

No child's behind left

By Greg Palast

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Go ahead, George, and lie to me. Lie to my dog. Lie to my sister. But don't you ever lie to my kids. Deep into your State of the Siege lecture last night, long after sensible adults had turned off the tube or kicked in the screen, you came after our children. "By passing the No Child Left Behind Act," you said, "We are regularly testing every child ... and making sure they have better options when schools are not performing."

You said it ... and then that little tongue came out; that weird way you stick your tongue out between your lips like the little kid who knows he's fibbing. Like a snake licking a rat. I saw that snakey tongue dart out and I thought, "He knows."

And what you know, Mr. Bush, is this: you've ordered this testing to hunt down, identify and target for destruction the hopes of millions of children you find too expensive, too heavy a burden, to educate.

Here's how No Child Left Behind and your tests work in the classrooms of Houston and Chicago. Millions of 8-year-olds are given lists of words and phrases. They try to read. Then they are graded, like USDA beef: some prime, some OK, many failed.

Once the kids are stamped and sorted, the parents of the marked children ask you to fulfill your tantalizing promise to "make sure they have better options when schools are not performing."

But there is no "better option," is there, Mr. Bush? Where's the money for the better schools to take in the kids getting crushed in cash-poor districts? Where's the open door to the suburban campuses with the big green lawns for the dark kids with the test-score mark of Cain?

And if I bring up the race of the kids with the low scores, don't get all snippy with me, telling me your program is color blind. We know the color of the kids left behind, and it's not the color of the kids you went to school with at Philips Andover Academy.

You know and I know the testing is a con. There is no "better option" at the other end. The cash went to eliminate the inheritance tax, that special program to give every millionaire's son another million.

But you'll tell me, you took tests as a youth. I know you did. And you scored on the Air Guard flight test 25 out of 100, one point above too dumb to fly. But you zoomed past the

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other would-be flyboys. They were stamped, "Ready for 'Nam."

And you took a test to get into Yale. And though your pet rock scored a wee bit higher than you, your grandpa on the Yale board provided the "better option" which got you in.

Here in New York City, your educational Taliban, led by Republican Mayor Michael Bloomberg, has issued an edict to test the third-graders. Winnow out the chaff – the kids stamped 'failed' – and throw them back, exactly where they started, to repeat the same failed program another year. The ugly little irony is this: the core of No Child Left Behind is that failing children will be left behind another year. And another year and another year.

You know and I know that this is not an educational opportunity program – because you offer no opportunities, no hope, no plan, no funding. Rather, it is the new Republican social Darwinism, educational eugenics: identify the nation's loser-class early on. Trap them, then train them cheap.

No Child Left Behind is of one piece with the tax cuts for the rich, the energy laws for the insiders, the oil wars for the well-off. Someone has to care for the privileged. No society can have winners without lots and lots of losers.

And so we have No Child Left Behind – to provide the new worker drones that will clean the toilets at the Yale Alumni Club, punch the cash registers color-coded for illiterates, and pamper the winner-class on the higher floors of the new economic order.

Greg Palast is author of, "The Best Democracy Money Can Buy," which has returned this week to the New York Times bestseller list. View Palast's writings for Harper's, The Guardian (UK) and BBC television at www.gregpalast.com.