Cultivating an American Worldview: A Comparative Analysis of Perspectives of the Middle East, Arabs, and Muslims in US Public High School “World History” Curricula

by

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Abstract

The institution of public education in democratic societies has been used as an effective tool for regulating national identity. In the last four decades, “World History” courses have become a fundamental part of mainstream American social studies. These courses offer a standardized narrative regarding the histories of non-Western regions. This study explores high school social studies curricula in Texas, New York, California, Virginia, and North Dakota focusing on how the frameworks address Islamic, Middle Eastern, and North African history. The analysis addresses the state frameworks’ ability to effectively present Islamic and Arab history within proper context and critiques various problematic paradigms rooted in modernization theory and orientalism. In critiquing the content of these frameworks and contextualizing policy in American public education, this paper intends to scrutinize the challenges of teaching the Middle East in the United States public high schools.
Acknowledgments

Writing this thesis has been a difficult journey, teaching me about my boundaries and how I can overcome them. This is a project I was first inspired to do as a fifteen year old in New York, intrigued by my social studies courses. It has been a gratifying experience to be able to finally execute my first dream of researching the Middle East in secondary education. I would like to express my gratitude toward my supervisor Dr. James Reilly for his immense patience in this process. Dr. Reilly was the first to encourage me to take on the arduous task of writing a thesis.

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Chapter 1

American Patriotism: Protecting Borders and Making Citizens

The institution of public education is historically a tool of the nation-state to consolidate national attitudes and ideologies. In liberal democracies especially, education is useful for legitimizing systems and maintaining order. This paper attempts to understand historical narratives of the Middle East, Arabs, and Muslims published in public school curricula in the United States with a specific focus on high school world history courses. World History in the discipline of Social Studies in the US is still quite new within the mainstream, as the subject was implemented into state required courses only after the 1980’s. Educators’ interaction with history in social studies has a foundation in established Western historical thinking practices as propagated in universities and colleges during previous decades. Significant policy changes have been made to make social studies curricula more inclusive since the 1980’s, however the Middle East remains a region misunderstood in American culture through stereotypes perpetuated in popular culture and mass media.

One major issue with teaching “World History” is that these courses define human history as universally occurring temporally and spatially, which in turn designates specific civilizations to have had more influential significance on humanity than others. Modern perceptions of the present day world order affect interpretations of the past and may result in inaccurate representations of other periods. This is a dilemma often faced by professionalized historians and social studies educators in an effort to produce coherent historical narratives. Considering these obstacles to teaching “World History” as designed for the masses, this paper questions the place the Middle East and North Africa has in the American public through its educative material. Furthermore, do these curricula challenge or bolster biases and stereotypes expressed by the American public? In comparing the presently used social studies frameworks of five states, one finds that the Middle East does not possess a historical presence that exists continually over time. Instead the histories of non-Western cultures are taught in relation to Western perception of time rather than within isolation of their own authentic role in human history. Each social studies framework generally demonstrates patriotic American nationalism rooted in Western historical thinking. It has been disappointing to discover that the
It is important to discuss American patriotic nationalism and its relationship to White Protestant Christian identity in order to assess the efficacy of public education in teaching non-Western regions such as the Middle East. If American states intend to expand its inclusion of minority histories in social studies curricula, is there a need to prioritize the Middle East and North Africa at all? Arab-Americans and Muslim-Americans still account for only a small percentage of the population, therefore is it truly necessary to allot greater portions of limited space in frameworks for this part of the world? I would argue that in today’s political climate, it has become increasingly necessary to demand well-informed and accurate portrayals of Middle Eastern and North African history in social studies courses. Muslims only account for 0.9 percent of the US population according to the CIA factbook.\(^1\) A report on Arab households published by the US Census Bureau in 2013 estimated 1.5 million people “with Arab ancestry” were in the United States.\(^2\) Despite the fact that Arabs account for only a small portion of the population, the United States government continues to engage financially and militarily in Middle Eastern countries therefore affecting domestic responses to foreign policy. Public schools are spaces wherein stereotypes can be disrupted, although perhaps it is unrealistic to expect American state agencies and local school boards to promote any social studies curriculum that entirely questions and undermines the foundation of Western hegemony.

In response to a diversifying population, some educators and policy makers have indeed attempted to move toward more multicultural pluralistic education which addresses the histories of their minority students.\(^3\) Furthermore, scholars in the social studies field hoped to utilize the schools to foster better understandings of the Middle East and Islam such as Stephen Phelps who states in “Critical literacy: Using Nonfiction to Learn about Islam” promoting the benefits of multicultural literature: “accurate information about people of diverse backgrounds can promote

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understanding, appreciation, and tolerance within our pluralistic society.”

Phelps is referenced in Adam Klepper’s study of effective social studies courses, where he discusses the outcomes of educating students on Islam and Muslims. Klepper is an educator at a private institution in the Midwest which seeks to bridge Catholic and Muslim communities. He was motivated to conduct a survey over the course of teaching a social studies class on Middle Eastern history. He sought to test if a social studies course could effectively alter students’ existing perceptions of Islamic beliefs often misinterpreted in mass media such as the religion’s treatment of women and the practice of jihad. What he found is that students did indeed “show more tolerance toward Muslims,” although their opinions on specific topics might contradict and the results were largely dependant on Klepper’s efficacy in dispelling certain myths and stereotypes.

Nethertheless, Klepper’s work is indicative of how more targeted attention in composing a curriculum can effectively alter the outcomes of a social studies course. Even more importantly, if high school is the final time students are exposed to Middle East studies, these curricula become a critical tool in deconstructing public opinion of the “other.”

