

Colombia Report editorial
Latino immigrants drawn into U.S. wars

By
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Increasing numbers of young Latin American immigrants in the United States are being actively recruited into the U.S. armed forces to fight in the wars of empire in Iraq and Afghanistan. Most of these young people are doubly victimized: ejected first from their home countries because of the policies of neoliberalism; and later being seduced to join the U.S. military as a desperate means to improve their lives.

The policies of neoliberalism, - the sale of government enterprises, the "opening" of Latin American economies to the products of giant U.S. multinationals, the weakening of the domestic agricultural and industrial sectors and so forth,- are progressively ruining the economic fabric of many Latin American countries. Feeling like prisoners in their own homeland, Latin Americans are migrating in increasing numbers to industrialized countries, especially the United States.

Upon arriving in the United States many young immigrants enter the labor force at the bottom of the ladder and, in the case of undocumented migrants, lead a marginalized life of fear and exploitation. Thus they have become easy prey for the recruiters of the U.S. Armed Forces. Faced with an increasingly unpopular war in Iraq, the U.S. is unable to recruit volunteers to fulfill its need for Iraq-bound soldiers. The solution: to focus recruitment among Latinos in the United States. You are undocumented? No matter. The United States will allow you to apply, not just for residence, but for citizenship, on the day that you join.

You may gain citizenship, but lose your life. Currently, between 35,000 to 40,000 non-citizens of the U.S. are enlisted in the U.S. Army. They represent a substantial contingent of the troops on duty in Iraq, where the best estimates indicate that 20% of the casualties have been Latinos. José Gutiérrez, a Guatemalan orphan who came to Los Angeles in the mid-1990s, was one of the first U.S. soldiers to die in combat in Iraq on March 21, 2003. Looking through the lists of the war dead one finds Mexicans, Salvadorans, Puerto Ricans, Colombians, and so on.

The children of working families and the poor often become the victims of militarism. This is now the plight of many unfortunate young Latino immigrants driven from their countries by the same economically powerful interests that stand to benefit from the war of occupation in Iraq. Fortunately, Latino immigrant families are becoming aware of the dangers behind the U.S. Army's "affirmative action" for Latinos and organizing efforts against this "poverty draft" are under ways in cities across the United States. We support those efforts.