

New Army JROTC Curriculum - Old Problems

by Catherine Lutz

In April of 1995, the American Friends Service Committee published *Making Soldiers in the Public Schools: Analysis of the Army JROTC Curriculum*. The Army updated Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) textbooks in 1997 (December 5, 1997), although those textbooks have not necessarily reached many or even most JROTC classrooms. The new text, "Leadership Education and Training 1" (LET 1), used in 9th and 10th grade classes, contains the most substantial revisions since 1989 (July 24, 1989). We compare the old and new versions of the curriculum.

In a few respects, the changes are clearly meant to neutralize criticism of the JROTC curriculum (in *Making Soldiers in the Public Schools* and elsewhere), particularly by removing at least some ethnic/racial slurs from those earlier texts. In many more respects, the changes have made the curriculum even more clearly oriented toward recruitment and public relations for the military than before. The new curriculum makes even larger claims for the program's benefits and encourages JROTC cadets to advertise it to others. No significant changes were made to the general tenor of the curriculum, and so it remains highly propagandistic, authoritarian, simplistic, and riddled with historical inaccuracy.

What's New

Claims that the positive effects of taking JROTC will last a lifetime.

The text says that the program can build character in ways other high school classes cannot ("Speaking of character, the JROTC program has it – JROTC offers many opportunities for teamwork, advancement, and self enrichment that are not available in other high school courses." LET-1, p. 3). This disparages the work of high school teachers in other subjects and undermines the prospect for learning in those other contexts. It claims the program can boost self-esteem, graduation rates, communication skills, and reduce drug use rates, and that it can make students better Americans. The revised version makes broader and more specific claims, while the earlier one simply says it provides many benefits to the individual.

The section on military career opportunities has been expanded.

It is more extensive than that on civilian career opportunities.

A lengthy section on leadership has been added.

It promotes as desirable the authoritarian idea that leadership is defined as influencing others to accomplish the mission rather than more egalitarian, conscience-based, or consensus-based views of leadership.

History sections are introduced with new reminders that they are not meant to cover all topics in U.S. history.

"Remember, as the unit title suggests, we are presenting only an overview of American history. Detailed information on these topics is covered in subsequent leadership education and training levels and, of course, in your high school social studies classes" (p. 245). However, the JROTC text continues to present its historical material as an accurate synopsis of central themes in U.S. history. This is particularly problematic when some school districts allow JROTC credits to substitute for social studies credit.

Historical error and a right-wing political agenda are reflected in the selection and presentation of facts and historical statements.

Some additional errors introduced by the changes include:

- A. The claim that international terrorism is a central public preoccupation as the century ends. Public opinion surveys show people are more concerned about health and medicine, the education of their children, taxes, violence in their neighborhoods, and so on. In any case, domestic terror in the most murderous instance in Oklahoma City – committed by two Army veterans – has killed more Americans than international terrorism.

- B. The claim that the U.S. dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima because it did not want "the war with Japan to continue for months, or possibly even years, which would result in the loss of additional American lives" (p. 258). Top U.S. decision-makers in fact knew that the war was almost over, and that Japan had offered to surrender if the emperor would not be deposed, which ended up being the actual terms of Japan's surrender.
- C. The new edition also eliminates mention of the fact, present in the first edition, that the hydrogen bomb could destroy a major city and millions of people, giving an even more distorted view of modern warfare which does not show its devastating consequences for human life and the environment.

Several new projects encourage students to missionize or promote the JROTC program among other students.

Project #1, for example, requires students to make a JROTC marketing brochure. It says "the JROTC instructor staff may use your brochure to 'sell' the Army JROTC program to other students" (p. 68). This is a rare teaching device in other course work, including comparable optional courses, such as band. Teachers of those subjects rely on the intrinsic rewards of their subjects to draw students, or do not have enough resources to support the additional students that successful promotion would bring in. In addition, positions students can fill in a JROTC unit include the Battalion Public Affairs Officer, who is instructed to disseminate propaganda in the school newspaper and community on a regular basis ("to create an outstanding image of the cadet battalion," p. 297). These parts of the curriculum are consistent with the military recruitment and public relations goals of the JROTC program, which the text passes on as a student responsibility.

Political agendas have sharpened in the treatment of the gun control controversy.

The text minimizes the significance of popular desire for such controls, which surveys show are preferred by the great majority of Americans. Where the older edition says many people are fighting for gun control laws, the new one says, "select groups of people are fighting for gun control laws." This new wording suggests that discredited interest groups are behind this movement rather than large numbers of average people. Where the older text said, "The Second Amendment to the Constitution guarantees the right to bear arms," the new text gives a more extensive interpretation: "This amendment prevents the government from prohibiting the ownership of weapons by citizens, and it protects their right and duty to serve in the armed forces" (p. 281).

Racial stereotypes have been introduced in the textbook's new sections on brain function.

For example, it cites research that claims African-Americans and Indians are right-brain dominant (associated with the preference for having a good time rather than being on time, and being active rather than thoughtful) and whites are left-brain dominant (associated with logic and rationality rather than intuition and preference for art or athletics over intellectual pursuits).

All units on drilling with guns and marksmanship have been deleted from the core first year textbook.

This change has been made in response to criticism of the program. It should be noted that many JROTC programs continue to have marksmanship components; however, these sections have been removed from the core first year texts designed for use in all programs.

New sections have been added.

