY SECRETS. Schonfeld argues that some classified information is so sensitive it needs to be kept secret and not disclosed, because, if it is disclosed, it will be harshly detrimental to Americans. And Schonfeld argues that those individuals and organizations who do make such disclosures of a harmful nature should be punished harshly under U. S. laws. The Schonfeld book was written before WikiLeaks and Julian Assange hit the newsstands big time. It basically covers the history of secrecy in the United States from its inception to the time the book was completed. Since it focuses mostly on the history of secrecy in the United States, including case law and issues covered in the news, it moves quite slowly, especially in

comparison to much of my normal fare. However, it is well written and not difficult at all to move through or understand. Schoenfeld basically tries to make the case that the press should not be releasing sensitive classified information that could bring harm to individuals or to the U. S., and if it does, it -- including all individuals who participated in its release -- should be prosecuted to the full extent of the law. It seems to me that secrets are only necessary when there are individuals or entities that are dishonest and unscrupulous. Of course, there are such individuals and entities. It also seems to me that, over time, the ability to keep things secret becomes more and more difficult with modern technology and social media being what it is today. Hence, it was informative to read *NECESSARY SECRETS* and to contemplate its history and arguments. I am not certain I am where its author is on the subject, but I'm certainly much more informed on the subject matter as it pertains to the United States because of his book.

Schoenfeld's work is not only informative but also genuinely interesting. He begins by presenting a New York Times leak from 2005 and then works back toward that example from the framers' perspective on secrecy to the present. The book is full of examples including leaks related to code-breaking in the first half of the twentieth century to the Pentagon Papers case and more. Unfortunately, as the book was published in 2010, Schoenfeld just missed the big Wikileaks case, on which his perspective would have undoubtedly been enlightening. Great book if you've ever pondered the intersection between freedom of the press, legitimate government whistle blowing, and actual issues of national security. The book is pretty well balanced and makes a strong case for why we must critically examine the responsibilities of both our elected representative government and the faux-representative press.

If ever there was a timely book, "Necessary Secrets" is it: With the Wikileaks scandal in the headlines, every American should be reading "Necessary Secrets." The author seems to have tried to provide a balanced analyses of our country's news media vs. government/military secrets -- and has pretty much succeeded. All readers may not agree with his conclusions, but this book should help each make up his/her own mind on the subject.

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