

ACT! For America Houston / Sugar Land Chapter members recently attended a one day workshop at Houston Independent School District's headquarters titled "Understanding the Arab World and Islam"

The workshop (sponsored by the World Affairs Council of Houston) is part of a nationwide program by a non-profit group Arab World and Islamic Resources (www.awaironline.org) aimed at Middle and High School teachers in an effort to encourage them to approach teaching students about Arab studies and Islam using an Islamo-Centric viewpoint rather than a Euro-Centric view.

The presenter of the material was Ms. Audrey Shabbas founder of AWIR, using as course material the AWIR textbook Arab World Studies, published by Middle East Policy Council (www.mepec.org/main/main.asp)

Of the 65 attendees, most were High School teachers and most were social studies teachers. There were some Community College teachers present. There were no Elementary school teachers attending.

The Arab World Studies textbook, originally published before the September 11th terrorist attacks of 2001 and the Iraq war of 2003 runs about 500 pages and has sections devoted to the twentieth century: Muslims Worldwide, Jerusalem, Colonial Legacy, The U.S. and the Arab World, Oil, The Gulf War, The Question of Palestine. There are 102 pages essays, readings, lesson plans and resources.

Ms. Shabbas is no stranger to controversy and her Arab World Studies textbook was initially withdrawn, edited and re-released to remove her allegations that the Algonquin tribe of Native Americans were actually Muslims whose chief's real name were Abdul-Rahim and Abdallah Ibn Malik. The Algonquin Nation successfully commenced litigation in 2003 to prevent her book from being used, but not before she had distributed about 1,200 copies to teachers nationwide.

<http://washingtontimes.com/news/2004/apr/16/20040416-120208-4455r>

More controversy erupted in 2004 when the MEPC pitched this book to Tulsa, Oklahoma school officials, erroneously claiming that it had been adopted by the California Department of Education - a claim strenuously denied by the State of California.

<http://www.campus-watch.org/article/id/1325>

Indeed her presentation was definitely Islamo-Centric, to the point of being subversive. Much of the textbook details is how Islam and the Arab World merged into Middle Age Europe and the spin Ms. Shabbas places on events in History are frequently not factual, or interpretive at best.

Part of the subversion employed is that although our local schools, or our State Board of Education has not adopted the textbook, several handouts were given (some copied from the textbook) as guides for lesson plans. These handouts included political agitprop regarding the war on Terror, a thesis on the inevitability of our withdrawal in shame from the Iraqi War Theatre and historically inaccurate versions of the Israeli/Palestinian situation. Handouts from one of AWIR's sponsors (Aramco) were also included, as was instructional material on how to make Islamic style clothing, art, music & food together with details to educators on how to incorporate those items in general lesson plans, not necessarily within the framework of an Arab studies curriculum.

During the lunch break, a movie was shown "West Bank Story" a light hearted parody of forbidden love between an Israeli soldier and a Palestinian girl, following the lines of "West Side Story".

A short presentation was also made by a member of staff of the World Affairs Council that detailed life in modern day Egypt. The most enlightening part being a question from one of the teachers in response to the claim that Egyptians celebrated Easter:

Teacher: "Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ?"

Presenter: "No [lengthy explanation given as to why not]"

Teacher: “Then how can you celebrate Easter?”

The following pages are notes taken by ACT! For America Houston / Sugar Land Chapter members whilst Ms. Shabbas was making her presentation.

Please remember when you are reading this report, it is not a thesis or a speech or an article in a newspaper. THIS IS WHAT TEACHERS ARE ACTUALLY BEING TAUGHT TO TEACH TO YOUR CHILDREN.