A short discussion of service learning through JROTC projects has been added. A new section on "Working Out Conflicts" is included. It focuses on understanding the causes of violence and conflict and on communication skills useful for identifying and resolving conflicts. This perspective on conflict is absent in the understanding of war, the military, and international relations contained in other sections of the text.

Old Problems Remain

Authoritarianism continues to structure much of the book.

The text emphasizes allegiance as a central feature of citizenship. Despite teaching the Bill of Rights, and including a student project that requires them to write a letter to a public official about a social problem (p. 289), the text places much heavier emphasis on loyalty and respect for authority, which will suggest that questioning the government is unpatriotic. Without qualification, it states that respect for law agencies is required (p. 11). There is brief mention that one of a citizen's responsibilities is to work for "constructive change," with the

adjective suggesting that citizen protest can and has sometimes been destructive and illegitimate. It also says citizens must respect the flag and the national anthem, as well as those of friendly nations. When students are asked in a later exercise to think about whether it is appropriate to have a flag burning amendment to the Constitution (p. 288), the answer they are expected to give could not be clearer.

Role models presented in the texts continue to be politically narrow.

The three "patriotic citizens" presented in one chapter include a woman who started a private school to help minority students and who promotes a self-help philosophy, and two anti-Communists, one a wealthy Cuban immigrant, and the other a soldier who died in Korea.

The text continues to present joining the military as a citizen obligation.

It explicitly equates military service to voting as a form of service to the country (p. 11). Four pages are devoted to military career options, and two pages on more general career advice, with most of the latter applicable to either military or civilian career preparation.

The curriculum suggests that the U.S.'s global military presence is an unequivocally good thing.

It uses a phrase from the British Empire in an approving way: the Unit Seven project asks students to locate themselves on the map, beginning with the following theme: "Recall at the very beginning of this course, we proclaimed that 'the sun never sets on JROTC' [*italics in original*]. Then, in Unit 1, we mentioned that Army JROTC is active in more than 1,350 high schools worldwide...." (p. 244). The violations of international law involved in various other U.S. military invasions and actions are not mentioned, nor is the U.S.'s role in supplying repressive regimes with arms and military training used against their own people in Central America, Indonesia, and elsewhere. For example, it never uses the word colonialism to describe U.S. occupation of Micronesia, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, etc. It notes that an island was destroyed when the hydrogen bomb was tested, but does not identify the island as the home of Marshall Islanders deported for the purpose.

The text continues to ignore the role of dissent in promoting U.S. democracy and in preventing war.

It mentions "peace movements" at only two points in the text, but does not describe what they were. The first says: "Americans have experienced social changes in the form of musical and written expressions, peace movements, and protests" (p. 245). The second describes the civil rights movement briefly, and then says this about the anti-war movement: "In the 1960s, America experienced a social revolution. While many Americans were fighting in Vietnam, many others were using their basic rights to express their beliefs about war and peace. Many Americans in United States expressed these ideas by protesting the war, holding peace movements [*sic*] and civil rights demonstrations, and taking an interest in the condition of the environment" (p. 264).

The text continues to trivialize the consequences of war.

Rather than discussing war's creation of refugees, renewed racism and nativism, and mass deaths among civilians and soldiers, it focuses on changes in a society's music, literature, or art. Its treatment of the causes of war continues to be simplistic and erroneous. It engages in no criticism or alternative scenarios for U.S. participation in any war. It promotes unthinking anti-communism, defining communism as anti-American, and using the fear of communism as a justification for war. The only dictatorships criticized are communist ones. It continues to claim that South Vietnam was a democratic country. The Iran crisis is described in ethnocentric and slanted terms; rather than describing it as a popular revolution against a dictator whose police state was supported by the U.S., the situation is described as one of "months of disorder" after which "Iranians were in a nationalistic frenzy" and took American hostages. It does not mention the arms for hostages deal, but says, "United States policy is not to give into [*sic*] terrorists."

Responding to Controversy?

The JROTC program - its curriculum and activities - has come under heavy criticism. It is important to note how two significant issues have been handled: racial and ethnic slurs in the textbooks and hazing.

Earlier JROTC texts spoke cavalierly about the Army's role in usurping Native Americans. Many educators, students and parents have been critical of specific biased remarks contained in several Army texts. On November 9, 1995, the Department of the Army issued a memo to all JROTC personnel asking them to

remove a seven-page section of LET 3 (third year text) ("Role of the U.S. Military in U.S. Expansion") because of its offensive comments about Native Americans. However, there are reports that older versions of the text are still in widespread use. The new (1997) text (LET 1) deals with the issue by failing to mention the Indian removal campaigns of the U.S. Army in its overview of U.S. history, erasing this important aspect of Native American experience.

Hazing, a frequent problem in highly authoritarian structures, has been a problem in a growing number of JROTC programs. Most of the abuses of power that have occurred in these units have involved higher ranked cadets abusing lower ranked cadets. The new text avoids the issue altogether. There is nothing in the new text that prohibits hazing. This would be natural material to include in the leadership sections of the first year text where responsible behavior in leaders is discussed, or in the Supplemental Material where duties and responsibilities of command positions are specifically listed.

Overall the new curriculum disappoints. What is needed is greater scrutiny over what is taught in the JROTC program.

About the Author

Catherine Lutz teaches anthropology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is the author of several books, including *Reading National Geographic* (with J. Collins). Lutz (with Lesley Bartlett) authored *Making Soldiers in the Public Schools*. She is now at work on a book examining the impact of a large U.S. military base on the surrounding community.