

ENGLISH 50 FINAL EXAM, FALL 2005

“Learning to Say No to the Military” by Andrew Tonkovich

Los Angeles Times, May 28, 2005

Twenty-five years ago, I printed a simple declarative statement on a Selective Service registration card. I was a kid but understood I would need to live by this gesture and those words: "I am a conscientious objector, opposed to participation in war in any form, because of my ethical, moral and religious beliefs."

During the Persian Gulf War, I counseled fathers and their teenage sons, informing them of their rights under law and asking them to consider the consequences and responsibilities of writing this phrase on their records.

Today, the Iraq war military deaths approach 1,700 with — almost never mentioned — an estimated 100,000 Iraqi civilians killed. Nobody counts Iraqi wounded, but more than 12,000 U.S. personnel have come home legless, armless, eyeless or otherwise wounded. Enlistment is down. More than 5,000 soldiers have been classified as deserters; some of them are conscientious objectors.

My wife and I want our son to have every opportunity: comfortable shelter, healthy food, clean water, a safe neighborhood, books, quality day care and excellent public schooling. But we also want him to have full citizenship — intelligent, engaged citizenship that points him toward both conscientious objection to war and political engagement with his government.

Yet the government's colonizing of public schools, the moral irresponsibility of elected officials and the cowardice of too many administrators and teachers to question our government add up to systematic accommodation of efforts by military recruiters to exploit children's naiveté, ignorance and impulse to self-sacrifice.

The No Child Left Behind law allows recruiters not only access to high schoolers on campus but requires schools to share their addresses and telephone numbers with the military. It puts the onus on parents to actively opt out of this otherwise unchallenged indoctrination scheme. The law presumes parents' willingness to allow recruiters to get at their children. It favors pro-military indoctrination absent opposing perspectives.

My wife and I will teach our son to recognize the military scam, to challenge the pitch, to be skeptical about flag waving, uniforms and ridiculous promises. He'll need to be armed against the recruiters, prepared to exercise intellectual selfdefense. It is a lot to ask of a child, but it may save his life, and the lives of others.

I see him in a crowded school auditorium, flags and bunting all around. Then I see my kid raising his hand to challenge the uniformed man on stage who is promising kids glory, college education and popularity, but never mentioning killing and dying.

It's impossible to inoculate a child completely from the horrors of militarism and its misguided ideals of service, its putative duty to kill others and to be killed in the name of national chauvinism, nostalgia or corporate hegemony.

So we will help him. Along with his other life documents and files — vaccination records, the Social Security card issued at his birth, his first "ouchie" notification from preschool, passport, report cards, awards — he'll have a conscientious objector file. Contents so far include photographs of him in his stroller at antiwar marches, standing in solidarity with striking supermarket workers, wearing his peace sign T-shirt, napping in his mother's arms at candlelight vigils, attending teach-ins and rallies, and standing in line with Dad at the Red Cross bloodmobile.

We'll document his participation in peaceful, alternative service to humanity: canned food and clothing drives for our local Catholic Worker, building trails for the Sierra Club, beach cleanups, voter registration. He'll learn to answer the bullies and sadists who have somehow coerced, shamed, flattered and lied our nation into believing patriotic service means murder on behalf of state power. Speaking truth to power, the Quakers call it.

My son may eventually choose otherwise when it comes to military service, but he will know that resistance is an option, and that thinking about one's allegiances is a requirement of citizenship.

English 50 Final Exam

General Instructions

For this exam, use ink, write legibly on every other line of your paper, and use only one side of each page. You may use a dictionary, an electronic speller, and a thesaurus.

Print your instructor's name in the upper right corner of this page. Print your own name on the back of the last page of your essay. Turn in your copy of "Learning to Say No to the Military" along with your written exam and this sheet. Failure to follow directions will disqualify your exam.

Essay Format

Your assignment is to write a 500-700 word essay addressing the prompt given below. This essay must include an introductory paragraph, several central paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. The first paragraph must identify the author of the article and provide a clear and identifiable thesis statement. Each central paragraph must be based on a topic sentence that supports your thesis and that is developed from a variety of methods, such as explanation and elaboration, facts, quotations, examples, and references to authority. The concluding paragraph must bring the essay to a satisfactory close.

Prompt

"Learning to Say No to the Military"

In "Learning to Say No to the Military," Andrew Tonkovich is upset that military recruiters have access to high schoolers on campus and that schools share student addresses and phone numbers with the military. He claims this situation "favors pro-military indoctrination absent opposing perspectives." Others might defend the policy, claiming that military recruiters perform a valuable service and that Tonkovich exaggerates their negative influence. What is your opinion? Should recruiters have access to high school students on campus?

Final Note

Remember that your general goal is to demonstrate to the reader of your essay that you have understood what you have read and that you have reacted sensitively and intelligently to it. Your specific goal is to write a well-constructed essay of the sort you have been studying and practicing all semester.