Klepper had the opportunity to teach a course more specifically focused on one region because he was teaching at a Catholic school. However public school social studies curricula do not have this advantage as many “world history” courses must cover the entirety of human history within a school year while balancing literary standards and testing requirements. This is difficult to undertake, therefore it is not uncommon to see that portion of other non-Western regions’ histories is reduced in state frameworks. Furthermore as will be discussed more extensively, the highly localized, politicized, and bureaucratic nature of approving curriculum inhibits the extent to which social studies courses can address topics in a critical manner. Prior to discussing the education structure in the United States, it is important to contextualize the relationship the American government has had with the Middle East throughout the twentieth century. In looking at American military and financial connections to Arab countries, interpretations of Middle Eastern history in state curricula are clarified.

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6 Ibid, 120.
A Brief History of American Foreign Policy in the Middle East

The United States and the Arab World

In terms of policy, the US has not always viewed the Middle East in a continuous monolithic way. The US’s relationship with the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) differed from that of Britain and France although Americans were indeed heavily influenced by their European contemporaries’ politics. The US’s initial notable encounters with the region were for commercial and religious reasons during the nineteenth century. The State Department did not initially have a significant presence in the region but the interwar period saw an increase in American missionary trips. Reverend James Barton, secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in 1918, had envisioned the Christian transformation of the Ottoman Empire. Initial missions failed at converting Muslims and consequently, the second round of missions focused on establishing education institutions as well as enhancing already existing Arab-Christian communities. American missionary ties to the US government did heavily influence its future relationship with the majority of the Arab region.

The United States government began to invigorate its foreign policy in MENA following WWI as President Woodrow Wilson’s interest grew in order to inform his Fourteen Points Program. The dissolving of the Ottoman Empire and the end of US isolationism opened up new doors for American opportunists to lay claims in establishing hegemony in the Middle East. Wilson and his successors displayed an increased interest in interacting with Middle Eastern states, even going so far as to apply for a mandate. During WWII, the US began investment in intelligence operations within Syria and diplomatic meetings in Saudi Arabia among other

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8 Ibid, 11.
9 Ibid, 11.
11 Osamah F. Khalil, 34.
endeavors. Much of early American Middle East policy was based in orientalist reports by academics which largely reflected attitudes commonly found in Britain and France.

Despite “Orientalism as policy,” the opportunistic US government saw the potential of profitability from mutually beneficial relationships with early Middle Eastern governments. This is best exemplified by the surge of diplomatic relations with the new Saudi Arabian Kingdom during the second World War. Additionally, the United States invested in intelligence collection through the Office of Strategic Services (OSS). It should also be noted that the US’s shift toward a greater interest in the Middle East was part of a larger phenomenon wherein the American government was evolving to secure its newfound role of “world superpower” following WWI and continuing during the Cold War. The US was concerned with establishing its economic and political hegemony in various regions of the world, not just the Middle East. For these new Arab states, the outcome of becoming “oil rich” was that the US would be to become more invested in political and economic decisions.

The Iranian Revolution in 1979 proved to be a catalyst in prompting the US to take on a more militaristic and antagonistic approach to the Middle East shifting away from its more calculated economically driven foreign policy. The US at this point had already invested significant intelligence funding to maintaining pro-American leaders in new nation-states such as Iran. The turn toward anti-American sentiment in Iran would resonate among Muslims throughout the region, and the US’s resistance to retreating from Middle Eastern politics would continue into the 21st century thus leading into the “War on Terror” era. The US’s motivations for maintaining a strong presence were for the sake of securing their oil needs and their partnership with Israel. The Middle East became synonymous with “enemy of the American nation” when the United States government began to actively involve itself in the region’s political processes. The rhetoric of Muslims as the enemy is a recent phenomenon, although it has now (to some effect) replaced the “Red Scare” in the American public.

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12 Osamah F. Khalil, 47-49, 66.
13 Ibid, 11.
14 Ibid, 10.
15 Ibid, 47.
For the US, Islam served as yet another ideology which could be presented as a threat to Evangelical Christian conservatism often conflated with American political idealism, thus motivating a new politically charged vilification of a foreign people. This interpretation of the Islamophobia machine is supported by Deepa Kumar and Nathan Leans. As Protestant Christian fear of the “other” amplified the public response to war in Arab states, the US government actively engaged in emphasizing the validity of an “Islamic Scare” through its rhetoric surrounding the participants of terrorism and identifying Muslim Arab terrorists as anachronistic barbarians idealizing an archaic past. Pundits, politicians, and conservative think tanks alike all expressed outrage toward the threat of “sharia” to Western democracy. An exploration of “World History” curricula by surveying the presentation of MENA in history spanning thousands of years, shows that American identity is largely based on a patriotism that asserts the inferiority of other culture, whether culturally, socially, or politically. Often, democracy is epitomized by the US according to these state documents. This identity is then processed and mass produced via schools as Michael Apple explains:

“Underpinning much of the neoliberal and neoconservative discourse about education -- the supposed decline in standards, the call for the return to the “Western tradition”, [etc.], -- lies a vision of the other. It symbolizes an immense set of anxieties that are used not only to build new hegemonic alliance around conservative policies, but also to structure our understanding of daily experience.”

The Fear Machine: Islamophobia as a Classic American Tradition

Antagonism toward the “other” in the US is not a recent phenomenon, and it is important to distinguish that the “other” was constantly redefined depending on the social context of the time. Of course, the racist orientalist core of Islamophobia in undeniable; however I contend that the phenomenon is actually very consistent with the American practice of sensationalizing fear of the foreign. In Nathan Lean’s *The Islamophobia Industry*, he explores the concept of “monsters” to trace the United States’s interaction with groups labeled as threats to American livelihood and American idealism. He provides examples throughout American history beginning in the late 1700’s where there were concerns regarding the illuminati and the Jacobins,

then the Catholic scare in 1800’s, the Red scare during the 1960’s, and finally the trend of Islamophobia following the Iranian Hostage crisis. What all of these “scares” had in common was a threat to Protestant Christian or American values. The two were often used synonymously when speaking toward whatever was accused of posing a threat. The Catholic scare is rather interesting to compare with present day Islamophobia because the rhetoric used is rather similar.

