



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on August 22, 2013

## Whistleblower Bradley Manning Sentenced to 35 Years

Reactions to [the sentence handed down on Wednesday](#) by Military Judge Denise Lind were immediate: “We’ll keep fighting for you, Bradley! You’re our hero!” exclaimed many in the courtroom when the verdict was announced.

Others expressed disappointment that Manning was found guilty at all. He had pleaded guilty to 10 of the 22 charges brought against him back in February, and was found guilty of the others, in part or in whole, following his trial. He was declared innocent of violating the Espionage Act, a capital offense that could have brought a death sentence or at least life in prison. Instead, with good behavior and a deduction of 112 days for the “pre-trial punishment” he endured while being held at the Marine Corps Base in Quantico, Virginia, Manning could be free in less than 10 years.



One of those [expressing disappointment](#) was Ben Wizner, a director of the American Civil Liberties Union’s Speech, Privacy & Technology Project:

When a soldier who shared information with the press and public is punished far more harshly than others who tortured prisoners and killed civilians, something is seriously wrong with our justice system. A legal system that doesn’t distinguish between leaks to the press in the public interest and treason against the nation will not only produce unjust results, but will deprive the public of critical information that is necessary for democratic accountability.

This is a sad day for Bradley Manning, but it’s also a sad day for all Americans who depend on brave whistleblowers and a free press for a fully informed public debate.

Manning’s legal team [declared its intention](#) to continue pressing his case. David Coombs, Manning’s lead defense attorney, said he was going to petition President Obama to pardon Manning “or at the very least commute his sentence to time served.” If that fails, Coombs committed to requesting parole for Manning at the earliest opportunity, and each year thereafter, as necessary, to release Manning from prison before the end of his sentence.

The first of some 700,000 classified documents that Manning sent to the disclosure portal now known to millions as WikiLeaks was published in February 2010, and it was followed in quick succession with massive exposures of government misbehavior, secret agreements, and deliberate murder of civilians. With the help of WikiLeaks, the *New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and *Der Spiegel* newspapers rolled out more than 91,000 documents in July 2010 that became known as the [Afghan War Logs](#). In October 2010 another nearly 400,000 documents were published which became known as the Iraq War Logs.



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Manning was arrested in May 2010 and was incarcerated in Kuwait until July when he was moved to Quantico where he was subjected to inhuman treatment: surviving in a 6 x 12 foot cell with no windows, checks by guards every five minutes, no sleeping between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m., forced to stand if he drifted off during those hours, required to remain visible to his guards at all times (including at night), and had no sheets or pillows (just a mattress) and one solitary blanket. At one point he was placed on "suicide risk," had his clothes and eyeglasses removed, and had his one hour a day of walking outside his cell eliminated.

He was moved to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas in April 2011 following international pressure along with a letter signed by 295 legal scholars that stated that such treatment was a violation of the U.S. Constitution.

Although WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange was never proven to have had direct contact with Manning (and thus avoiding a conspiracy charge), Assange [had this to say](#) when the sentence was announced:

This hard-won minimum term represents a significant tactical victory for Bradley Manning's defense, campaign team and supporters. At the start of these proceedings, the United States government had charged Bradley Manning with a capital offence and other charges carrying over 135 years of incarceration....

The only just outcome in Mr Manning's case is his unconditional release, compensation for the unlawful treatment he has undergone, and a serious commitment to investigating the wrongdoing his alleged disclosures have brought to light.

Mr. Manning's treatment has been intended to send a signal to people of conscience in the US government who might seek to bring wrongdoing to light. This strategy has spectacularly backfired, as recent months have proven. Instead, the Obama administration is demonstrating that there is no place in its system for people of conscience and principle. As a result, there will be a thousand more Bradley Mannings.

Daniel Ellsberg, the whistleblower responsible for leaking a secret report on Vietnam to the *New York Times*, known as the Pentagon Papers, said that Manning is "one more casualty of a horrible, wrongful war" and that he didn't deserve the sentence. In the run-up to the Supreme Court ruling in 1971 on the First Amendment caused by Ellsberg's exposures, now known as [New York Times Co. v. United States](#), federal judge Murray Gurfein wrote:

The security of the Nation is not at the ramparts alone. Security also lies in the value of our free institutions. A cantankerous press, an obstinate press, a ubiquitous press, must be suffered by those in authority in order to preserve the even greater values of freedom of expression and the right of the people to know.

At the time, Ellsberg defended his actions with comments similar to those expressed by Manning:

I felt that as an American citizen, as a responsible citizen, I could no longer cooperate in concealing this information from the American public. I did this clearly at my own jeopardy and I am prepared to answer to all the consequences of this decision.

[Manning said essentially the same thing:](#)

I began to think about what I knew and the information I still had in my possession. For me, the [information I had] represented the on-the-ground reality of the conflicts in both Iraq and Afghanistan. I felt that we were risking so much for people that seemed unwilling to cooperate with



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us, leading to frustration and anger on both sides.

I began to become depressed with the situation we found ourselves increasingly mired in. The [information] documented this in great detail and provided a context of what we were seeing on the ground....

I believed that if the general public, especially the American public, had access to the information contained ... it could spark a domestic debate on the role of the military and our foreign policy in general as it related to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Perhaps the most important contribution Manning's disclosures made in the war between secrecy and disclosure over the wars was his forwarding the infamous [Collateral Murder video](#) that has been viewed millions of times. By itself that revelation and the following revulsion felt by so many may perhaps have begun to turn support for foreign military adventures and interventions into rejection.

When John Birch Society President John McManus was asked for his reaction to the Manning sentence, he responded: "It's truly sad that a member of the military service has to break protocol and violate procedures in order to expose essential truths in an effort to warn the American people about the dangers to their freedom."

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