

PART I.

SUPPLEMENTAL CURRICULA

Civics Gone Awry

Various non-profit groups supply schools with curricula and materials that respond to widespread concerns about young people's ignorance of our political principles and processes and the responsibilities of citizenship. The increasing number of children from immigrant families, dysfunctional families, and highly mobile families has accelerated the development of programs that ostensibly address character education, moral education, and civic education. Some do accomplish their stated purposes in a responsible fashion. For example, the programs offered by the Center for Civic Education in California are well known, generally respected, and widely used. They provide high-quality academic materials and speakers on the history and philosophy leading to the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and promote no activism on specific social issues.³ Regrettably, this is not the case with many others.

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Facing History and Ourselves

Possibly the most malevolent of the organizations professing to address citizenship education is Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO), which provides materials and services to over 16,000 teachers, ostensibly to help them address racism, anti-Semitism, and violence.⁴ Facing History and Ourselves is by far the most popular source of K-12 training and materials on the Holocaust. According to its Web site, it reaches over 1.5 million adolescents through its teacher network, and over 4,500 schools through regional offices in six major cities in the U.S. In addition, it now has an office in Europe. Facing History and Ourselves describes itself as an “interdisciplinary approach to citizenship education” and can be taught over a long or a short period of time and at any grade level, although it is usually taught in grade 8 or 9.

The central problem with this organization's activities stems not from its efforts to provide students with scrupulously accurate information about the Holocaust but from its goal of teaching contemporary civic lessons for American students. To do so, it makes false analogies to a catastrophic historical event, thus trivializing the catastrophe and setting up a moral equivalence between Nazis and white Americans. The purpose of FHAO's first major resource book, titled *Holocaust and Human Behavior* and published in 1982, was to encourage students to practice "moral decision-making" by speaking up about the dangers of a nuclear "holocaust" and to see the Moral Majority as a danger to freedom of speech.⁵ Once those dangers seemed to have receded from the political radar screen, study of the Holocaust was linked to a domestic issue with more staying power. The purpose of the 1994 resource book, bearing the same title as the 1982 manual but with a new conceptual framework, is to make sure that students see the task of confronting white racism in America as the chief reason for studying the Holocaust.⁶ It makes explicit and frequent comparisons not only between twentieth-century America and twentieth-century Germany but also between nineteenth-century America and nineteenth-century Germany. In essence, it uses the Holocaust to portray America's blacks as Europe's Jews, thereby reducing genocide to an act of bigotry and equating white Americans to Nazis.

The purpose of the supplementary resource book FHAO published in 2002, titled *Race and Membership in American History: The Eugenics Movement* (RMAH), is even more poisonous.⁷ FHAO wants teachers and students to infer a causal connection between the American eugenics movement and the Holocaust; that is, to infer that Americans and American science, however indirectly, were responsible for Nazi Germany's extermination policies and the Holocaust. RMAH makes it clear that few American scientists subscribed to the eugenics movement by World War II. Nevertheless, the chapters on "The Nazi Connection" so cleverly connect Hitler's use of the ideas of German scientists on racial "eugenics" to an acknowledgment of the leadership of American scientists, educators, and policy makers in the eugenics movement that Americans appear almost directly responsible for the Final Solution.⁸ The net effect is the discrediting of American society.

Despite the many citations and excerpts intended to prop up the book's implicit thesis, FHAO fails to note even one biologist as a reviewer or to give a biologist's assessment of the influence of the eugenics movement on American or German science. While the history of the eugenics movement should be better known to the general public, one must ask why an organization devoted to a study of the Holocaust should expend its energy compiling information on the history and influence of the eugenics movement in America as if *it*, rather than the centuries of negative cultural stereotypes and religious and economic hatred of Jews in Christian Europe, were instrumental in the development and execution of Hitler's Final Solution. But aside from a few pages in its 1982 and 1994 resource books, FHAO has studiously ignored the history of anti-Semitism since its inception, a criticism made by Lucy Dawidowicz in her 1990 essay. Facing History and

Ourselves has just begun to introduce this book at workshops and to develop an on-line course based on the book. Social studies teachers are likely to accept FHAO's implicit thesis about who was responsible for the Holocaust because its resource books are likely to be their only source of information on the topic. Science teachers are most unlikely to address the eugenics movement in their classes because evolutionary biologists view its influence on the history of American biology as miniscule.⁹