During the 1800’s the meteoric rise of European Catholic immigrants spurred a movement of xenophobia. Despite that the fear of Catholics emerged in private religious spaces, Protestant church goers were faced with politicized sermons: in 1835 Presbyterian pastor Lyman Beecher “emphasized the anti-American nature of the religion that a “A crop of men acting systemically and perseveringly for their own ends may ‘inflame and divide the nation [America], break the bond of our union, and thrown down our free institutions.’”18 To Beecher, the US was truly a beacon of hope for non-Catholic Christians and the inclusion of new European immigrants into the American social fabric would mean the reorganizing of Protestants’ political-social identity. Lean explains such resistance to immigration as the result of the “American Revolution, which heightened a strong sense of national unity, [and] also caused Americans to be more cognizant of immigrants.”19 Christian conservatism has commonly been used interchangeably with political language regardless of who the threat was. In February 1950, Catholic US senator Joseph McCarthy said, “Today we are engaged in a final, all-out battle between communistic atheism and Christianity.”20 Now in the 2010’s, Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council, (identified as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center), says “Are they [Muslims] really praying for our nation?”21 In recent years, Protestant Christianity has had immense influence on policy and the direction of political parties. The emergence of Islam as the most recent American fear in the last decade means that inflammatory language and discrimination toward the Middle East will only proliferate. Yet it is clear that this phenomenon is fundamentally a quality of American national identity, and that Islamophobia is yet another manifestation of the long-standing tradition of inculcating paranoia when faced with the “other” whatever that may be.

18 Nathan Lean, 26.
19 Ibid, 25.
21 Ibid, 94.
Power and Teaching: The Politicization of American Education

Education: A Tool for Informed Citizenship

The ideal place for cultivating a standardized national identity in a democratic society are public schools. This was understood quite distinctively after WWII, but the origins of American public education are far less restricted. One must first understand the structure of the American education system to better contextualize the status of social studies in the United States. Based on the study of public education in the United States since the colonial period, it is clear that the issue of religion is concentrated within the battle for ideological hegemony in schools. Furthermore, the structure of federal, state, and local administration in addition to the issue of the disseminating of funds is particularly essential to the task of balancing public opinions when writing a social studies curricula.

The US government’s interaction with its public education system is connected to the debate surrounding the balance between federalism and higher state power. While not unique to the US, the issues which often affect confederations are further exacerbated due to the sheer number of states, each with different levels of representation, funding qualification, and tax capabilities. Each state agency receives varied amounts of funding from the federal Department of Education, and this can greatly determine the efficacy of a state’s ability to employ good teachers and provide attractive benefits. Thus, the quality of education in Oklahoma and New York can be varied. Should a state struggle with education funding, otherwise good teachers may leave to other states for better employment therefore affecting residents’ long term education and future.

During the colonial period, settlers predominantly decided on the content of curricula for young students and there was resistance toward any over extended authority from higher governing powers. Education specialist Jennifer E. Rippner attributes this to the existence of numerous varying religious groups in the colonies. Having possibly escaped religious persecution in Europe, American colonies served as a safe haven to relay the settlers’ own doctrines to their children. Various Christian religious groups were adamant in maintaining control over the schools and restraining governing bodies from becoming involved in regulating

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these practices. Consequently, education was not yet “public” in the modern sense which perceives schooling as a required government service. Rather the colonial order was based in “family, community, church” and public schooling was an institution that emerged out of necessity to account for short labor shortages. In seventeenth century England there was the tradition of educating children in the home rather than in school houses. However the new conditions of settlement life changed custom: “the inability and unwillingness of families to continue traditional functions led to the reliance on another institutional device, the school... [the] first public schools in the context of social change and [an] attempt to address that change are significant to our understanding of American public schooling.” What had occurred was the transferral of a private practice into a public one, as the duties traditionally held by parents were placed on instructors from outside the family unit providing collective rather than individualized study. This newfound practice of sending children to school however, would not lead to the secularization of beliefs as communities believed that school houses could become an extension of the home where religious idealisms were relayed. Therefore, the “function” of public schools was to instruct the same values based in Christian “virtues.” The secularization of American society would occur later during the nineteenth century, but Christian identity is something that has never been fully separate from the American psyche.

What is most significant in the American past is that founding members never actively pursued the creation of a nationalized public schooling system, and this is exemplified by the fact that education is not mentioned in the United States Constitution or the earlier Articles of Confederation. This decision was purposeful as founding fathers deemed such an inclusion to be an unnecessary power for the federal government to hold. While there were some debates about a national system, it never resulted in political action during the early days of the United States. Thomas Jefferson’s thoughts to establish and create a system wherein American republican values could be instilled systematically was an early vision of a national system but he was also concerned with overstepping boundaries between federal and state authorities. He was known to associate informed democratic action and rhetoric surrounding “freedom” with an educated

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26 Ibid, 52.
27 Jennifer E. Rippner, 15.
citizenry. Resistance to such ideas from churches and local leaders would prevent any substantial nationalization discussion. In the eighteenth century, European immigrants from various religious groups fully endorsed this fragmented approach to education so as to sustain their personal control over their children’s beliefs. This phenomenon of Christian groups affecting national education is one that would continue to resonate in the twenty-first century.

