

# The Value of Bradley Manning

Pvt. Bradley Manning faces possible life imprisonment for opening up windows into the unsavory actions of the U.S. government and many allies around the world. A valuable new book examines what turned the 24-year-old into one of history's great whistleblowers, writes David Swanson at Warisacrime.org.

By David Swanson

Chase Madar's new book, *The Passion of Bradley Manning*, pulls together the essential facts that we should try to somehow deliver to television viewers and victims of our education system. The subtitle is "The Story of the Suspect Behind the Largest Security Breach in U.S. History."

The book looks at Manning's life story, his alleged action (leaking voluminous materials to WikiLeaks), the value of the material he made available to us, the status of whistleblowers in our country, the torture inflicted on Manning during his imprisonment, the similar treatment routinely inflicted on hundreds of thousands of U.S. prisoners without the same scandal resulting, and the value of running a society in accordance with written laws.

The table of contents sounds predictable, but the most valuable parts of Madar's book are the tangents, the riffs, the expansions on questions such as whether knowing the truth does – or does not – tend to set us free. Does learning what our government is up to help to improve our government's behavior? Has the rule of law become an empty phrase or worse? Who is standing up for Bradley Manning, and who should be?

Madar does not pretend indifference to the fact that Manning took great risk and has greatly suffered for blowing the whistle on countless criminal and immoral actions. The first sentence of the book is "Bradley Manning deserves the Presidential Medal of Freedom," as of course he does – unless that medal is now too tarnished by its actual recipients, including George Tenet and L. Paul Bremer. Madar remarks:

"Thanks to Manning's alleged disclosures, we have a sense of what transpired in Iraq and Afghanistan. We have an image of how Washington operates in the world. Thanks to those revelations we now know just how our government leaned on the Vatican to quell opposition to the Iraq War. We now know how Washington pressured the German government to block the prosecution of CIA agents who kidnapped an innocent man, Khaled El-Masri, while he was on vacation. We know how our State Department lobbied hard to prevent a minimum wage increase in Haiti, the hemisphere's poorest nation."

Of course, such examples could be extended for many pages. Manning's is indeed the largest revelation of our government's behavior we have had. His is the Louisiana Purchase of whistleblowing. And, of course, if you are going to have a government of, by and for the people, then the people have to find out what that government is doing – and stop believing they are better off and more patriotic not knowing.

Madar does not hesitate to point out the situation we are in at the moment in presidential and partisan terms:

“President Obama came into office promising a ‘sunshine’ policy for his administration while singing praises of whistleblowers. Instead, he has launched the fiercest campaign against whistleblowers the republic has ever seen, and dragged our foreign policy deeper into the shadows.

“As soon as he stepped into the Oval Office, the new President pledged never to launch any probe, much less prosecution, to hold these figures responsible [for torture and other war crimes]. ‘Look forward, not backward’ is the slogan: any rules that threaten the high and mighty can be shrugged off.

“Obama loyalists such as *Nation* magazine columnist Melissa Harris-Perry begged Americans to reconcile with Dick Cheney, as if the power to forgive belonged to Americans, and not to Iraqi victims – a perversion of Christian doctrine that allows the perpetrators to tearfully forgive themselves.”

(Just ask Sibel Edmonds how whistleblowers are being treated today. Her new book *Classified Woman* about her days at the FBI has been submitted to the FBI for censorship; the FBI has been unable to find a single word to black out, and yet the FBI is refusing to permit publication of the entire book.)

Manning's contribution has been global. His revelations have benefitted the people of numerous nations with which the State Department communicated in the cables that Manning is said to have leaked. The Arab Spring was not caused by Bradley Manning, but the information he made public has played a major role.

Madar does an excellent job of relating what he has been able to learn about Manning's childhood. Here was a young man with principles and independence, who partially believed the hype about wars being good for the world, who was horribly abused by the U.S. military, but whose motivation – even if I suspect as well some retaliation against his abusers – was primarily almost certainly benefitting the public at large, both at home and abroad.