[Note: We are working on getting the handouts from the presentation into a legible format to place on our website]

- Semites are Arabs; Aramaic & Hebrews [Thereby making it impossible for Arabs to be Anti-Semitic i.e. Anti-Jewish as they are Semites themselves]
- Refuses to acknowledge historical existence of Israel and continually refers to area as Palestine, even when discussing Israeli specific matters
- Hebrew is a language that is derived from Arabic
- We should encourage our students not to look at countries in the Arab World in the terms of good guys/bad guys but we should let the people of the area tell their story.
- The terms “Middle East”; “Near East”; “Far East” are incorrect and are the result of European colonialism
- Afghanistan & Pakistan are to be excluded from Arab World studies as they are not in the Arab World [Meaning that Afghanistan & Pakistan are treated as if their population & leaders have had no influence in shaping the area being studied, the events taking place in the area nor the behavior of those living in the “Arab World”]
- Hebrew is a new language and thus not as important as Arabic
- Ignores any references to Israelites; Hebrews or Jews when discussing cultures that existed pre 7th Century (arrival of Islam)
- Describes non-Islamic cultures as absorbing Islam, never being conquered.
- Further describes the same process as Arabization and contextualizes that as Arab culture precedes any others in the region, the inevitability of this same process is not surprising.
- Arab identity supersedes religious fervor therefore Islamic factions are not a basis for violence in Iraq, which is an excuse/creation of the Western media.
- The Western Media have created the impression that the Kurds are the good guys and the Sunni/Shia are the bad guys by wrongly portraying Kurds as helpless Christians, whereas in fact they are Muslims [Only partially correct as Kurds predated Islam, and not all Kurds consider themselves Arabs]
- CIA claim the Kurds were not gassed by Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, but by Iran using US supplied poison gas [A single source theory being promoted by a retired CIA operative who is also known as a conspiracy theory protagonist, but gets good coverage]
- Sunni & Shia muslims have no distinction between places of worship and pray peacefully alongside each other.
- Friday sermons in mosques are community announcements and not used for theological instruction, unlike Christian or Jewish places of worship.
- Describes the present government of Iraq as “the U.S. Government in Iraq” and continues to refer to them as such.
- Women wearing a veil is not an issue in Arab countries and it is not a religious mandate – it’s a free will choice whether to wear one or not [We are sure that Iranian and Saudi Arabian women will be glad to hear this]
- The Holocaust is an imported problem that has affected the Arab world and it belongs in Europe.
- The English Royal Family has no right to rule Britain because they are Germans.
- International boundaries are not sacred and we can thus educate students to think about how they can help people redraw those boundaries
- As an example of both how artificial boundaries are and how colonial Europe disregarded the people in the colonies was Queen Victoria gifting Prince Wilhelm of Germany Mount Kilimanjaro as a birthday gift. [This story has been debunked as romantic nonsense decades ago by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the German government, the Tanzanian government and the official history of the Mountain]
- Kamal Attaturk did not modernize or reform Turkey, he merely changed it