Below the federal level, states had begun to establish individual institutions and systems for education quite early as exemplified by the New York’s Board of Regents in 1784. The roles and tasks that each state designated for their education boards varied depending on respective local needs. By the 1800’s, every state possessed some type of administrative body to supervise education activity. Drastic socioeconomic changes as a result of the Civil War marked the beginning of racialized debates in public education policy discourse. Of course, the education of slaves was extremely limited and their eventual emancipation initiated a wealth of political disputes between the North and South. The public education system in the United States had its beginnings in serving White Christian demands and needs. This legacy of this establishment remains at the core of the system’s functionality thus deeply affecting the states’ treatment of Black and later on, Brown students. Until the desegregation of schools more than a century later, Black communities were left to establish their own institutions driving a cultural division between racial groups’ education. In addition to the separation of White and Black people, urbanization was also a new phenomenon in the 1800’s which altered the relationship between family and school. John Walker comments on this period: “what we see...is the further erosion of the educative function of the family.” It was during the nineteenth century that states began to treat basic forms of education as a right for its citizenry, and gradually over time these institutions evolved into expansive agencies.

The federal Department of Education would not be established until 1979, after which there have been greater attempts to centralize the direction of education. The fundamental debate among American political figures on how to balance state and federal power is one that

28 John H. Walker, 54.
29 Ibid, 65.
30 John H. Walker, 63.
31 John H. Walker, 65.
32 Jennifer Rippner, 16.
has continued to resonate in US politics since the country’s establishment. This contentious
debate is not one limited to the education sector either. Despite the divisive nature of US politics, when looking at curricula there are clear similarities across state lines in the language used regarding American nationalistic identity concerning how it should be manifested in young children.

The American education system as it is structured today is highly bureaucratic and purposely decentralized when compared to contemporary developed countries, thus explaining the present debate of moving toward a more nationalized system. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, there are a total of 130,000 public schools and 13,500 school districts. Each state currently has an agency which operates coordination with the federal Department of Education in order to decide on common core standards, funding, and national programs. At the local level, state governors and mayors have an important role in education policy in order align their economic goals with school districts. Lastly, local school boards hold the most direct control over curriculum as they decide how to acquire pedagogical material when adopting state policy standards, hiring teachers, distributing funding, etc. The resulting system in its entirety is an institution functioning around political ambition and ideological power struggles which affect the quality of education American students receive. Joel Spring comments on this:

The political content of the curriculum includes patriotic exercises, a national history, and national literature that emphasizes the role of the elite. In addition, the curriculum touts the superiority of the country’s economic and political systems and proclaims the inferiority of the other political and economic systems.

During the twentieth century American society experienced momentous cultural and political transformation, as the country revolutionized its perception of itself within a global context. Desegregation altered the functionality of government institutions, and a new wave of immigration introduced a new set of challenges. In regards to education, desegregation would

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33 Jennifer A. Ripper, 21.
34 Ibid, 82.
35 Joel Spring, The Conflict of Interests, 132-133.
36 Jennifer A. Ripper, 82.
37 Joel Spring, The Conflict of Interests, 35.
have the most disruptive effect.\textsuperscript{38} Michael W. Apple quotes John Fiske in his book \textit{Knowledge, Power, and Education}:

Knowledge is never neutral, it never exists in an empiricist, objective relationship to the real. Knowledge is power, and the circulation of knowledge is part of the social distribution of power. The discursive power to construct a commonsense reality that can be inserted into cultural and political life is central in the social relationship of power.\textsuperscript{39}

The relationship between knowledge and power becomes a contentious point of debate as American policy makers and educators begin to critique the content of what is being taught in classrooms, especially to Black students after desegregation and brown students after new immigration. The racialized biases of curricula and textbooks became the center of criticism as neoconservative intellectuals, humanists, and economic modernizers have fought to sustain Western historical thinking despite the rise of multiculturalism in education policy.\textsuperscript{40} Social conditions are always reflected in the study of social studies as policy makers are often the enablers of problematic divisive policy which affect marginalized groups. The role of social studies education is to simultaneously stimulate an attachment to American patriotism, which emphasizes the right to the pursuit of happiness whilst also illuminating a past which offers a starkly different reality.

The Textbook Industry

The final component to contextualizing social studies in the US is the importance of textbooks to the subject. For many teachers it is where they begin their planning for lessons in accordance to the state framework.\textsuperscript{41} The issue with national textbooks emerges due to the nature of the industry, as publishing companies are naturally dependent on business with larger school districts. The consequence of this order was that Texas has had substantial domination in the direction of the textbook industry.\textsuperscript{42} When observing the debates surrounding the “political content” of textbooks, the rivalry between multicultural education advocates and Christian

\textsuperscript{38} Jennifer A. Rippner, 41.
\textsuperscript{40} Michael W. Apple, \textit{Knowledge, Power, and Education}, 179.
\textsuperscript{42} Joel Spring, \textit{Conflicts of Interests}, 169.
conservatives protesting “anti-Americanism” is pronounced.\textsuperscript{43} As discussed above, Christian conservative and far-right groups are often mentioned as powerful forces in countering social studies education that emphasizes an approach to history far less Eurocentric. In a report published by a conservative independent group called the American Textbook Council (ATC), Gilbert T. Sewall evaluated Islam as it is portrayed in several national textbooks. Sewall denigrates the textbooks’ efforts to portray Islam as a religion rather than a polemical ideology, exposing his extreme biases. Sewall is quite direct when he states,

Textbook editors try to avoid any subject that could turn into a political grenade. Willingly, they adjust the definition of jihad and sharia or remove these words from lessons to avoid inconvenient truths that the editors fear activists will contest. Explicit facts that non-Muslims might find disturbing are varnished or deleted. Textbooks pare to a minimum such touchy subjects as Israel and oil as agents of change in the Middle East since 1945. Terrorism and Islam are uncoupled and the ultimate dangers of Islamic militancy hidden from view.\textsuperscript{44}

