

[Bradley] Manning Up

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An outstanding man of character and conviction - a cut above the rest!

Whatever one's views about his alleged actions, you would need a pretty hard shell not to be moved by the case of Bradley Manning. Hero to some, traitor to others, this diminutive soldier has endured an unprecedented level of mistreatment, languishing in a largely incommunicado pretrial state for more than two years and facing repeated episodes of humiliation and degradation. Compounding this case is Manning's status as a gay soldier, for which he had experienced repercussions well before gaining international notoriety as a purported Wikileaks source for some of the whistleblowing site's most damning allegations about governmental and military machinations around the world.



Pfc Bradley Manning, prisoner of conscience and hero of our time

Being accused of revealing the “emperor’s new clothes” is likely to land one in hot water, but Manning’s treatment has crossed all bounds of fairness, decency, and legality. Having one’s life stripped down (literally) to its most basic functions, being confined in a space barely the size of a standard bathroom, having to formally ask even for toilet paper while standing at attention, and getting access to the outdoors for only 20 minutes per day is the sort of thing that could drive anyone mad. The fact that the military has justified the conditions of Manning’s confinement by asserting that he was a suicide risk is a specious argument; being in such a state can cause one to seek any way out, and putting all options on the table is more a sign of sanity than the opposite.

We can speculate how any of us would hold up in similar circumstances, which hopefully we’ll never have to find out. But the art and science of breaking down the human spirit is pretty well-developed by now, and the harshness of Manning’s confinement is likely intended as a warning and deterrent to anyone else even contemplating blowing the whistle on the architects of empire. It is thus all the more important and impressive that Manning has endured this brutal captivity — doing so through methods like dancing in his cell, “working out” with imaginary weights, and making faces at himself in the small mirror on the wall. In fact, as Michael Ratner of the Center for Constitutional Rights [observed](#) upon attending the recent hearing on Manning’s confinement, the testimony Manning gave showed him to be “dignified, articulate, smart and self-aware.... His incredible sincerity and strength was visible to all. We are lucky to have people with the courage of Bradley Manning.”

Where Manning found this resolve will likely be a subject for biographers someday, but early signs indicate that the military itself may have ironically contributed to it. From his first days as a soldier, Manning seemed to be ill-suited for the role, at least in the eyes of some of his colleagues. In an interview with *The Guardian*, an anonymous soldier who served with Manning recalls the situation: "The kid was barely 5ft — he was a runt. And by military standards and compared with everyone who was around there — he was a runt. By military standards, 'he's a runt so pick on him', or 'he's crazy — pick on him', or 'he's a faggot — pick on him.' The guy took it from every side. He couldn't please anyone. And he tried. He really did.... A lot of people let him down. He is not the first one they let down and he is not the last one." If we subscribe to the school of thought that says our scars make us stronger, then Manning's early duress may have steeled him for what would come later.

In another irony, Manning's first post after basic training was at Fort Huachuca in southern Arizona, where human rights activists would gather annually to demonstrate against the base's claim to fame as being the headquarters of U.S. Army military intelligence and the place where the "torture manuals" for the War on Terror were developed. The nonviolent protests there specifically addressed [cruel treatment](#) of detainees: "We practice nonviolence at Ft. Huachuca to call for civilian, human-rights centered oversight of all interrogation training and practice, which must include absolute prohibition of cruel treatment and command responsibility for any violation of this prohibition." Indeed, the history of nonviolent praxis is replete with examples of people enduring suffering for their principles. Gandhi referred to this as *tapasya*, meaning "austere devotion" and often implemented as a willingness to suffer for one's beliefs rather than inflict suffering on another.

In the annals of nonviolence, Thoreau's famed essay "Civil Disobedience" stands out as a testament to the principled endurance of unjust confinement: "Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison." In his equally celebrated "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," Martin Luther King, Jr. extols the virtues of myriad activists for justice "willingly going to jail for conscience' sake." Perhaps Manning, implicitly if not outright, was aware of the essence of these teachings when he made the alleged decision to transgress the hegemon by revealing its secrets. If so he would be in good company, as validated by the "198 methods of nonviolent action" developed by Gene Sharp and the Albert Einstein Institution and their inclusion of "disclosing identities of secret agents" among the list of tactics — which we can extrapolate to include disclosing damning evidence of the sort that Manning is said to have given to Wikileaks.

Manning may be guilty of revealing state secrets, but that action pales before the state's guilt in perpetrating atrocities and committing them to secrecy in the first place. In a recent accounting of what these revelations demonstrate, Wikileaks founder Julian Assange catalogues their import:

"The material that Bradley Manning is alleged to have leaked has highlighted astonishing examples of U.S. subversion of the democratic process around the world, systematic evasion of accountability for atrocities and killings, and many other abuses.... the cables show that torture and killing are not isolated events, but the violent manifestations of an aggressive policy of coercion used by the United States in the pursuit of its strategic commercial and political goals around the world."

The implications of this are wide-ranging and eminently clear: whatever privileges of democratic governance and material comfort we enjoy here in the U.S. (and in other privileged nations), they are provided at the expense of innumerable underprivileged others' democracy and comfort. Perhaps some are content with this bargain, and they will accordingly construct Manning as a traitor. Many others, however, grasp more deeply that such an inherently unequal system is untenable and unjust. Eventually, it entraps even those nominally "privileged" within its confines, turning us all into captives of a sort as the tentacles of inequality and injustice expand their network.

Again, Assange, from a recent [interview](#) with Democracy Now! in which he considers the digital-age implications:

“I think this tension between power and knowledge is extremely important. So, we’ve all heard the saying that knowledge is power. Well, it’s true. And the mass surveillance and mass interception that is occurring to all of us now who use the internet is also a mass transfer of power from individuals into extremely sophisticated state and private intelligence organizations and their cronies. Now, if that is to be resisted, we must have a transfer of information that is going the other way.”

In getting to hear directly from Manning for the first time, we not only learn more about his story and personal qualities, but also come to understand the deeper connections between this small man and the big questions raised by his alleged actions. Intriguingly, Manning’s testimony itself alludes to the basic issues of transparency that determine whether the balance of power will be struck in favor of “the people” or the entrenched “powers that be” in the days ahead. As reported in The Guardian, in his landmark pretrial testimony Manning reflected on the deprivation of natural light during his excessive period of confinement. “I’m a fan of sunshine,” he stated. If we care at all about the cause of justice in our world, Bradley Manning’s fortitude should render us all devotees of sunshine...

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See also:

<http://rt.com/news/bradley-manning-us-hero-033/>

<http://www.newclearvision.com/2012/12/03/manning-up/>

Jungle Drum Prose/Poetry. <http://jungledrum.lingama.net/news/story-282.html>