Manning says so quite clearly and repeatedly in as-yet-unverified chat logs. It was when the military forced him to take part in punishing Iraqi whistleblowers that Manning had a major change of perspective. “I was actively involved in

something that I was completely against," he posted in a chat.

Manning is not only the whistleblower who has told us the most, and the whistleblower who may suffer the most for his heroism, but also the whistleblower who revealed crimes and abuses that were also known by or knowable by the greatest number of other people – all of whom chose to remain silent.

Some three million Americans have a security clearance. Most of what Manning released was "confidential," six percent was "secret," and none of it was "top secret." In the world of whistleblowers, normal is abnormal. The common sense duty to "say something" is, you see, something that makes you a freak. And never more so than in the heroism and vilification of young Bradley Manning.

One comment in Madar's excellent book strikes me as out of place, as perhaps inserted by an editor: "Few are the American intellectuals who unequivocally defend the leaks: Michael Moore, Jesse Ventura, and CodePink's core of leftwing peace activists – and that's about it."

Are those all intellectuals? And is that the full list of people who have defended the leaks? Much later in the book, Glenn Greenwald – who really deserves great credit for advancing this issue – gets a mention. So does Coleen Rowley, with whom I recall protesting Manning's treatment at Quantico, along with hundreds of others.

Then Daniel Ellsberg, Roseanne Barr, Jack Shafer and Dennis Kucinich get a nod. Ray McGovern receives a lengthy and well-deserved discussion. We also learn that Manning receives hundreds of letters of support every week from all over the world (some of them are from this country). We find out that "Free Bradley" signs dot this country's Occupy encampments.

And after the book is over, in the "Further Reading" section at the back, we discover that there is a Bradley Manning Support Network, Kevin Gosztola's blog at FireDogLake, Marcy Wheeler, Jane Hamsher, and others who indeed have supported what Manning has been accused of doing. Not what it should be, of course, but not so terribly few of us after all.

I wonder also about Madar's take on whether knowing the truth is helpful in politics. Ultimately, of course, Madar is in favor of public knowledge of government's behavior. But I think he undervalues it a bit at times.

"When does war end?" he quotes Alexander Cockburn asking himself. "One side is annihilated, the money runs out, the troops mutiny, the government falls, or fears it will. With the U.S. war in Afghanistan none of these conditions has been met." Nor with the U.S. war on Iraq, which has virtually ended nonetheless.

I also would modify slightly Madar's take on the rule of law. As Madar sees it, many of the outrages that Manning revealed, even the killings in the "Collateral Murder" video, even the handing over of prisoners to the Iraqi government to torture, were immoral but legal, because the laws of war allow them.

Madar is dealing with *jus in bello*, laws on the conduct of war, not *jus ad bellum*, laws on what makes a war or an occupation just to begin with. In fact there is no just war. There is no legal war. Every single war has been illegal since the Kellogg Briand Pact of 1928.

The U.N. Charter seeks to legalize wars that are either labeled "defensive" or authorized by the United Nations. The U.S. wars on Iraq and Afghanistan are neither defensive nor authorized by the United Nations. The U.S. Constitution forbids wars not declared by Congress. Congress has not declared a war since 1941.

Certainly the law is often unjust and must be nonviolently resisted. But when we have good legal arguments on our side, we shouldn't always be so reluctant to use them. If torture can be "legalized" by the vacuous ramblings of John Yoo, if bribery can be "legalized" through the human rights of corporations established by a court reporter's marginalia, why shouldn't we legalize peace by reviving awareness of actual laws actually on the books?

As with most books I review, so must I comment on this one that I wish people would stop low-balling the death count in Iraq by almost an order of magnitude. I must also strongly encourage you to buy a copy of this book for everyone you know.

You can write to Bradley to encourage him at:

Bradley Manning

#89289

JRCF

830 Sabalu Road

Fort Leavenworth KS 66027-2315.

**David Swanson's books include [War Is A Lie](#). He blogs at <http://davidswanson.org> and <http://warisacrime.org> and works for the online activist organization <http://rootsaction.org>. He hosts [Talk Nation Radio](#).**

---