Sewall’s words above perhaps reveal his ignorance of the Middle East and Islam, therefore limiting the persuasiveness of his arguments. Expressions such as “ultimate dangers of Islamic militancy [are] hidden from view” echo tones expressed in far right circles in the US, and indicate a danger such ideas pose to education policy. Indeed it is important to properly frame jihad as an important concept in Islamic history, however intent is particularly important when narratives become politicized. Sewall’s analysis is problematic precisely because he is concerned with the cost of propagating supposedly sympathetic descriptions of Islam. In response to a 2005 controversy between parents and textbook choices in Lodi, California, Sewall writes “In Lodi some of the parents objected on religious grounds, motivated by their awareness that educators and courts have minimized the story of Christianity in the curriculum...one thoughtful parent was disturbed by the ‘unrestrained admiration’ that the textbook lavished on Islam in contrast to a sketchy and unsympathetic view of Europe and Western civilization.”\textsuperscript{45} In this case, parents have the ability to st\-

Sewall’s opinions are not on the fringe either and such cases are recurring in the United

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 91.
\textsuperscript{45} Gilbert E. Sewall, 7.
States. In Joel Spring’s discussion of the knowledge industry, he states, “the greatest challenge to the neutrality of school knowledge has occurred in court cases brought by Protestant fundamentalists.”

As the courts are generally only involved with public education if it concerns religious rights, Christian conservatives have been at the forefront of these legal battles. According to Linda Symcox, the Christian Coalition has had significant impact on Congress and politics in general. Furthermore, this Christian evangelical conservative movement has influenced the process of choosing textbooks for many years.

The ATC has garnered criticism from left circles however this did not prevent the influence of Sewall in the education sphere: “[Sewall’s] operation forms part of a larger strategy by conservative foundations to fund a cohort of neo-conservative reformers and pundits who then sit on each other’s boards, forming interlocking directorates.”

The ATC had been funded through the conservative William H. Donner Foundation and despite the fact the council essentially only employed Sewall, somehow he was granted a powerful voice in the debates against “politically correct” history. This is not to say that liberal circles did not engage in the same type of tactics to further their own agendas. However in regards to our concerns surrounding the representations of Muslims in public school textbooks, evaluating the ties between Christian conservative circles with the knowledge industry is particularly necessary.

In Alexander W. Wiseman’s article “Representations of Islam and Arab Societies in Western Secondary Textbooks,” he too emphasizes that although controversial, the ATC reports have been widely disseminated and read, thus indicating its influence. Sewall’s report is also referenced by Philadelphia based think tank Middle East Forum founded by Daniel Pipes. Pipes is referred to as a “hawkish commentator” by Zachary Lockman in “Behind the Battle Over Middle East Studies,” in other words the organizations that publish diatribes against the nuanced portrayals of Islam in textbooks were often tied to specific political goals. These were not figures interested in the historicity of narratives written in textbooks, rather they felt that Islam

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46 Joel Spring, Conflicts of Interest, 171.
48 Linda Symcox, 151.
49 Ibid, 83.
portrayed in any positive light was somehow the active repression of truth by “Islamic activists” using multiculturalism as a justification to do so. Another one of Sewall's articles called “Islam and the Textbooks” was published in the Middle East Forum’s journal *Middle East Quarterly*, where he writes using inflammatory language calling MESA “apologetics of Islamism” and the Council on Islamic Education an “agent of contemporary censorship.” The article notably bases its historical claims entirely on Bernard Lewis’s publications.

In studies conducted by academics, Islam and Arab society in American textbooks is indeed flawed but not in the way Sewall was contending. Wiseman conducted a comparative study of Islam and Arab societies in 72 Western textbooks. While the average total percentage of coverage was at 5.86 percent, coverage in American textbooks fell to 3.70 percent. This low percentage is striking when comparing it to that of the UK where coverage was at 13.78 percent. In response to these findings Wiseman argues,

> Given the U.S.’ ongoing involvement in the Middle East and the Gulf region in particular, the low percent coverage dedicated to the region suggests that there is perhaps a concerted effort to exclude information about Islam and Arab society, or to purposefully ignore the impact and importance of the U.S.’ involvement in two wars in Islamic and Arab regions.

Perhaps such a statement is an exaggerated conclusion, however Wiseman is correct in that it is surprising that the US does not address the Middle East more vigorously considering the country’s continued involvement in the region.

According to Wiseman’s study of textbooks, US books were more likely to mention Gulf Cooperation Council Countries, art and scientific contribution of Arabs, and Christians in relation to Arabs. The themes here are indicative of how the subjects US textbooks focus on, is largely tied to nature of America’s present day relationship with the Middle East. Overall, Wiseman states that US descriptions of the Islam and Arab society is generally negative although better than in other Western countries. Perhaps this is a step above the status of Islam in textbooks in the 1970’s. In the 1970’s, the treatment of Islam in textbooks was often

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54 Ibid, 323.
55 Alexander W. Wiseman, 325.
56 Ibid, 326.
dangerously inaccurate.\footnote{Glenn Perry, “Treatment of the Middle East in American High School Textbooks,” \emph{Journal of Palestine Studies} 4(1975): 46.} To summarize, the textbook industry’s connection to education experts from various sides of the political spectrum holds particular importance to this study of state curricula. Textbooks are evolving but at a slower pace than literature published at higher levels. Like curricula, textbooks should be constantly critiqued. Michael S. Merry says in his article “Patriotism, History, and the Legitimate Aims of American Education” that these textbooks:

\begin{quote}
with their control of a particular narrative---systematized by textbook companies and adopted by state and local boards of education---comes the ability to influence the thinking of an entire generation...textbooks are also liable to the degree that the authors promote an uncritical view of a nation’s history, particularly its misdeeds toward and the exclusion of particular groups.\footnote{Michael S. Merry, “Patriotism, History, and the Legitimate Aims of American Education,” \emph{Educational Philosophy and Theory} 41(2009): 384.}
\end{quote}

For many historians, educators, and multiculturalist advocates, there is monumental work to be done in order to counter falsehoods and inaccuracies which continue to plague social studies education. When comparing the research findings from surveys conducted in the 1970’s to more recently, there has been significant changes the portrayal of Muslims and Arabs. While before the books suffered from misinformation, today we find that there is often a purposeful exclusion of certain topics as well an emphasis on others. Perhaps the same can be said for the curricula to be analyzed in Chapter 2.
Chapter 2

World History Curricula: Standardizing an American Worldview

The Debacle of Teaching Social Studies

Social Studies: History or something more?

