

**Islam in Charlotte
County Schools'
Textbooks - History
or Religious
Indoctrination?**

Review and Summary of 10th Grade
World History Textbooks~ School Year 2013-2014

Purpose: To bring to the attention of members of the Charlotte County School Board and the citizens of Charlotte County the inappropriate treatment of Islam as it is taught in the county's public schools.

Background: It is generally accepted that in the teaching of world history, an introduction to the world's great religions is fundamental to the students' understanding of the world's cultures, architecture, art and literature among others.

Discussion: The manner, accuracy and fairness in which the subject of religion is portrayed to students is of utmost importance if we are to instill in them the knowledge needed to properly comprehend and respect the world's diverse societies.

Problem: Textbooks provided to our students do not accurately reflect the belief systems of the world's major religions nor do they provide an appropriate balance as to the quantity or depth of the information presented.

In 2011, a report was published by ACT! for America Education, Inc., entitled “Education or Indoctrination? The Treatment of Islam in 6th through 12th Grade American Textbooks”. This report reviewed the treatment of Islam in thirty-eight, 6th through 12th grade American textbooks that date from 1999 to 2011. The report revealed “a pattern of historical revisionism, omissions, and bias in the presentation of all aspects devoted to Islam in these textbooks”. Additionally, the report also asserted that “Since the mid-1990s, the number of units devoted to Islam in world history textbooks has significantly increased while the number of pages allocated to Judaism and Christianity has conspicuously decreased”.

It is our understanding that this report has been made available to the members of the Charlotte County School Board, but to date no response has been made public nor has any action been taken as a result of the information presented. It is our desire that school board members make a good faith effort to examine the errors that were identified and evaluate how these errors contribute to a rewrite of history that is doing a grave disservice to our students. We are not opposed to teaching about Islam or any other religion whose impact on history has been significant. However, this must be done in an accurate and objective manner and there must be an appropriate balance as to the amount and depth of the information presented for each religion discussed.

Members of the Charlotte/Desoto chapter of ACT! for America have undertaken a review of two textbooks currently in use in Charlotte County schools. One is a 10th grade history textbook entitled, *World History – Connections to Today* by Prentice Hall, 2008. The other is a 10th grade Advanced Placement textbook entitled, *The Earth and Its Peoples, A Global History* by Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011. Both contained numerous inaccuracies in their portrayal of both Islam and Christianity. For example, the Prentice Hall textbook states that

“Muslims profess faith in the same god as that worshiped by Jews and Christians”. This is a statement that would be deemed untrue by both Muslims and Christians. Christians believe that Jesus is God, Muslims believe Jesus to be merely a prophet.

The Wadsworth Cengage Learning textbook asserts that, “Muslim women fared better legally under Islamic law than did Christian and Jewish women under their respective religious codes”. Sharia Law, the moral code, and religious law of Islam is replete with examples of the unequal and even misogynistic treatment of women. Elsewhere, the Wadsworth text stated that “Since the portrait of Jesus found in the New Testament largely reflects the viewpoint of followers a half-century after his death; it is difficult to determine the motives and teachings of the historical Jesus.” The *Bible* contains the writings of individuals who were eye witnesses to the teachings of Jesus, and Christian theologians as well as the secular ancient historians have been very prolific in describing the motives and teachings of the historical Jesus.

Aside from specific inaccuracies and misrepresentations prevalent in the two textbooks, the sheer volume of information presented was far from balanced. In the Wadsworth text, a complete twenty-three page chapter entitled, “The Rise of Islam, 600-1200” was devoted to Islam compared to a one and one quarter page section entitled, “The Rise of Christianity”, listed under “Rome’s Creation of a Mediterranean Empire, 753 B.C.E. – 600 C.E.”, a small sub-section of a thirty-two page chapter entitled, “An Age of Empires: Rome and Han China, 753 B.C.E. – 600 C.E.”

