

Military Recruitment of Youth With a New Facade

By Arnold August, March 2012

In 2002, President George W. Bush enacted the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), Section 9528, entitled “Armed Forces Recruiter Access to Students and Student Recruiting Information.” It states that every school that receives public funding “shall provide military recruiters the same access to secondary school students as is provided generally to post secondary educational institutions or to prospective employers of those students.” In addition, this section also requires that these schools provide names, addresses and telephone numbers to the military recruiters.¹ In a series of reports published at the end of 2008, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) claims that the Pentagon “regularly target(s) children under 17” and that “wartime enlistment quotas (for Iraq and Afghanistan) have placed increased pressure on military recruiters.”² Despite the formal possibility in the NCLB Act for parents to “‘opt out’ of providing the information” regarding names and addresses, the ACLU claims that “many school districts do not have a clear process” for this, and one study “found that two in five respondents did not get a military op-out form.”³ Finally, the ACLU has found that African-Americans make up only 16 percent of the civilian population, but represent about 22 percent of the enlisted Army personnel. Therefore, the military has a practice of “strategically targeting low-income youth and students of color.” A similar situation applies to American people of Latino origin in the U.S. ACLU 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.’”⁴

Since coming to office, Obama has held several press conferences and featured widely publicized high school visits regarding changes he has brought about to the NCLB.^{5; 6; 7} In addition, a Spanish version of Obama’s NCLB changes was also released.⁸ However, in order to accomplish the objectives of the Pentagon, Obama does not allude in any way in his comments or his legislative initiatives to the problem of aggressive military recruitment among U.S. youth in general nor specifically to racial profiling. If anything, Obama’s decentralization plans for the school system, one of the main features of the changes, can perhaps leave more leeway for the school boards to circumvent the opt-out clause in the NCLB.

Taking the issue of the NCLB into account with Obama's innumerable acclamations in favour of the military, "patriotism" and "service to the nation," during his 2008 presidential campaign and thereafter, one can conclude that the Obama recruitment policy is yet another example of a new facade for the old Pentagon policy. Given Obama's stepped-up foreign military adventures, it represents not merely an attempt to save the image of the military, but rather an *offensive* and thus an attempt to *increase* military recruitment, especially among youth and — within this age category — African-Americans and Latinos. Michelle Obama is also very involved, calling on women to join in combat and, in general, extolling the military in her role as a keynote speaker in prestigious events held at the United States Military Academy at West Point.^{9; 10; 11} Are the Obamas succeeding? It is too early to reach any conclusion. However, according to the most recent statistics available at the time of writing, 2010 was the first year since 2003 that the Pentagon has actually reported an increase over the previous year — albeit very slight (from 20.9 percent to 21 percent) — for African-Americans enlisted among the forces.¹²

¹ No Child Left Behind. 2002. "No Child Left Behind Act (Public Law 107-110, Sec. 9528)." NCLB, Department of Defense (January 8). At <<http://www.nochildleftbehind.com/nclb-law-contents.html>>.

² Ross, Sherwood. 2008a. "U.S. Breaks International Pledge Not to Recruit Children Under 17." *LA Progressive* (December 3). At <<http://www.laprogressive.com/us-breaks-international-pledge-not-to-recruit-children-under-17/>>.

³ ———. 2008b. "'No Child Left Behind' Is a Trojan Horse for Pentagon Recruiters." *LA Progressive* (December 2). At <<http://www.laprogressive.com/no-child-left-behind-is-a-trojan-horse-for-pentagon-recruiters/>>.

⁴ American Civil Liberties Union. 2008. "Soldiers of Misfortune." ACLU (May 13). At <aclu.org/pdfs/humanrights/crc_report_20080513.pdf>, p. 32.

⁵ White House. 2011a. "President Obama Calls on Congress to Fix No Child Left Behind Before the Start of the Next School Year." (March 21). At <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/14/president-obama-calls-congress-fix-no-child-left-behind-start-next-schoo>>.

⁶ ———. 2011b. "Weekly Address: Congress Should Reform No Child Left Behind This Year." (May 21). At <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/21/weekly-address-congress-should-reform-no-child-left-behind-year>>.

⁷ Obama, Barack. 2011. "Remarks by the President on No Child Left Behind Flexibility." White House (September 23). At <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/23/remarks-president-no-child-left-behind-flexibility>>.

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- ⁸ White House. n.d. “La administración del Presidente Obama anuncia metas ambiciosas para flexibilidad de la ley ‘No Child Left Behind’ a fin de avanzar la reforma de equidad y apoyo.” At <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/23/la-administraci-n-del-presidente-obama-anuncia-metas-ambiciosas-para-file>>.
- ⁹ Harding, Alison. 2011. “Report: Women Should Be Allowed to Serve in Combat.” CNN Politics (January 15). At <http://articles.cnn.com/2011-01-15/politics/military.women_1_combat-units-direct-combat-roles-iraq-and-afghanistan?_s=PM:POLITICS>.
- ¹⁰ Obama, Michelle. 2011. “Remarks of First Lady Michelle Obama at United States Military Academy Graduation Family Banquet.” White House (May 20). At <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/20/remarks-first-lady-michelle-obama-united-states-military-academy-graduat>>.
- ¹¹ White House. 2011c. “First Lady Michelle Obama Bringing the Support of Joining Forces to West Point.” (May 20). At <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/05/20/first-lady-michelle-obama-bringing-support-joining-forces-west-point>>.
- ¹² U.S. Army G1 Demographics Office. 2011. “Demographics. Active-Duty Profiles.” At <<http://www.armyg1.army.mil/hr/demographics.asp>>.