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CASE IN POINT

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Like other colleges of The City University of New York (CUNY), Bronx Community College (BCC) participates in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC). Understandably, the military appeals to many Bronx youth as means to escape from poverty and prison. With few well-paying jobs in the Bronx, students are suctioned into an economic military draft. "Get Your Degree Tuition Free!" gushes an ad for the New York National Guard. "That's right! **You Can** get your degree *100% Tuition Free* at all State University and City University of New York Colleges."¹ By 2001, the U. S. Army and the U.S. Air Force ran five ROTC programs at Bronx public high schools. Norman Wechsler, then Bronx High Schools Superintendent, commented in an interview: "I love the ROTC. The program represents many of the qualities we need to see more of in schools, including discipline, camaraderie and a sense of purpose."²

However, the military recruitment of children violates the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, a United Nations treaty that the U.S. Senate ratified in 2002. A survey of nearly one thousand high school students in New York City, conducted by the American Civil Liberties Union, found that 21% of students reported that military recruiters were taking up class time and that 13% reported seeing a military recruiter in school at least once a week. The survey also noted that military recruiters were being trained to target African Americans by mimicking hip hop language and to appeal to Latinos through their "hotheaded" culture.³

Contradicting "sense of purpose" seemingly inherent in military service, there were 30,177 suicides among active duty U.S. military personnel between 2001 and 2021, compared to the 7,057 killed in post-9/11 military operations.⁴ According to one study, from 2006 to 2020, the suicide rate was 42 per 100,000 for veterans compared to 18 per 100,000 for the general population.⁵ The names of students who died in Iraq and Afghanistan appeared regularly in *Clarion*, the CUNY faculty union monthly. Neither their deaths nor the trauma and suffering of their fellow soldiers enhanced anyone's freedoms.

Barely two months after 9/11, CUNY imposed out-of-state tuition on undocumented immigrants, who were already struggling with high living costs, menial jobs, and mass deportations. Besides diverting scarce resources towards destruction abroad, The War on Terror heightened domestic repression, as Robert O'Neil

¹ Education Update (January 2001): 13.

² Minners, Jon. "Respect, Honor, Leadership: ROTC in the Bronx." *Bronx Times*. (28 March 2002): 8.

³ *Soldiers of Misfortune: Abusive U. S. Military Recruitment and Failure to Protect Child Soldiers*. American Civil Liberties Union. (13 May 2008): 2, 11, 30. <https://www.aclu.org/publications/soldiers-misfortune-abusive-us-military-recruitment-and-failure-protect-child-soldiers>

⁴ Suitt, Thomas Howard. "High Suicide Rates Among United States Service Members and Veterans of the Post-9/11 Wars." (June 21, 2021): 1. https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2021/Suitt_Suicides_Costs%20of%20War_June%2021%202021.pdf

⁵ Kime, Patricia. "Suicide Rates Surged Among Post-9/11." <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2023/08/28/suicide-rates-surged-among-post-9-11-veterans-even-deaths-remained-steady-general-population-study.html>

observes:

Several provisions [of the USA Patriot Act] have caused the academic community special concern – notably the “Business Records” section that empowers federal agents to obtain information about persons suspected of terrorist activity without a court order or warrant – illustratively, borrower records from libraries and purchase records from bookstores. Since the person from whom such records are sought may disclose such a demand to no one else – most especially not the subject or target of the inquiry – it has been virtually impossible to gauge the extent of such clandestine surveillance.⁶

Case in point: in July 2002, Alyce Zimmerman, BCC Vice President for Administration and Finance, requested computer sign-in sheets at the Learning Resource Center from an administrative assistant whose supervisor, Laroï Lawton, was away on vacation. It transpired that Zimmerman had made the request on behalf of the FBI, contravening a New York State law that protects library records as confidential save in response to a court order or a subpoena. In an interview, Lawton said that he would have refused the request, as did Theresa McManus, BCC head librarian.⁷

NOTE

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⁶ O’Neil, Robert. *Academic Freedom in a Wired World*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2008: 105.

⁷ Geron, Tomio. “Watching What Your Read.” *Clarion* (April 2003): 3.