



The Center on
Conscience & War

The Reporter for Conscience' Sake

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Why Bradley* Manning Matters to Us: Conscience

“Although the information had not yet been published by the WLO [WikiLeaks Organization], I felt this sense of relief by them having it. I felt I had accomplished something that allowed me to have a clear conscience based upon what I had seen and read about and knew were happening in both Iraq and Afghanistan everyday.”

-Bradley Manning, Feb. 28, 2013

In our work at the Center on Conscience & War, as we read statements from conscientious objectors (COs), this sense of relief is expressed over and over again. Even before they are discharged or any action is taken on their cases, the simple act of *declaring oneself a conscientious objector*, taking that proactive step to reclaim your moral conscience, brings an immediate sense of relief.

The path traveled by military conscientious objectors seems to start from a common place: with what’s in front of them at a given moment – what they are witnessing, what they’re doing, or what they are failing to do. They start by recognizing that something is wrong. Eventually, their beliefs evolve to the realization that all war is wrong.

Private Manning is a classic example of a conscientious objector. While serving as an intelligence analyst in Iraq, the 22-year-old had access to some of the most disturbing and tragic documentation, including the widely-seen video, *Collateral Murder*, that exposed the indiscriminate killing that is inherent in war. Moved by conscience and hoping to inspire a national discussion about the war, Manning leaked thousands of documents to the media. He was convicted of espionage and theft of government property and sentenced to 35 years in a military prison – the longest sentence, by some tenfold, ever given to a whistleblower. (Bradley was found innocent of the most serious and grossly exaggerated charge of aiding the enemy.) Though Bradley was arrested before his beliefs evolved to the point when he might have sought a discharge from the Army as a conscientious objector, his conscience was clearly the guiding force in his life.

Facing what has been proven to be immense personal risk, why did Pfc. Manning take such action?

When conscience leads, there is no choice but to follow. The harm that would have come from a violation of conscience was clearly

greater than any other consequences Bradley faced. That harm is recognized as moral injury, and it is known to have devastating effects.

“Their condition was more closely linked to an inner conflict rather than threats to their lives....”

–from a 2011 Marine Corps study on moral injury

The trauma of moral injury, trauma that has become all too familiar in this generation’s veterans and service members, is not necessarily linked to deployment. Similarly, many of the COs we work with have not been to combat, but still suffer the trauma of moral injury, which suggests that the military culture itself – the culture of war and of killing, introduced from day one of boot camp, is a significant contributor to moral injury and other psychological trauma.

The idea that the human conscience is opposed to killing, and even training to kill, is not new. Those in military and political leadership who would have us fight in war have known this for some time, and have adapted both training and rhetoric accordingly. Unfortunately, it is often those working for peace who are slow to acknowledge this fact. We believe that “we” are different or separate from “they” who join the military, because they are capable of killing and we are not. Once you accept that the human conscience by nature opposes killing, you know that this difference is artificial. But the proponents of war are masterful at spinning very persuasive political arguments to support their position, and we get caught up in that web. For those of us working for peace, focusing our argument on the moral, instead of the political, may help us gain more ground.

When we are assisting COs in drafting their applications, we explain to them that they do not need to argue politics or take a political stand on war. Politics are complex and debatable; what you believe is not. In the case of Pfc. Manning, if we politicize his actions – whether to support or oppose – we miss the most significant point.

“To understand Manning, one must see his acts in light of his moral, not political, agency.”

–Alexa O’Brien, journalist covering US v. Pfc. Manning

What we learn from Bradley and his actions is that the power and the pull of moral conscience are unmatched. To honor moral conscience and, as we do, Pfc. Manning’s sacrifice, we must maintain a consistent voice in support and in acknowledgment of moral conscience. By doing so, we wage an active challenge against the idea that violence is human nature, an idea that is propagated so calculatedly by the pillars of our society – our government, our media, our schools, and so many of our churches. (This was not always the case, however. See CCW Updates on p. 3 for info on a forthcoming study of Pentecostal and Holiness CO during WWI.)

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Portrait by Debra Van Poolen

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Call us at 1-800-379-2679
<http://centeronconscience.org>
ccw@centeronconscience.org

Founded in 1940, the Center on Conscience & War works to extend and defend the rights of conscientious objectors to war. In pursuit of this mission, the Center provides these services free of charge:

- Counseling military conscientious objectors.
- Monitoring Congress and Selective Service to extend and defend the rights of conscientious objectors.
- Support for COs who refuse to register for the draft through F.E.A.T student loans.
- Counseling military personnel on the GI Rights Hotline with accuracy and honesty.
- Military counter-recruitment information.
- Workshops, training, and speakers on all of these issues.

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Declare *yourself* a conscientious objector! Bring CO back into our cultural lexicon as a way to demonstrate, especially to those in the military right now, that being a CO isn't rare, it isn't unique, and it doesn't mean that you are unpatriotic. Being a CO is simply what it means to be human.

**We refer to Pfc. Manning as Bradley and as "he" because he identified in this way during the time of the events discussed here. We acknowledge that Pfc. Manning now identifies as Chelsea, and we affirm her right to express her most authentic gender identity.*

Coercion of Conscience:

A New Report on SSS coming soon!

