

Bradley Manning: Telling the Truth in a Time of Lies

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Bradley Manning is accused of leaking documents that described serious flaws in U.S. foreign policy in an effort to start a debate that would lead to a more perfect union. This patriotism for America has resulted in him being denied due process and treated inhumanely — virtual solitary confinement for ten months and now forced nudity. The actions of the government are inconsistent with the rhetoric of President Obama and Secretary Clinton; and inconsistent with what the U.S. Constitution requires.

Reports that Bradley Manning is being held nude every night at the Quantico Brig, then forced to stand naked in the hallway while he waits for his clothes, shows the inconsistency of the treatment of Manning with basic American values of due process, fair trial and human dignity.

Here is how [his lawyer David Coombs describes his treatment](#):

“The Brig has stripped PFC Manning of all of his clothing for the past three nights, and they intend to continue this practice indefinitely. Each night, Brig guards force PFC Manning to relinquish all of his clothing. He then lies in a cold jail cell naked until the following morning, when he is required to endure the humiliation of standing naked at attention for the morning roll call. According to Marine spokesperson, First Lieutenant Brian Villiard, the decision to strip him naked every night is for PFC Manning’s own protection. Villiard stated that it would be ‘inappropriate’ to explain what prompted these actions ‘because to discuss the details would be a violation of PFC Manning’s privacy.’”

Manning, who has not been convicted of anything, has been held in virtual solitary confinement for ten months. David House who has visited him since September [described him as](#) “emotionally exhausted” and “catatonic.” The Constitution declares a right to bail, yet Manning who is not a risk of flight is denied bail. Americans are required to be provided due process of law and a trial before a jury of their peers *before* being punished. There is no provision in the Constitution allowing punishment before trial yet Manning is being punished.

Why is Manning being treated this way? Because this young American allegedly saw crimes being committed in U.S. foreign policy and after trying to report them to his commander, with no good result, supposedly realized he had to get the information to the public. We are living in a time of myths and lies, and, as George Orwell aptly wrote: “In a time of universal deceit telling the truth is a revolutionary act.” Manning allegedly let out the truth and is now paying the price.

Manning shows the true meaning of patriotism. Patriotism is not blind nationalism. If Manning is guilty of what he is accused of, he sought to make the country more fair and just in the best traditions of America. He sought to make us a “more perfect union,” a concept enshrined in the preamble to the U.S. Constitution. The idea of creating a better country is sung about in “America the Beautiful:”

America! America!
God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in self-control,
Thy liberty in law!

Manning is now being punished for allegedly disclosing the flaws of U.S. foreign policy in order to mend them. He is a [young man from Oklahoma](#) who voluntarily joined the U.S. Army. Manning believed the United States played a positive role in the world and was not anti-military. He volunteered to serve his country, in doing so he saw how the U.S. conducts its military and foreign policy. He saw war crimes, violations of law and constant deception.

Manning is a principled American who wants his country to be all it promises to be but is not.

[Manning was ordered](#) “to round up and hand over Iraqi civilians” to the government the United State put in power and he saw they “were then torturing them with electrical drills and other implements.” He examined what 15 Iraqi prisoners who were being tortured had done and found they were accused of printing “anti-Iraqi literature.” In fact, the literature was merely a scholarly critique of corruption in the government that asked “Where did the money go?” He [brought his concerns to the chain of command](#) and was told to “shut up” and find more detainees. Evidently, [Manning realized](#) he “was actively involved in something that I was completely against...”

According to the unverified chat logs with the informant Adrian Lamo, [Manning said](#) that he hoped the publication of the documents and videos would spur “worldwide discussion, debates, and reform.” He went on to say, “I want people to see the truth... regardless of who they are... because without information, you cannot make informed decisions as a public.” He had already learned that the command structure would not listen, so Manning went beyond them to the people who are supposed to control the military in our democratic republic. He wanted Americans to know the truth.

The WikiLeaks documents that Manning allegedly released did help spur dramatic change by [providing much-needed information about abusive security-state governments](#) in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain among others. It is disgraceful that America – which constantly proclaims itself as supporting democracy around the world – is now punishing Manning without trial for allegedly providing information that did so much for democracy and ending security state regimes around the world.

Manning now faces charges that include the potential of capital punishment. He was [charged with 22 additional counts](#) for his alleged role in a massive leak of classified information to WikiLeaks, including a charge of “aiding the enemy” that can result in the death penalty. This charge is particularly disturbing [as Glenn Greenwald points out](#): “This prosecution theory would convert acts of whistle-blowing into a hanging offense.”

This is particularly ironic since the former constitutional law professor who is now the U.S.

president, said in 2008 when he was running for office “Government whistleblowers are part of a healthy democracy and must be protected from reprisal.” Further, as Secretary of State [Clinton reminded us a speech on Internet freedom](#), when President Obama spoke in China, “he spoke about how access to information helps citizens hold their own governments accountable. . . .”

Indeed, Hillary Clinton is lecturing the world on the importance of freedom of speech and press in the Internet age [saying](#) these are “values etched in stone” that “every generation of Americans has worked to protect.” Last month, in [her second speech on freedom](#) in the 21st Century she stated “We govern with the consent of the people, and that consent must be informed to be meaningful.” She applauded people around the world who used the Internet to “expose public corruption” and criticized countries that attempt to restrict the free flow of information. She proclaimed “Governments have to choose to live up to their commitments to protect free expression, assembly, and association.”

How are the statements of President Obama and Secretary Clinton consistent with charging Manning with a death penalty offense based on allegations of leaking documents that showed war crimes as well as crimes by U.S. diplomats? How is it consistent with the rule of law to punish Manning before he is convicted and hold him in solitary confinement with forced nudity? Doesn't the United States like other countries need informed citizens who can hold their government accountable?

The president and secretary of state should apply the standards they tell the rest of the world to live up to, to the United States and in particular to Bradley Manning. If they did not only would he be released on bail but the charges against him would be dropped and he would be proclaimed a hero for living up to the greatest ideals of patriotic Americans, generations of whom have worked to create a more perfect union.

Kevin Zeese serves on the steering committee of the [Bradley Manning Support Network](#).

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