

Pentagon Targets African-American and Hispanic Kids to Fight its Wars

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If African-Americans are overrepresented in the armed forces it is likely because of the military's practice of "strategically targeting low-income youth and students of color," the ACLU has found.

Result: While African-Americans make up only 16% of the same-age civilian population, in 2006 they represented about 22% of enlisted Army personnel.

Even though enlistment under law is supposed to be voluntary, the Pentagon's racial targeting "in combination with exaggerated promises of financial rewards for enlistment, undermines the voluntariness of their enlistment," ACLU said in a 46-page report, "Soldiers of Misfortune."

Can it be accidental that 54% of the participants in JROTC programs are African-American and Latino students?

In the Los Angeles Unified School District, the 30 JROTC programs enrolling 4,754 students "are located in the most economically depressed communities in the city," according to the Coalition Against Militarism in Our Schools.

Nationally, JROTC programs are offered in 18% of high schools. They have enrolled 273,000 "cadets," of whom 45% typically enlist. According to the National Priorities Project, of the top 50 high schools ranked by the number of Black recruits, 94% have a JROTC program; similarly, for the top 50 high schools ranked by number of Hispanic recruits, 86% have JROTC.

The Army's "School Recruiting Program Handbook," ACLU says, advises recruiters to participate in Hispanic Heritage and Black History Month activities. And through its Joint Advertising Market Research & Studies database (JAMRS), the Pentagon collects information on 16-year-olds in the eleventh grade, in violation of the U.S. agreement, ratified by the Senate, not to recruit those under age 17. That agreement is Article 3 of the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

JAMRS is thought to be the largest repository of data anywhere on the 16-to-25 age group, covering 30 million Americans, and specifically includes data about students' race and ethnicity.

This information is key to Pentagon recruitment plans as it has been found that the two most important predictors of enlistment are students' race/ethnicity and their college plans.

College-bound students aren't as likely to give serious thought to military service.

A 2004 study by the *Boston Globe* found the Pentagon makes minimal effort to recruit students at schools where guidance counselors steer them to college. "This strategy results in recruiters generally focusing on lower-middle class youth in places with limited economic opportunities," the ACLU report says.

The newspaper compared recruitment activities at a working-class public high school in Maryland with a Virginia public high school in an affluent neighborhood 37 miles away and found students in the former were six times more likely to join the military!

At the Maryland school, recruiters chaperoned school dances, distributed key chains, mugs and military brochures in the school cafeteria, repeatedly telephoned students, and enrolled them in JROTC classes. At the Virginia school, "there was no military chaperoning of school events, no ROTC class, and recruiters limited themselves to a strict quota of visits," the ACLU report said.

The civil liberties group claims PowerPoint training materials taken from the Department of Defense website based recruiting efforts "around stereotypes of Latino and African American youth, including adapting language to mimic 'hip hop culture' and to appeal to 'hotheaded' Latino culture."

In New York, Army recruiters at high schools drive a specially-equipped "African-American Humvee" and a "Yo Soy El Army Humvee" (I am the Army Humvee) that have plasma television screens and blast rock music intended to appeal to black and Latino kids.

Dangling financial incentives before poor and minority students such as college aid and \$20,000 sign-up bonuses also mocks the concept that their enlistment is "voluntary." In July, 2005, the Army unveiled an incentive package of recruiting bonuses, college funds and special pay for selected jobs that could add up to more than \$100,00 for a new active duty recruit, according to *The New York Times*.

Students frequently do not get the pay-offs recruiters promised them. In North Philadelphia, for example, reservist Joshua Gordy told the *AP* recruiters at his high school promised he could earn \$35,000 for college, but said he has yet to receive the money. And Alberto Gomez, a Northern California student told the ACLU the recruiter at his high school promised him "about half a million dollars," adding, "Even if I knew that he might be telling lies, it still sounded so good—money for college, job training, traveling."

Gomez's experience may not be exceptional. "Although Latinos are somewhat underrepresented in the military," the ACLU report says, "their numbers are increasing rapidly, having jumped about 30% in the last decade."

The U.S. has come a long way since December 8, 1941, the day after Pearl Harbor was attacked by Japan, when long lines formed outside recruiting offices, and not for any enlistment bonuses, either. Could it be that when President Bush does the attacking, fewer folks think it is patriotic to fight?

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