Some of the other world’s religions were also greatly underrepresented in comparison to Islam. “The Evolution of Hinduism” was covered in 2 pages, one page was devoted to “Challenges to the Older Order: Jainism and Buddhism” and a 5 page section, entitled, “Israel 2000-500

B.C.E. was devoted to Judaism. Additionally, the textbook's index directs the reader to Islam using forty-five references, while twenty-five refer to Christianity and only five to Judaism.

In the Prentice Hall text, the roots of Judaism are covered in three pages of one section in Chapter 2, entitled, "First Civilizations". Hinduism and Buddhism are contained in two pages and three pages respectively a single section in Chapter 4, entitled, "Empires of India and China. Christianity is presented in a single five page section of Chapter 6, entitled "Ancient Rome and the Rise of Christianity". However, the authors devoted an entire chapter to Islam, entitled, "The Muslim World", containing five separate sections and consisting of 19 pages of instruction.

The textbooks' descriptions of the various religions also differ significantly in their depth and specificity. For example, in the Wadsworth Cengage Learning text, the chapter on Islam includes sub-chapters devoted to 1. "The Origins of Islam" (including the *Koran* and the Five Pillars of Islam), 2. "The Rise and Fall of the Caliphate" (including the Islamic conquests and assaults from within and without) and 3. "Islamic Civilization" (which included Sharia Law, the moral code and religious law of Islam as well as the *Hadith*, a collection of reports purported to convey the precise words or deeds of Muhammad. Next to the *Quran*, the *Hadith* is most important basis for Islamic law.) Its chapter on Islam provided in depth information on the founding of Islam, the life of Muhammad, its laws and dogma and topics such as women's legal status, religious conversion, Muhammad's wife, homosexuality and slavery.

Unlike its chapter on Islam, the Wadsworth Cengage Learning's short section on Christianity did not even define who a Christian was, give a definition of Christianity or describe the *Holy Bible*, the written text of Christianity.

Not only is the inequitable amount of information devoted to the Christian faith glaringly obvious to the reader, but strangely and categorically inaccurate as well. Continuing under the short section entitled, "The Rise of Christianity" on pp. 152 of the Wadsworth text, the identity of Jesus Christ, the central figure of the Christian faith, is greatly misrepresented in a paragraph which states, "Some experts believe that he was essentially a rabbi, or teacher...." This statement actually denies and omits essential facts about Jesus which are clearly documented in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible.

Continuing in that same passage, a false statement is made in reference to Jesus' actual teachings. "...Offended by Jewish religious and political leaders' excessive concern with money and power and by the perfunctory nature of mainstream Jewish religious practice in his time, he prescribed a return to the personal faith and spirituality of an earlier age." Jesus was offended *not* by an excessive concern with money and power, but that the leadership of the Jews and the Pharisees sought to enhance their power and authority through religious legalism rather than to focus on the true lessons of God as revealed in Scripture.

Conclusion: The textbooks examined by our members demonstrated the same patterns of omissions, errors and bias as found by the investigators from ACT! for America Education, Inc. Additionally, the quantity and specificity of the information presented varied widely between the religions, with the religion of Islam being presented in a much more voluminous and deliberate manner.

Recommendation: That the members of the Charlotte County School Board accomplish the following:

1. State for the record that no special recognition in the teaching of history should be accorded any religion to the detriment of other faiths.
2. Appoint a committee of community volunteers consisting, at a minimum, of parents, clergy and educators tasked to review the contents of any textbooks used within the county where the subject of religion is an integral part of the teaching process. The work of this committee should be transparent and open to all citizens to observe the proceedings.
3. Require the committee to report to the school board in an open meeting the results, conclusions and recommendations of its review.
4. Upon review of the committee's report, suspend from use within the Charlotte County Public School District all textbooks that demonstrate significant errors, omissions, bias or a lack of appropriate balance in regard to volume or specificity in the treatment of any religion.
5. Notify the authors/publishers of the textbooks suspended, the action taken by the Board, and request they produce textbooks that more closely meet the stringent requirements of the Charlotte County Public School District.