It is not difficult to understand why teachers find study of the Holocaust useful for addressing bigotry in this country. It provides them with the most horrendous image possible of a prejudiced person—a Nazi—an image that can be connected through the concept of intolerance to the image of a white racist in America. And what could better symbolize the deadly nature of intolerance unchecked and make a more powerful impression on young minds than images of death camps, gas chambers, and crematoria? Teachers who believe what they have been told repeatedly by their own instructors and the mainstream media—that bigotry and intolerance are the most serious problems we face in this country—are unlikely to have any doubts about the educational value of this curriculum despite the lack of any longitudinal research evidence that it reduces bigotry or produces more tolerant or informed citizens.

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Islam and Islamic History

The traditional history curriculum has been faulted for concentrating almost solely on the history of the Western world—ancient Greece and Rome, and European, British, and U.S. history. To help American students become more familiar with other cultures, civilizations, and regions, and thus less “ethnocentric,” history teachers, who tend to have been trained chiefly in Western or U.S. history and whose textbooks often have a similar focus, have had to draw upon additional resources. This is especially the case for addressing Islam, the Islamic world, and the Middle East. I describe here three egregious sets of curricular materials. All three falsify history in their attempt to indoctrinate both teachers and students.

The Arab World Studies Notebook

The Arab World Studies Notebook is published jointly by the Middle East Policy Council and AWAIR (Arab World And Islamic Resources and School Services). The Middle East Policy Council (formerly the Arab American Affairs Council) sponsors workshops about the Arab world and Islam for teachers, while AWAIR runs the workshops and distributes printed materials and videos. The *Notebook* is described as containing secondary level curriculum materials. The workshops are provided free to schools all over the country, and the *Notebooks* cost much less money per teacher (\$15) when schools arrange for the workshops than when teachers buy copies on their own (over \$50). The *Notebook* has been used in schools for many years and is in every bibliography on Islam that I’ve seen

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for educators. It is specifically touted for staff development by a faculty member at Teachers College, Columbia University in a 1999 ERIC Digest article on “the resources available to provide Arab Americans with a supportive school environment and all students with an accurate and unbiased education on the Middle East.”¹⁰ (It was also a major resource for a professional development insti-

tute described in the second part of this report.) I first came across the *Notebook* in 1990 when parents and other citizens belonging to an organization we called Citizens for Quality Education were engaged in a high profile battle with social studies administrators and teachers at Brookline (MA) High School over the content of a course called “World in Crisis” and their attempt to eliminate Advanced Placement European History.¹¹ The *Notebook* was one of the pieces of propaganda we found in half a dozen courses at the high school. Published in Berkeley, California, and edited by

Audrey Shabbas, who is still its editor, as well as director of AWAIR, the 1989 version (about 300 pages long) stated among other non-facts that Yasir Arafat was president of a newly declared State of Palestine, that the United Nations General Assembly had voted to recognize this state in 1988, and that the Canaanites were the ancestors of many present-day Palestinians.¹² I will paraphrase or quote briefly from William Bennetta's preliminary report and correspondence on the content of the current version of the *Notebook*. This report may be read in its entirety at <http://www.textbook-league.org/spwich.htm>.

Bennetta concluded that the principal purpose of the 1998 *Notebook* (now 513 pages long) is to induce teachers to embrace Islamic religious beliefs, support political views favored by MEPC and AWAIR, and disseminate those religious beliefs and political views in their classrooms. Its attempt at indoctrination goes beyond presenting religious myths as matters of fact, and it also includes some bizarre history. For example, one article, ascribed to Abdallah Hakim Quick and Audrey Shabbas, is titled "Early Muslim Exploration Worldwide: Evidence of Muslims in the New World Before Columbus." The article claims that Muslims from Europe were the first to sail across the Atlantic and land in the New World, starting in 889. Not to be outdone by any of the early European explorers, the article also claims that West African Muslims had not only spread throughout South and Central America but had also reached Canada, intermarrying with the Iroquois and Algonquin nations so that, much later, early English explorers were to meet "Iroquois and Algonquin chiefs with names like Abdul-Rahim and Abdallah Ibn Malik."