Social studies curricula have often been at the center of controversies involving education scholars and curriculum critics because the nature of the content is reliant on narratives crafted by historians, each with their worldviews. Additionally, the process of consolidating “official knowledge” of the past is a site for debate among policy makers in education as they have often make clear their goals for perpetuating nationalistic identity in schools. 59 Official knowledge in this context deals with the knowledge produced by power structures that are tied to political goals seeking to standardize a narrative. In Joel Spring’s Conflict of Interest, he says:

There are three components to the politics of knowledge. First, there is the politics of curriculum, which includes decisions about which subjects to teach in public schools. Second there is the politics of content, which deals with what is being taught in each subject. Last, there is the politics of testing, which includes decisions about what students ought to have learned. 60

In other words, official knowledge is the product of the knowledge industry that decides for the public what they should know in order to become informed. My approach to this research is to evaluate whether Social Studies education continues to perpetuate orientalist narratives. I will investigate 1) the influence of modernization theory, 2) time distancing the “other,” 3) the centrality of European time within historical narratives, and 4) Western periodization of history. We should not be simply satisfied with the inclusion of the Middle East in these curricula, rather we must critique the nature in which its history is presented. Additionally, this paper also hopes to analyze the positive and progressive aspects of these state curricula.

59 Joel Spring, 170.
60 Joel Spring, 167.
Limitations of Modernity

Two concepts essential to my critique of social studies curricula are modernity and “time distancing.” Both terms are conceptually and controversially related to each other. In Carol Gluck’s “The End of Elsewhere: Writing Modernity Now,” she explores the difficulties in writing about the modern world considering that historians have decided modernity is indeed not “disposable fiction” meaning there had to be a way to craft narratives without falling into outdated habits.61 Such habits included “time-distancing” which is that act of writing about the “other” in a way that places them perpetually and eternally behind Europe. Carol Gluck states it well by describing it as the “Eurocentric arrogance that once kept the ‘backward’ peoples of ‘elsewhere’ forever in the ‘imaginary waiting room’ of history while the West commanded the halls of the modern.”62 Vinay Lal also called it the colonization of not only the past but also the future: “[the non-Western World] does not really have a future; its only future is to live the present of the West, or what would have then become the past of the West. History...already happened somewhere else: that is the history of the underdeveloped world has to look forward to.”63 The idea of an ‘imaginary waiting room’ is especially powerful because it conjures a striking image of the formerly colonized world as indefinitely confined to a figurative space which intellectually and politically inhibits their achievement of equity in a global environment. These attitudes have genuine political consequences on the contemporary world in terms of order and the balance of power between Western and non-Western countries. In order to counterbalance politicized historical narratives, deconstructing normative perceptions of progress is critical to the disruption of orientalism in Western public society.

In addition to time, relating geographical or physical space to history is foundational to its conceptualization. In the article “Critical Place Studies and Middle East Histories: Power, Politics, and Social Change,” Amy Mills contemplates the essence of geographical space as we interpret it in our own times. The name “Middle East” is a term designated to an already “existing cultural region” by Europeans and Americans.64 These labels are externally designated

to a collective, drawn together through a connection that may or may not be consistent with the historicity of geographical regions. The purpose of history as it is understood in present times has a certain functionality attached to geographical space. David C. Gordon describes the discipline of history as “the collective memory of a people of its past experiences, its heroes, its great deeds is a basis for a sense of identity...as well as to endow its young with a collective pride and dedication to the tribe, the state, the nation, or the religion.”

History as it is framed in these state frameworks is based around that of a physical space, more so than a collective community. What this means is that the frameworks conceptualize modern nation-states in their current geographic location, in order to identify which stories will be explored. It is for this reason that in the US, Middle Eastern history is explored more than South East Asian history. The region, even in isolation of its present state, holds indispensable significance to the story of Europe.

The issue of teaching history at rudimentary levels or teaching history to the masses in twenty-first century, is that there may be certain demands for uniformity. Curriculum writers also have to contemplate how to present history in a simplified manner as the subject being taught to young students. Yet this oversimplification often compresses history and omits important events. The study of world history, as a field, is one often debated in universities and is a relatively new subject in North America. As the United States opened up in the second half of the twentieth century, academics and politicians alike began to question the public’s awareness of the world. US Education Commissioner Earl James Mcgrath had published in the *Journal of Higher Education* in 1951 an appeal for enhancing instruction of non-Western histories. Most importantly he proposed the need for Area Studies as a national necessity, tying the education of other cultures to active patriotism: “unless the people of the United States assume their responsibilities as world leaders, our own national life will be jeopardized and freedom may be imperiled.” In this same article Mcgrath is concerned with the apparent ignorance of the American population citing their unawareness of the UN and foreign languages. His language echoes that of globalization advocates, and his understanding of education aligns with the idea that schools played a role in molding young productive citizens.