In 1974, draft registration ended, and the Selective Service System (SSS) was put into deep standby. In 1980, President Carter revived the SSS and resumed draft registration, following the Soviet Union's December 1979 invasion of Afghanistan.

At that time, there was significant vocal and public resistance to registration. For many people then, and still today, the act of registering for the draft is cooperation with the war machine, and that violates their conscience. Hundreds of thousands failed to register in the early years. Even as vocal and public resistance diminished over time, the number of people who have failed to register is in the millions. According to SSS reports, the majority of those required to register do so late, and over 90 percent of those who move fail to meet their obligation to notify SSS of an address change. Offenses like these carry a potential felony conviction, up to five years in jail and a \$250,000 fine.

In 1982, the government began prosecuting a handful of non-registrants. While the numbers were too great to go after everyone, the plan was to carry out a few high profile prosecutions, get lots of publicity, and scare folks into registering.

But that plan had unintended consequences. The government prosecuted only 20 people, almost all of whom were public resisters and conscientious objectors. They were on the evening news talking about why they didn't register, why the draft was wrong, and how they were following a "higher" law. Even in conservative venues, like the Iowa cornfields and the military's own "company town" of San Diego, noncompliance with the registration *increased* when the personal stories hit the news. Even more young men came to realize that they had a choice – the choice to follow their conscience!

For its part, the government began working on other ways to compel people to register. The solu-

tion they devised was to link various government "benefits" to registration, and they began by withholding federal student financial aid, including college work-study and federally guaranteed student loans, from those who did not register. These laws became known as Solomon laws, named for the member of Congress who first proposed the amendments. Soon, Congress enacted legislation that withheld federal job training, financial aid for medical school, and jobs with federal executive agencies (that's most federal jobs) from non-registrants. Immigration joined in and made registration compliance a prerequisite for citizenship.

Almost immediately, states began passing laws requiring registration compliance to receive state financial aid. Some also require compliance simply to enroll in a state institution of higher education – even on your own dime; a few levy out-of-state tuition on residents who did not register; and some declare non-registrants ineligible for employment in state government.

Then, 13 years ago, the most far-reaching proposals began popping up in state legislatures. Selective Service registration is now linked with the privilege of obtaining a driver's license, and even a state-issued ID. The details of these laws vary from state to state, from requiring SSS registration before one is eligible for a license or ID, to simply providing the opportunity to register at the time one applies for a license. In those states requiring registration, a young driver is automatically registered with Selective Service. In states where it is legal to drive at the age of 16 (or younger), that means that some states are collecting information to transmit to SSS from minors who have no legal obligation to be registered at the time!

To date, thirty-nine states, the District of Columbia, and four US territories have laws linking Selective Service registration with driver's licenses or IDs. Twenty-nine jurisdictions have linked registration with college financial aid and/or admission, and twenty-one require registration for government employment.

In its annual report, Selective Service states that they would like to see driver's license legislation in all 50 states, but in some states, advocates have been successful at defeating similar proposals – when they see them coming.

But even though many of these laws have made it on the books, past court decisions suggest that they may now be challenged successfully.

In 1984, shortly after its passage, the original "Solomon Amendment" was challenged as a "bill of attainder": a law that levies a punishment on someone who has not been convicted of a crime. The court ruled against the challenge, stating that the intent of the law was not to punish anyone, but to get people to register. If someone wanted to avoid the punishment, he could just register. In 1984, only four years after registration

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was reinstated, everyone who was denied financial aid was under the age of 26 and could still register. Today, there are many who didn't register who are 26 or older, and can no longer register. Never convicted of any crime, they continue to be punished by being permanently barred from receiving financial aid and participating in other federal or state programs.

Another challenge that may be successful today is a challenge based on sex discrimination. Registration applies only to males, and, likewise, these penalties. When SSS registration was challenged as sex discrimination in the early 1980s, the Supreme Court noted that Congress has the power to raise an army, and because women were, at that time, excluded from combat jobs, the Court ruled that Congress was within its authority to require only males be subject to the draft.

But things have changed since then. While it is clear that women have been involved in combat for a number of years, the Department of Defense officially eliminated the "combat exclusion" for women in early 2013. The justification cited by the Supreme Court for allowing a male only draft no longer exists.

While these are the primary challenges, there are other issues raised by these laws that are worthy of challenge – for example, the practice in some states of collecting information from underage boys. Also, at a time when no one in Washington really believes the draft will resume in the foreseeable future, some fiscal conservatives have looked at the SSS budget as an easy way to save \$25 million a year.

If a law is so resisted or ignored by the population that a hundred more laws must be passed to coerce people into compliance, isn't it time we reconsider that initial law?

The strings attached to SSS registration laws are an unacceptable burden on young men struggling to be true to their conscience. In many cases they impose a real financial burden, when, for most families, student financial aid or obtaining a driver's license is not a "benefit" or privilege – it is a necessity.

It is past time to end draft registration and the penalties imposed on people of conscience. The Selective Service System should be put back into deep standby.

A detailed breakdown and analysis of the laws imposed by each jurisdiction will be available from CCW by mail and on our website soon, www.centeronconscience.org.

