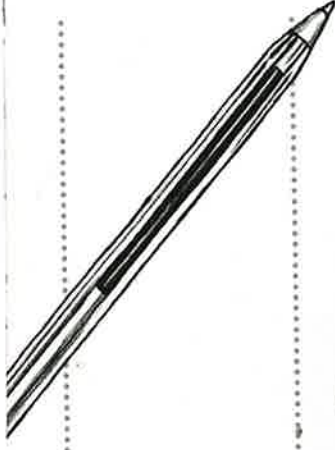


WRITE
FOR RIGHTS

**CLASSIFIED
DOCUMENTS**



COVER STORY



**I'M NO
TRAITOR**

Chelsea Manning is serving 35 years in prison for leaking classified US government documents to the website WikiLeaks. From her cell in Kansas, she explains why speaking out against injustice is worth the risk.



Top: Chelsea Manning is held in the US military prison at Fort Leavenworth © US Army
Above: Guards escort Manning from the court house on the second day of court martial © AP

Why did you decide to leak documents about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan?

These documents were important because they relate to two connected counter-insurgency conflicts in real-time from the ground. Humanity has never had this complete and detailed a record of what modern warfare actually looks like.

Once you realise that the co-ordinates represent a real place where people live; that the dates happened in our recent history; that the numbers are actually human lives – with all the love, hope, dreams, hatred, fear, and nightmares that come with them – then it's difficult to ever forget how important these documents are.

What did you think the consequences might be for you personally?

In 2010, I was a lot younger. The consequences felt very vague. I expected the worst possible outcome, but I didn't have a strong sense of what that might entail.

But I expected to be demonised and have every moment of my life examined and

analysed for every single possible screw-up that I've ever made – every flaw and blemish – and to have them used against me in the court of public opinion. I was especially afraid that my gender identity would be used against me.

What was it like to feel the full force of the US justice system and be presented as a traitor?

It was particularly interesting to see the logistics involved in the prosecution: the stacks of money spent; the gallons of fuel burned; the reams of paper printed; the lengthy rolls of security personnel, lawyers, and experts – it felt silly at times.

It felt especially silly being presented as a traitor by the officers who prosecuted my case. I saw them out of court for at least 100 days before and during the trial and developed a very good sense of who they were as people. I'm fairly certain that they got a good sense of who I am as a person too. I remain convinced that even the advocates that presented the treason arguments did not believe their own words as they spoke them.

'It was never my intention to hurt anyone. I only wanted to help people. When I chose to disclose classified information, I did so out of a love for my country and a sense of duty to others.'

WRITE FOR RIGHTS

► **Many people think of you as a whistleblower. Why are whistleblowers important?**

In an ideal world, governments, corporations, and other large institutions would be transparent by default. Unfortunately, the world is not ideal. Many institutions begin a slow creep toward being opaque and we need people who recognise that.

I think the term 'whistleblowers' has an overwhelmingly negative connotation in government and business, akin to a 'tattle-tale' or 'snitch'. This needs to be addressed somehow. Very often policies that supposedly protect such people are actually used to discredit them.

What would you say to somebody who is afraid to speak out against injustice?

First, I would point out that life is precious. In Iraq in 2009-10, life felt very cheap. It became overwhelming to see the sheer number of people suffering and dying, and the learned indifference to it by everybody around me, including the Iraqis themselves. That really changed my perspective on my life, and made me realise that speaking out about injustices is worth the risk.

Second, in your life, you are rarely given the chance to really make a difference. Every now and then you do come across a significant choice. Do you really want to find yourself asking whether you could have done more, 10-20 years later? These are the kinds of questions I didn't want to haunt me.

Why did you choose this particular artwork to represent you?

It's the closest representation of what I might look like if I was allowed to present and express myself the way I see fit. Even after I came out as a trans woman in 2013, I have not been able to express myself as a woman in public. So I worked with Alicia Neal, an artist in California, to sketch a realistic portrait that more accurately represents who I am.