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67 Ibid, 238-240.
68 Earl James McGrath, 239.
Thus “Area Studies” and “World History” became new categories of knowledge with growing popularity in colleges and universities after WWII. Coordination between higher learning institutions and the US government during the war had motivated post-war administrations to invest in generating experts on other cultures. Investment in post-secondary research of the Middle East in the postwar era was therefore a result of American foreign policy interests to expand its role as a new superpower.69 One particularly polarizing moment was the Sputnik crisis of the 1950’s, but education reform in social studies would not occur in full until the 1980’s.70 The eighties marked a decade of debate but transformations occurred quite swiftly with California and Texas designating world history courses as a HS graduation requirement.71 The textbook industry immediately began to capitalize on the newfound interest in world history and the 1980’s saw a rise in the publication of world history textbooks as the new courses became a part of the mainstream.

The syllabus of a World History course is political by default as often the stories most emphasized are tied to present day nation-states. Social Studies in high schools derives from the education teachers receive in post-secondary institutions: “the [Western centered world history] course likely owes its current popularity among curriculum designers to the fact that it is one of the most time-tested components of social studies education. For untold numbers of educators, that course...was an essential feature of their own collegiate experience.”72 The issue we face in critiquing historical narratives of the Middle East is that there are limitations onto who is educated on these topics. The stories deemed most consequential are an expression of power dynamics within an institution as well as in an entire field. Public schooling is no exception to this problem as well. World History, with a more “multicultural” approach, became a point of contention for all parties involved in the bureaucratic politics of American education.73 The discipline of social studies should also not be conflated with history as it is in fact much more expansive. Social Studies courses can come to include geography, government and civics.

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71 Burton F. Beers, 93.
72 Burton F. Beers, 96.
73 Joel Spring, 90.
sociology, and psychology. The way social studies teachers are educated and choose to teach their classes is also dependant on a variety of factors. Burton F. Beers writes:

Some veteran instructors, whose undergraduate curriculum has required Western civilization...generally ignored those chapters in the text that dealt with the world beyond the West. Younger teachers, who had missed the sweeping survey courses, but had profited from specialized studies in their undergraduate years sometimes describe their courses as a collage of topics on ancient Rome, modern Europe, China, and the like all of which were presented without much of a connective structure.  

Therefore we have to consider the fact that there continue to be gaps in the way present day social studies teachers have themselves been taught about other regions from earlier generations.

For most US states, frameworks are designed to have a loose construction in order for districts to individually develop their syllabi for schools while also possessing specifics on what exact topics are designated as essential. Therefore, it is difficult to know the extent to which these frameworks are standardized across the entire state. In the case of New York, where social studies is tested in high school through the Regents Board, it is perhaps more likely for districts to follow frameworks more closely. More importantly, these frameworks serve as a testing ground for states to cultivate their cultural identity to be perpetuated in public schools, forcing the monopolized and small textbook industry to cater to large school districts.

Looking at published frameworks, there are key topics consistently identified as essential to a study of the Middle East: the advent of Islam, the division of the Ottoman Empire post WWI, the Armenian Genocide, the mandate system, and the Arab-Israeli or Palestinian-Israeli conflict. All these frameworks are also history centric as well. Periods are defined based on critical ideological movements which alter the course of history such as the “scientific revolution,” “age of revolutions,” “imperialism,” etc. Essentially, the historic trajectories of other states are completely disregarded in favor of a Europeanized timeline.

The following section contains an analysis of public frameworks published by five states’ education agencies. As discussed in Chapter 1, frameworks are pedagogical materials meant to aid educators and school board members in composing their individual syllabi and choosing

74 Burton F. Beers, 108.
which textbooks to order. Often times, they are companion documents to “content standards” which address different skills students should achieve through social studies. While the standards might be short, frameworks generally are lengthier and contain expansion on about what historical topics are suggested to be included in syllabi. In many states, the frameworks also indicate which historical topics are essential to teach for testing, as in the case of New York. For each state, they require an extensive system of writing the documents, reviewing, and approving them.

An exploration of this process demonstrates the conflicts between authors and school board members. Each state tries to include a variety of voices, but the narratives in each document is indicative of the larger vision the education boards intended to promote through their frameworks. Authors of a curriculum varied from state to state, including educators, professional historians, and curricularists. In the case of North Dakota there were 23 writers from across the state representing the elementary and high school levels. The project was supervised by the state superintendent, consulted by representatives from Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, and coordinated by the director and administrative assistant for Standards and Achievements of the North Dakota Department of Education. Only one person on the team was listed as having a PhD as a project consultant, but the writers consisted only of teachers. None of the other curricula sampled in this paper directly include the names of the writers or consultants. According to information provided on from state agencies’ websites, in California, New York, and Texas, revisors or reviewers were recruited from in-state universities. For New York the 2012-2013 Social Studies Content Advisory Board, members included professors of history and school teachers from all over the state such Elaine Lawrence who is an Assistant Professor for Social Studies-Teacher Education at State University of New York at Oneonta and Carol Berkin who is a professor of History (Emeritus) at the CUNY Graduate Center. In Texas, the 2010-2011 Knowledge and Skills framework is a document originally written in 1998 but the team of reviews included David Barton the President of WallBuilders (an organization which advocates the Christian role in government), Dr. Jesus Francisco de la Teja

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76 North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, “North Dakota Social Studies Content and Achievement Standards,” (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, Bismarck, 2007), 3-4.
the Chair of Department of History at Texas State University, Dr. Daniel L. Dreisbach from American University, Dr. Lybeth Hodges who is a history professor at Texas Woman's University, Dr. Jim Kracht Associate Dean at the College of Education and Human Development at Texas A&M University, and Reverend Peter Marshall of Peter Marshall Ministries. David Barton, the Council of Islamic Education, and the Jewish Community Relations Council have also been consulted in California during 2009 revisions.

