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## Bradley Manning is No Gay Hero

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BY JAMES KIRCHICK

Why the LGBT community shouldn't honor this man's treachery

*Photo: Anonymous supporters of Bradley Manning at an SF rally for Bradley Manning's article 32 hearing and birthday / Source: [Bradley Manning Support Network/WikiMedia Commons](#).*

From 1916, when the United States military first expressly prohibited homosexuals, until the 1993 passage of "don't ask, don't tell" (DADT), gay men and women were considered psychologically unfit to serve in the nation's armed forces. While the Clinton administration compromise provided a way for gays to serve as long as they did not reveal their orientation, (justifying such discrimination not on the basis of personal competence but rather on the grounds that the presence of open gays would harm "unit cohesion"), the measure still enforced a policy presuming that open homosexuality was irreconcilable with military service. It was not until DADT was repealed in December of 2010 that the United States government officially declared that there is nothing incompatible between being openly gay and fighting to defend one's country.

For some gay activists, however, this was no victory. Just months before DADT was repealed in December of 2010, army investigators arrested Private Bradley Manning, who was accused of passing over 250,000 confidential State Department cables to Wikileaks, the anti-secrecy Internet collective. Manning is gay and reportedly suffered from gender identity disorder, at one point adopting a female alter ego. Rather than condemn him as the traitor he is, many gay activists have rushed to his defense, portraying him as a courageous whistleblower who brought American abuses to light. By arguing that Manning is not only a victim of the military but also a hero, these activists unwittingly confirm the claim that gay people are unfit to serve in the armed forces.

Former Army Lieutenant Dan Choi, who was honorably discharged in 2009 for stating he was gay during a cable television interview and soon thereafter emerged as the most visible advocate against DADT, has called Manning, whose time in the military was marked by disruptive and insubordinate behavior, an "excellent soldier." Likening the enforced concealment under which gay soldiers long suffered and the necessary protection of national secrets, Choi has said that, "I don't want to live in a society that replaces that 'don't ask, don't tell' with a new 'don't ask, don't tell' in society and national

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security." Addressing a rally of Manning supporters outside his trial at Maryland's Fort Meade last year, Choi declared that Manning, "is not the one on trial, the United States of America is on trial today."

**Peter Tatchell**, one of Britain's most famous gay activists, lauds Manning as a "human rights hero" and a "defender of democracy and human rights." Last year's **gay pride parades in Chicago, New York, and San Francisco** each featured contingents demanding that the government "Free Bradley Manning." At the protests against the May NATO in Chicago, a contingent of activists from the **Gay Liberation Network** called for Manning's release. Writing in ***The Advocate in March***, Victoria Brownworth lamented Manning as "the forgotten soldier, emblematic of the struggles queer service members face."

While it's true that Manning did struggle because of his sexuality, so did many other gay soldiers who once labored under DADT's onerous restrictions. The vast majority of them did not act out their emotional problems by leaking classified material to individuals with an explicit agenda of harming the interests of the United States and its allies. Wikileaks impresario Julian Assange, now a host of a program on Vladimir Putin's Russia Today cable network, has equated the Guantanamo Bay prison camp with Auschwitz. David Leigh, a journalist for the *Guardian* who worked with Assange to publicize the cables, says that, when he pleaded with Assange to redact the names of Afghan informants of the U.S. military whose lives could be threatened by the Taliban, Assange told him that the "collaborators deserve to die." (Assange has since denied he said this.)

Wikileaks has caused enormous damage not only to the interests of the United States but imperiled the lives of brave human rights defenders around the world. Immediately after the first dump of cables, the Taliban announced it was drawing up a hit list and began sending death threats to individuals named in the communications. In December of 2010, the Zimbabwean regime of Robert Mugabe utilized a cable relating a secret meeting between opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai and American Embassy officials to launch an investigation into his "treasonous collaboration." Last September, Ethiopian journalist Argaw Ashine had to flee his country after Wikileaks revealed critical comments he had made to U.S. government officials concerning the regime's targeting journalists.

For centuries, gay people have served with distinction and honor in the armed forces, and it is the service of these countless veterans whom today's gays can thank for the freedom to serve openly. Bradley Manning's actions are fodder to those who have long argued that homosexuality naturally leads to treason; some on the far right have argued that his actions were intended as "revenge" over the military's then-enforced anti-gay policy. It is unconscionable that gay activists, of all people, would play into these slanders.

Complaining that Manning's "treatment mimics that of detainees at Abu Ghraib," Brownworth declared that the soldier's plight "demands attention, particularly by the LGBT community." Manning's situation does indeed demand the attention of the LGBT community, but not in the way that Brownworth and others of her ilk suggest. Rather than claim Bradley Manning as a hero of the gay community and campaign for his release, we should be the ones advocating most loudly that he face the strictest possible punishment for his treachery.

*James Kirchick, a fellow with the **Foundation for Defense of Democracies**, is a contributing editor for **The New Republic**.*

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