Do you know of a community of people you think may enjoy hearing about the victories and the value of Conscientious Objection today? Please consider inviting us to speak or lead a workshop or join a panel discussion! Give us a call to discuss the possibilities. Help us spread the word about our work and build a larger base of support for our Conscientious Objectors.

Thank you!



CCW Updates

As we go to press, President Obama is pressuring Congress to support the use of **military force against Syria**. We anticipate an increase in CO applications, and the COs we are currently working with are feeling a heightened urgency to submit their applications and be officially recognized as objectors to war.

The past several months have been keeping us very busy working with an exciting number of COs, representing every branch of the military. We also have been getting out into the community and doing **outreach and educational presentations** whenever the opportunity presents itself. Bill and Maria led a workshop on Moral Injury, Conscience, and War at the War Resisters League 90th Anniversary Conference here in DC in early August. Maria was on a panel discussing the meaning of Bradley Manning's whistleblower case, while the court martial was in progress at Ft. Meade, MD. Maria will be on a panel discussing Conscience & War, along with our friends from the Peace Tax Fund, at the **Peace and Justice Studies Association Conference** in Ontario in October. We so appreciate the opportunity to talk to folks about conscientious objection today, and we hear we give pretty interesting talks, too! See for yourself – invite us to your town.

On October 5, HBO will premier the film *Muhammad Ali's Greatest Fight*, an inside look into Ali's struggle to be recognized as a conscientious objector to the US war in Vietnam. Host a viewing party in your community! We are working to get one together here in DC and other places, with a discussion following the film. Keep posted to our Facebook page and Twitter to learn about our plans as they unfold and to let us know what you are doing in your community. What a great opportunity to remind the world that conscientious objection is not just part of our history, but that **CO is alive and well today**, even in the absence of a draft!

On December 6 in Philadelphia, CCW will be joined by authors **Shane Claiborne and Jay Beaman** in a panel discussion and book signing. Shane, who traveled to Iraq with a Christian Peacemaker Team during the 2003 US-led bombing there, is a founder of The Simple Way, an intentional Christian community in Philadelphia. Jay is author of *Pentecostal Pacifism* and a forthcoming book, *Pentecostal and Holiness Statements on War and Peace*. The panel takes place alongside the annual gathering of **Pentecostals and Charismatics for Peace and Justice**. Time and exact location TBD, but, if you are in the Philly area, please mark your calendar. That weekend, we will host Jay Beaman in DC for an additional event – details to follow soon.

Please link to us! If you or your organization has a website with a resources page and you can add a few lines about conscientious objection – including a link to www.centeronconscience.org – that would be great! Thank you!

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A CSA for CCW: Community Supported Advocacy

With hundreds of participating farms and thousands of members across the United States, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a movement that is likely to be familiar to many of you. In a CSA, a community of individuals pledges support to a farm operation so that the community becomes “invested” in the success of the farm – morally, spiritually and literally. CSA members or “shareholders” make a financial pledge to cover the anticipated costs of the farm operation and the farmer’s salary, and in return they receive not only shares of the farm’s produce, but also a deep personal fulfillment as they connect with something greater than themselves.

At CCW, we’d like to borrow from that successful model as we invite our community to take part in a different kind of CSA: **Community Supported Advocacy**. Like a traditional CSA, ours joins a community of supporters – members – together with CCW staff, board and volunteers as we sow the seeds of a different kind of crop: *freedom of conscience*.

We’re inviting members of our CSA to be part of Team 365 – 365 of our supporters (or communities of supporters) who join as “members” or shareholders of CCW with a contribution of \$500 per year. That’s a total of \$180,000 – enough to cover our basic expenses for one year. Right now, about 75 people already sponsor a day of our work by making annual gifts of at least \$500 per year.

For those of you who are able to make such an investment in the future of conscientious objection (CO), now is the perfect time! In addition to our daily caseload of COs, our leadership and knowledge have been called upon in high-profile cases recently. You may have read about Army Private Chris Muñoz, the young father who submitted a CO application 10 days before he was scheduled to deploy

to Afghanistan. Or Margaret Doughty, a conscientious objector who refused to pledge in her citizenship oath that she would take up arms for the United States.

A day at the office for CCW can make all the difference in a day in the life of a conscientious objector.

No other organization has the level of expertise or the decades of experience that CCW has. That is why lawyers, human rights groups, members of the media, church leaders, elected officials, and even the Government Accountability Office (GAO) look to us for reliable information about conscientious objection. This is not just our job; this is what our conscience calls us to do, too.

Of course, we know that \$500 a year is not feasible for many folks. The great thing about a CSA is that you can “share your share” with friends, family, or your congregation. The financial load on the individual is lessened, but the impact of the investment is just as strong!

Will you become a member of Team 365 and sponsor a day of advocacy for conscience? You can choose to give as an individual, as a congregation, or as a community. You can make a once-per-year gift of \$500 or sign up for \$40 per month. However you choose to invest, you will know that your gift – your share in CCW’s CSA – will help reap a harvest of peace and justice, one conscientious objector at a time.

Thank you.

