

“War is a racket...in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives.”
--Major General Smedley Butler

Essay by Bianca Taylor

C.K. McClatchy High School, Sacramento

The orders have been given, barked from the insides of soiled canvas tents. A sense of urgency swirls with the intense heat that chokes the atmosphere. Dirt-caked humvees crawl over the shifting sands like archaic armored beetles as soldiers begin to appear at the frontlines. They walk like zombies, physically battered and bruised. But the worst of the pain is etched on their faces between deep lines smeared with soot, tears, and grief. Their skin has turned leathery and hard, and the corners of their mouths sag downwards in a perpetual grimace while they squint with dull eyes into the horizon. But these soldiers are not wearing camouflage, or carrying weapons. Instead of the standard green and brown, they emerge dressed in sleek pantsuits with Dolce, Armani, and Gucci leading the way as the soldiers align in their ranks. Hundreds of pairs of black leather shoes glint fiercely in the sunlight, and the jingle of golden heirloom cufflinks against newly purchased Rolexes fills the air. These men and women represent the new generation of soldiers: those millionaires and billionaires that believe so strongly in their cause for war that they themselves take the front lines.

Or so it should be. Ironically, these corporate executives so keen on waging war cannot be found within one hundred miles of the battlefield. Lobbyists and confidential advisors to senior federal officials who pushed for invasion into Iraq are collecting tens of thousands of dollars in fees for helping business clients with their federal contracts in the Middle East. And although they insist on the nobility of fighting for their cause, it is without hesitation that they refuse to enlist their children—let alone themselves. Cue then the disenfranchised, the poor, and the ignorant all willing to sacrifice their lives for the chance to be honored by history as heroes. The star-spangled flag promising freedom and bravery guides its soldiers to Afghanistan, Iraq, Yugoslavia, Syria, Iran, Kuwait, Pakistan, Japan, and Serbia yet it is that same flag draped over the solemn rows of wooden coffins. At the cost of 4,035 American and 1.2 million Iraqi lives, Kellogg Brown and Root has profited \$16 billion as a private contractor since the 2003 US invasion into Iraq. These appalling numbers beg the question: who is profiting from this war? The answer lies not with the future of global democracy, or the devastated families of American soldiers, and certainly not with the ravaged Iraqi citizens. Clearly, war is a racket, in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives.