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Soldiers of Conscience, Gary Weimberg and Catherine Ryan (Bullfrog Films, 2007, \$19.99). 54 min. ISBN (DVD) 1 59458 799 X.

Secrecy, Peter Galison and Robb Moss (Bullfrog Films, 2008, \$25.00). 80 min. ISBN (DVD) 1 59458 797 3.

Soldiers of Conscience and *Secrecy*, two documentaries from US-based distributor Bullfrog Films, represent concentrated attempts to bring the contingencies and antinomies of recent American military intervention and the attendant resurgence of the national security state into sharp historical and political relief. In doing so, they raise important questions about the nature of anti-war sentiment in the context of ongoing struggles against US imperialism.

Utilizing interviews with soldiers, lawyers, trainers and West Point professors, Gary Weimberg and Catherine Ryan's *Soldiers of Conscience* recounts the stories of three American military personnel turned conscientious objectors. Initially detailing the Army's response to the realization that during the Second World War only one in four soldiers faced with the opportunity to kill during combat had actually done so, the film highlights the consequent development of "reflexive fire training," a technique designed specifically to override a soldier's moral decision-making capacities. *Soldiers of Conscience* then catalogues the respective experiences that turned Joshua Casteel, Camillo Majia and Kevin Benderman's explicit support for war in Iraq and Afghanistan into "crystallizations of conscience." From remarkably different ethnic, social and cultural backgrounds, all three are shown to have eventually coalesced around the pacifistic conviction that, in Casteel's words, an end to war "is not a utopian vision."

Similarly structured around interviews with a range of specialists and insiders, Peter Galison and Robb Moss's *Secrecy* delineates the emergence and periodic re-rudescence of the national security state's fixation with official concealment in the period since 1945. Here, arguments in favour of certain forms of executive secrecy are pitted against contrary assertions of the importance of democratic openness. The polemical nature of the film, however, is clear. Starting with the establishment by the Supreme Court of a precedent for state secrets in *Reynolds v. U.S.* (1953), and running through recent cases involving "extraordinary rendition" and the suspension of habeas corpus – the key examples being *Al-Masri v. U.S.* (2006) and *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* (2006) – the film suggests that an undue interest in secrecy has made the executive branch less accountable to the American body politic. In times of existential crisis, then, government has been more likely to condone the changes in standard operating procedure that lead to such legal and moral voids as Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo Bay, and numerous other "black sites" around the globe.

Overall, *Soldiers of Conscience* and *Secrecy* offer critical, historically aware discourses on the ethical quandaries raised by contemporary conflict, probing the lengths to which state power can (a) rely on the unquestioning support of its troops at the front line, and (b) relentlessly conjoin secrecy and the use of force without meeting serious and considered legal resistance. Calling expert witnesses with direct experience of the structures they choose to defy, the films lend considerable credence to their arguments. Finally, whilst both are unquestionably products of a previous era of

presidential politics, they refrain from giving the problems they identify the too easily adopted epithet “Bush.” In doing so, they highlight the fact that contemporary manifestations of American power are no neoconservative aberration. Indeed, it seems certain that in the context of a re-branded but effectively unchanged “war on terror,” questions of soldierly conscience and state secrecy will remain pertinent well into the future.

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