Unfortunately, with the current rules at military confinement facilities, it is very unlikely that I will have any photos taken until I am released – which, parole and clemency notwithstanding, might not be for another two decades. ■



Top: Chelsea Elizabeth Manning legally changed her name from Bradley earlier this year to reflect the fact that she is transgender and wants to live as a woman © David Coombs

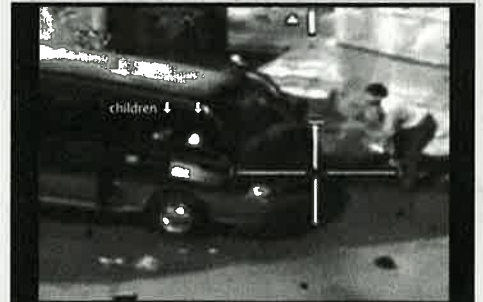
Bottom: As she sees herself: this artwork is 'the closest representation of what I might look like if I was allowed to present and express myself the way I see fit,' says Chelsea © Alicia Neal/Chelsea Manning Support Network

COLLATERAL MURDER: WIKILEAKS VIDEO



"No innocent civilians were killed on our part deliberately. We took great pains to prevent that. I know that two children were hurt, and we did everything we could to help them. I don't know how the children were hurt."

— Major Brent Cummings, executive officer 7-16, US Army
(Washington Post)



CHELSEA MANNING IN HER OWN WORDS

ON THE 'COLLATERAL MURDER' VIDEO

Among the classified material exposed by Chelsea Manning was a film shot from the gunsight of a US helicopter, showing the indiscriminate killing of a number of unarmed people – including two Reuters news staff – in Iraq in 2007. This is now widely known as the 'Collateral Murder' video (see clips, left).

At first I did not consider the video very special... However, the recording and audio comments by the aerial weapons team and the second engagement in the video of an unarmed bongo truck troubled me...

It was clear to me that the event happened because the aerial weapons team mistakenly identified Reuters employees as a potential threat and that the people in the bongo truck were merely attempting to assist the wounded... The most alarming aspect of the video to me, however, was the seemingly delightful blood-lust the Aerial Weapons Team seemed to have.

They dehumanised the individuals they were engaging and seemed to not value human life, and referred to them as quote-unquote "dead bastards," and congratulated each other on their ability to kill in large numbers.'

Statement to court, February 2013

ON THE 'WAR ON TERROR'

Since the tragic events of 9/11, our country has been at war. We've been at war with an enemy that chooses not to meet us on any traditional battlefield, and due to this fact we've had to alter our methods of combating the risks posed to us and our way of life.

I initially agreed with these methods and chose to volunteer to help defend my country. It was not until I was in Iraq and reading secret military reports on a daily basis that I started to question the morality of what we were doing... When we engaged those that we perceived were the enemy, we sometimes killed innocent civilians. Whenever we killed innocent civilians, instead of accepting responsibility for our conduct, we elected to hide behind the veil of national security and classified information in order to avoid any public accountability.

In our zeal to kill the enemy, we internally debated the definition of torture. We held individuals at Guantanamo for years without due process. We inexplicably turned a blind eye to torture and executions by the Iraqi government. And we stomached countless other acts in the name of our war on terror.'

Letter asking for clemency, August 2013

ON INFORMING THE PUBLIC

Using her experience as a former intelligence analyst, Chelsea Manning continues to contribute to public debate through the media.

... the concerns that motivated me have not been resolved... I believe that the current limits on press freedom and excessive government secrecy make it impossible for Americans to grasp fully what is happening in the wars we finance.'

*'The Fog Machine of War', New York Times
16 June 2014*

ON WAR REPORTING

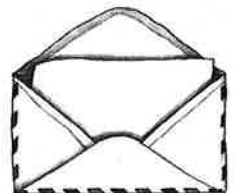
The process of limiting press access to a conflict begins when a reporter applies for embed status. All reporters are carefully vetted by military public affairs officials. This system is far from unbiased. Unsurprisingly, reporters who have established relationships with the military are more likely to be granted access.

Less well known is that journalists whom military contractors rate as likely to produce "favorable" coverage, based on their past reporting, also get preference. This outsourced "favorability" rating assigned to each applicant is used to screen out those judged likely to produce critical coverage.'

*'The Fog Machine of War', New York Times
16 June 2014*

You can read the full text of 'The Fog Machine of War' on the Chelsea Manning Support Network website
www.chelseamanning.org

'In life you are rarely given the chance to really make a difference. Do you want to find yourself asking, 20 years later, whether you could have done more?'



**WRITE A
LETTER
TODAY
HELP GET
CHELSEA
RELEASED**

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