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The idea that English explorers met native Indian chiefs with Muslim names in the middle of the Northeast woodlands sounds almost like something a Hollywood film writer dreamed up for a spoof. What is most astonishing about this "historical information" is that it seems not to have been recognized as fake history by all the satisfied teachers that MEPC claims have participated in its workshops over the years. At least no complaints have reached local newspapers or state departments of education, so far as it can be determined. The current version of the *Notebook* continues the practice that CQE noted in 1990—no evidence or documentation to support key historical "facts" that serve to advance their political views or religious beliefs. One can only wonder if this has ever been questioned by the teachers who use its materials, or if they feel they must agree to any claim made by Muslims as an "alternative perspective" or risk being labeled insensitive, Eurocentric, or racist.

Interestingly, this particular bit of fake history may soon be cleaned up at the request of the Algonquin Nation itself. In 2003, the Algonquin Nation Secretariat, in Quebec, became aware of the

academic travesty being committed in its name (i.e., English explorers meeting Algonquin chiefs with Muslim names) and issued an alert on November 28, 2003, “to state that there is no credible evidence to support these theories, in the archival record, academic study, or in oral history” and that “we are extremely concerned that such nonsense would be circulated as curriculum intended for use in schools.”¹³ The Secretariat calls upon the sponsors of the *Arab World Studies Notebook* to render an “explanation and an apology” for “material that is so patently untrue and academically indefensible.”

The Modern Middle East

The Modern Middle East is a supplemental curriculum that has been approved by the California State Department of Education for purchase with state funds. An analysis by the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) in the San Francisco Bay Area can be found at www.jcrc.org/israel/tci.htm. This material is published in Rancho Cordova, California, by Teachers’ Curriculum Institute (TCI), an organization whose self-description is drenched in constructivist jargon. TCI publishes history and social studies curricula (History Alive for grades 5-12; and Social Studies Alive for K-2) that use an approach to learning consisting of “a series of instructional practices that allows students with multiple intelligences to ‘experience’ history.” According to its pub-

lisher, the goal of this curriculum is to “engage students in the history of the Middle East through a process of self-discovery and interactive pedagogy.”

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be fixed and should not be used. For example, it erroneously asserts that the Arabs of Israel/Palestine are indigenous to that area and trace their roots back to the Philistines (unlike the *Notebook*, which claims the Canaanites as their ancestors).¹⁴ One learning activity, designed to prepare students for the lessons on the Arab-Israeli conflict, divides students into two groups, one called Jeds and the other Pads, representing Jews and Palestinians in the early twentieth century. The teacher is told to arrange the furniture in the classroom so that the Pads are crowded in a small space into which the Jeds demand to enter. Assuming the role of “the Great Power,” the teacher is told to favor the Jeds’ arguments and ignore the Pads’ seemingly reasonable opposition to the Jeds’ entry. The obvious purpose of the activity is to elicit students’ feelings about the unfair treatment accorded to the Pads and pre-

dispose them to be sympathetic to one side and negative to the other before they have learned anything about the actual conflict in the Middle East.

In response to a parent complaint about this material, the Santa Rosa school district convened a committee of district teachers to review it. According to a JCRC staffer, the committee expressed “significant concerns” about the materials but decided that the curriculum could be used if it were “balanced with other materials.”¹⁵ Although I suspect that the teachers were reluctant to make a negative judgment about information in curricular materials supposedly reviewed by scholars, especially on a controversial topic, their rationale warrants comment. It suggests that it doesn’t matter if facts are mingled with non-facts (and an unscrupulous pedagogy to boot) so long as the mixture fairly reflects a contribution from all relevant parties. A “moral” imperative to give all relevant parties an equal voice in providing information for the study of a political conflict, even if some (or most) of the voices contribute their favorite falsehood, may turn out to be the chief legacy of the constructivist and multicultural movements in schools of education.