- Israel / Palestinian issues are discussed from the prism of the Intifada of 1990 onwards, and that the Oslo Accords of 1993 have no International Legitimacy as Yassir Arafat was not authorized to speak on behalf of the Palestinian people [Directly contradicts a 1974 agreement by the Arab League declaring the PLO as “the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian People]
- Arab World is only 430m people whereas the Muslim world is 1.3 billion, therefore Arabs represent only a small fraction of the worldwide Muslim population. [Completely ignores the influence of the Arab World on Islam]
- Koran returns to the concept of God being male [Inference being that Christianity and Judaism are responsible for ‘watering down’ God’s image]
- The purity of the Koran is because it was written down within 150 years of it being revealed as God’s word to Mohammed, as opposed to Old & New Testaments which had taken centuries to write down, and thus had been corrupted by the Jews & Christians.
- The Koran was one last time that God would give his word to the world, on the understanding that it would not be corrupted this time
- The “People of the Book” that the Koran refers to are Jews, Christians, Muslims and an unknown entity called the Sabaens. [That’s not what the Koran we have read have says – comment made presumably to deflect any application of the discrimination permitted in the Koran to unbelievers i.e. People of the Book]
- All Arabic is written or read in one case only. Mixing an upper or lower case letter changes the meaning of the words
- Intention is a very powerful concept in Islam and is one of the three things one will be judged upon come the Day of Reckoning (along with what one did and what one didn’t do). Therefore as long as one intended to do something, it will be considered as done. Example given was if there was an intention to go on Hajj to Macca (one of the five pillars) but didn’t get to go, the intent to go was good enough to count.
- [In answer to question as to whether Muslims believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ] Jesus was not crucified on the cross, God substituted another person in Jesus’ place, therefore there was no resurrection.
- [Immediately followed by a comment that] Egyptians celebrate Easter[
- The Hadiths (collected life stories and saying about Mohammed) were used to determine what was true about God’s word, giving rise to the Bible not being so.
- Green has no theological significance – it was merely Mohammed’s favorite color
- Islamic thought process and reading is right to left. To read & write left to right is EuroCentric and not correct.
- Christians get to enjoy Ramadan and it’s customs in Egypt [...whether they want to or not!]
- A hajib is not required dress in Egypt
- Refers to marriage by choice as an arranged marriage (I arranged it myself!) [This fosters the acceptability of a custom considered backwards in US Society]
- Movie shown was either harmless fun – or equal opportunity stereotype offender. Tame enough but interesting to note that Israeli soldiers are clearly positioned manning a checkpoint that is outside of Israel. [Occupiers]
- Invented similarities between Arabic Proverbs and English Language proverbs (some of which had not been heard of before).
- Denigrates a photo montage of all past Presidents of the USA with a comment that they did not all have international significance
- Islamic presence in Spanish Middle Ages is whitewashed and avoids any mention of conquering, war, subjugation etc.

- Encouraged a Middle Eastern Banquet at school using Islamic art (simple art projects but stressed that there are Islamic rules about what one can draw or not draw)
- Columbus' voyages of discovery were funded by the confiscated treasure of Muslims & Jews after Ferdinand & Isabella banished them in 1492 [omits the fact that before that date Muslim treasury was funded by punitive taxes on Christians and Jews – Jizyya]
- Islam was invited into Spain and Portugal at the request of Christians in the North who wanted protection.
- Portrayal of the globe as “up” not “down” leads to supremacist thinking by Northern Europeans [she really said that!]
- King Roger of Sicily employed many Arabs because they were literate and well versed in government and world travel [true] so much so that Sicily became the head of the Holy Roman Empire [false - a King of Sicily was never one of Holy Roman Emperors, although Sicily sometimes was part of HRE, but it was also sometimes not]
- The golden age of Jewry was under Muslim rule
- The Medici family/dynasty were actually Muslims sold into papal slavery by pirates after their expulsion from Spain in 1492, thereby fostering the intellectual ideas that became the Renaissance [The Medici family had been established as a major family in Italy for 150 years by 1500]
- The reason so many Jews settled in Arab lands is that the Caliph in Istanbul requested Jews to settle there after they were expelled from Spain in 1492
- Muslim soldiers showed mercy to vanquished armies
- Muslims expelled from Spain in 1492 created a school in Paris called the Sorbonne [This news would have come as a massive shock to Robert de Sorbonne's descendents who would have known that at the time of his death in 1272 Sorbonne had established the school that bears his name as one of the premier theological universities in Europe. The official website of the Sorbonne makes no mention of any significant events between the death of Sorbonne and the restoration of the school by Richelieu in the 1600s]
- There is no missionary movement in Islam [Three comments 1. She had better tell all the BAM converts in American Prisons and the Muslim Chaplaincy program 2. Why does the word dawaa exist? And finally 3. What exactly was happening in this presentation then]
- Illiteracy today in the developing world is a result of European Colonial Rule
- Maimonides was discussed as an Arabic speaking Jew who because of his 'religion and science can be combined' theories (not uncommon at that time) was ostracized by most of the intellectual world. No mention is made of his contribution to Jewish teachings or scholarly works which permit him to be considered one of the greatest Rabbis ever.