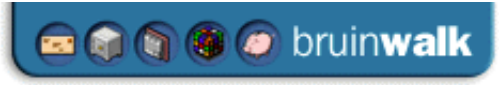


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PAST ARCHIVED FEATURES



Remember Super Mario Brothers? Pac-man and Donkey Kong? In case you haven't been to Toys "R" Us lately, the world of technologically advanced video games has exploded since we were kids. To check out the latest fast-paced adventure game, just pick up "America's Army: the Official U.S. Army Game." It won't cost you a thing. Paid for by tax dollars, the game is absolutely free.

"America's Army" is just the latest facet of the military's multi-media approach to recruitment in the new age of war without end. Using video games, huge ad campaigns, reality TV shows and the Junior ROTC, the military's goal is to convince youth that life in the armed forces is both rewarding and fun.

Aimed mostly at youth of color, the expensive recruitment campaign is a perverse attempt to draw America's kids into an institution geared toward violence and obedience instead of pushing them to pursue the immediate path of higher education.

America's kids into an institution geared toward violence and obedience instead of pushing them to pursue the immediate path of higher education.

The Army's video game makes clear the characteristics the military would like to cultivate in its target audience of youth – players who follow orders gain points on scales that measure loyalty, duty and honor. As Michael Capps, one of the games' designers, states, "The game does include violence but only in the same way the real Army uses force in defense of our country. We wanted to portray it as a value-laden organization."

The problem is the one sided, rosy view of the armed forces such modern tools of recruitment promote. For example, the latest "Army of One" ads ensure recruits that the army respects their individual identities. Cool commercials and logos are hoped to blend into popular youth culture to be sold on products like clothing and gear. Placing their commercials on such channels as Comedy Central and MTV, the Army's target age group is clear: youths aged twelve to twenty-four.

But just as obvious is the group coveted for their race. Just go to www.americasarmy.com to see for yourself how the majority of characters are men of color. Hired by the military to help sharpen its image, Leo Burnett's advertising firm (famous for such youth-friendly clients as Disney, Coca-Cola and McDonalds) has also subcontracted to Cartel Creativo and IMAGE USA to secure the Latino and African-American niche.

But the racial slant of recruitment doesn't stop with the media. In fact, youth in America's inner cities are bombarded with images of the military in the one space that is supposed to promote education and non-violence above all: school. In their report, "Making Soldiers in the Public Schools," Catherine Lutz and Lesley Bartlett show that while public schools should promote critical thinking and respect for other cultures, Junior ROTC curriculum promotes authoritarian values, gun use and a version of history that looks at the heroic accomplishments of soldiers rather than the role of citizens. JROTC programs stress military careers as opposed to civilian ones in mostly non-white, non-affluent schools.

While cuts in education have subsidized a ballooning military budget, the high-school graduation rate in the U.S. (about 74 percent) is one of the lowest among industrialized countries. For those who do graduate, schools are crawling with Army recruitment officers ready to snatch them up. In East L.A.'s Roosevelt High School, there are five military recruiters for every one college counselor. As Luis Sanchez of Inner City Struggle points out, "promises of money or citizenship are thrown out like candy."

Viewpoint Columnists

PRINT ARTICLE

In addition to video games, commercials and JROTC, the military has jumped on the "militainment" bandwagon, venturing into the realm of reality TV.

CBS's "American Fighter Pilot" and VH1's "Military Diaries" are set to compete for the highest ratings in a time producers see as ripe for jingoistic television.

With cameras following good-looking soldiers, the goal of these shows is twofold – make the military look exciting and show the human side of training to kill.

In the upcoming "Military Diaries," soldiers are given cameras to tell their stories, hopes and dreams and to help recruit new batches of youth into the Armed forces.

But this only shows viewers what the Army wants them to see. My proposal for the next reality TV show: give cameras to some kids in war-torn Afghanistan, a few women in Japan's Okinawa and the people of Iraq and the Philippines. Have them tape-record the death and destruction, sexual abuse and displacement caused by the U.S. military. Show the tape to America's youth alongside Army recruitment ads and adequate information about higher education. Then let America's youth decide if the military is right for them.

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