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ISLAM: A Simulation of Islamic History and Culture, 610-1100

ISLAM: A Simulation of Islamic History and Culture, 610-1100, was published in 1991 by Interaction Publishers of Carlsbad, California (see www.textbookleague.org/114islam.htm for William Bennetta’s review). This is promoted as a curriculum manual for history teachers in grades 6-12 and consists of enough material for a three-week program of instruction in which students “simulate becoming Muslims” and “learn about the history and culture of Islam.” However, like the *Notebook*, it falsifies history with ludicrous claims and anachronisms. As Bennetta notes, students are to pretend to be living during the time of Muhammad (i.e., early in the seventh century), are to form teams representing “early Islamic cities” such as Jerusalem and Cordova, and are to engage in a camel caravan-race from Cordova to Mecca. It is not clear why students start from Cordova, Bennetta points out, since the Muslim invasion of Spain didn’t take place until the eighth century, nor how the camels will cross the Straits of Gibraltar. But these are minor problems in what Bennetta documents as a web of outright lies and other devices for deceiving students. The manual acknowledges

that two Muslim agencies were involved in the development of this program—the Islamic Education and Information Center in San Jose, California, and the Council on Islamic Education in Los Angeles. In Bennetta’s judgment, *ISLAM: A Simulation* is nothing but a religious publication designed to use unsuspecting classroom teachers as agents for propagating Islam.

African American History

The teachers’ manuals described here were sent free to thousands of educators throughout the country. One accompanied a series of programs provided by the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) that met academic standards, the other accompanied a commercial film that fictionalized a real historical event. It is not known to what extent teachers have used these manuals or the video or film they were intended to accompany. We do know, though, that teachers have been increasingly encouraged by their professional organizations to use videos of television programs or films in their classes to compensate for the inability of many high school students to read their history textbooks or primary documents with adequate comprehension. But, again, teachers are largely on their own in appraising the quality of the information given in a video or film or in an accompanying manual.

Africans in America: America’s Journey Through Slavery

In October 1998, PBS offered a series of four 90-minute programs titled *Africans in America: America’s Journey Through Slavery*, produced by WGBH in Boston. It was accompanied by a “companion” book that corresponds to the four programs. Sheldon Stern, formerly the historian at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, notes in a review published in *The Textbook Letter*, September-October 1998, (<http://www.textbookleague.org/94afro.htm>) that “the series is well done, the companion book follows the series closely,

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and both are worthy resources for anyone who wants to learn or to teach about the real historical record on slavery.” However, the *Teacher’s Guide* that was published in conjunction with the series and mailed to many teachers in the schools is, in Stern’s judgment, “the worst example of educational disinformation and historical deception that I have seen in several

years.” For example, the *Teacher’s Guide* says that the Africans arriving in the English colonies in America were “abducted from their homelands,” omitting mention of indigenous African slavery, the

indigenous African slave trade, and the roles played by African royal families and African slave-traders. *The Teacher's Guide* also ignores the global context for slavery, omitting mention of the fact that most slaves shipped to the Western Hemisphere went to colonies in South America and the Caribbean, and that Islamic countries in the Old World imported more African slaves than did all the New World countries and colonies combined. It even goes so far as to suggest that the teacher conduct an exercise based on an imaginary eighteenth-century debate over the proposition that "American slavery is an oxymoron," with students role-playing prominent Founders and others as debaters. Stern was told by a staff member at WGBH that the *Teacher's Guide* was produced by a group of five Massachusetts educators described as "multiple-perspective educational activists." These activists, it seems, wrote the "lessons" in the *Guide* before the television series was finished.

A Kit to Promote Amistad

A kit produced in 1997 by Lifetime Learning Systems (Stamford, Connecticut) and sent free to twenty thousand educators across the country promoted the film *Amistad* as historically accurate. Yet *Amistad* actually fictionalizes the events that began in the Caribbean in 1839, when some fifty African slaves seized the Spanish schooner *Amistad*, and that ended in 1841 when the Supreme Court, paying heed to the arguments of John Quincy Adams, decided that the slaves (who had been intercepted by a Navy ship and held in the U.S.) were now freemen.

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students to see it (at special group rates). The promotion effort was exposed by film critic Michael Medved in the December 8, 1997, issue of *USA Today*, who noted among other things that the main character never existed and that it wasn't possible for John Quincy Adams to have received judicial advice from the leader of the Africans to win the case.¹⁶ In this example, classroom teachers were being manipulated to teach bogus history in order to sell a commercial product.