California and Texas are both referred to as important influencers on the textbook industry. The development of California’s History and Social Sciences Framework is credited as having popularized the history centric social studies curricula. In the case of Texas the currently used “Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies” curriculum had sparked widespread debate between rival ideological groups. J. Kelton Williams recounts how one democratic Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) member had “stormed out” of a meeting claiming that the board was rewriting history. In the Texan case, Republican conservatives were clear in their intentions to maintain a worldview within Social Studies by acting on behalf of Protestant groups: “The more controversial proposals recommended by the coalition of Republicans include diminishing the attention given to minorities in American history...and emphasizing the role of Christianity in American history.” Of the three reviewers for the Texas framework, it was Reverend Peter Marshall and David Barton from Wallbuilders that “recommended that the TEKS place greater emphasis on the role that Christianity and the Bible have played in American history and in the formation of the American government.” Neither of these reviewers offered any insight into changes to be made regarding the Middle East. Comparatively, Dr. Lybeth Hodges’s review suggests the curriculum to make changes to “highlight Arab nations and culture” and provide a “more serious examination of Islam.

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81 J. Kelton Williams, 437.
82 Ibid, 438.
83 J Kelton Williams, 439.
division between Christian conservative views and progressive multiculturalist academic views is also apparent in the reviews of California standards as well: “conservative advocates for content-heavy, chronological history won the day. Proponents of global and multicultural history and those who favored a thematic cross-disciplinary approach or flexible skill-centered standards offered alternative visions not incorporated into the California standards.”

It is important to consider the background of these documents in the following analysis.

Analysis of Curricula

For each state, I will provide an explanation of the structure of the document. I approached these frameworks by critiquing them through three categories of analysis: periodization of history, language use, and accuracy of information. Additionally, I consider the choices of what historical events are deemed as “essential” and how each identified topic contributes to a an overall portrayal of the Middle East.

Texas

The Texas framework I will be evaluating, as presented on the Texas Education Agency’s (TEA) website, is titled “Chapter 113. Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies, Subchapter C. High School.” The framework was written and approved to be implemented in 2011-2012, while this version was also updated in August 2016. In this entire subchapter, there are standards listed for four courses: United States History Since 1877, World History Studies, World Geography Studies, and United States Government. The course to be studied in detail here is “World History Studies.” In each course, there is an introduction (subsection b) to the topic as well as a breakdown of the time periods to be studied. Most importantly, the Texas framework explicitly states its intentions in what it hopes to achieve in teaching students about the world. Subsection (c) contains “Knowledge and Skills” which acts as a guide for educators in terms of what historical content should be included within a course syllabus. Under Knowledge and Skills (KS) there are six categories: “History,” “Economics,” “Government,” “Citizenship,” “Culture,” and finally, “Science, Technology, and society.” History is the most extensive of the

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85 Bradley Fogo, 65.
categories and makes up for the bulk of the short framework, but there is historical content expressed in other sections not mentioned under “History.” In total, there are a total of 31 “Knowledge and Skills” bullet points, under which there are topics specified as important to include in course syllabi. This version of the framework is in fact a 2010 revision of the 1998 Texas Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). Historically, Texas had previously utilized “Essential Elements” until the state Senate passed a bill in June 1995 which tasked “the board to identify “essential knowledge and skills . . . that all students should be able to demonstrate.”

The introduction, states that “World History is a survey of the history of humankind. Due to the expanse of world history and time limitation of the school year, the scope of this course should focus on essential concepts and skills that can be applied to various eras, events, and people within the standards in subsection c of this section.” The issue here then becomes, who defines what historical events are “essential?” Additionally, what is marked as essential then becomes an indicator of TEA’s worldview. Overall, what is found in the language of the Texas framework is the presentation of a Europeanized world, but also one steeped in American imperial identity. Every piece of world history is interpreted in relation to the American understanding of the present. Mentions of the Middle East and the Muslim World are representative of this interpretation. Any discussion of the Middle East is consistently explicit in its attempt to present a consolidated image of the region, one that uniform over the course of time.

History related to the Middle East, Islam, Muslims, or Arabs is mentioned a total of eight times in the world history course framework. The framework is structured so that the first KS identifies “traditional historical points of reference” to which the importance of Islamic Caliphates and the Ottoman Empire are included. The first KS therefore presents its worldview in a few short bullet points. KS4 addresses the period from 600 to 1450: The student understands how, after the collapse of classical empires, new political, economic, and social systems evolved and expanded from 600 to 1450. The student is expected to: (D) explain the political, economic, and social impact of Islam on Europe, Asia, and Africa; (E) describe the

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interactions among Muslim, Christian, and Jewish societies in Europe, Asia, and North Africa.” What is interesting about this framework is that while it has chosen to identify the Ottoman Empire, it does not name any important Islamic caliphates such as the Abbasids or Umayyads. The prophet Muhammad is not mentioned in the entire framework, although neither is Jesus. Additionally, while the intellectual impact of the Renaissance is later included in the framework, there is no mention of the translation movement in Islamic empires which directly influenced European thought during the continent’s revival. This essential historical fact is rarely credited in mainstream narratives surrounding the diffusion of ideas in the Mediterranean region. The exclusion of this dynamic between Europe and the Middle East diminishes the false dichotomous narratives regarding political, social, and economic relationships throughout human history. A major problem many frameworks have is the abrupt nature of their approach to history. Highlighting the ambiguous complicated nature of the Mediterranean region would offer a past that was much more organic and fluid.

All other Islamic history is set aside until the period between 1450 to 1750. The erasure and diluted presentation of the Ottoman Empire is perhaps one of the biggest flaws in this framework. KS(7) states that in order to “understand the causes and impact of European expansion from 1450 to 1750,” the student is expected to “explain the impact of the Ottoman Empire on Eastern Europe and global trade” which ultimately limits the importance and impact of the empire to its effect on a European region. Considering that the single mention of a large Islamic empire is in relation to influence on European independence, it is clear that this framework severely lacks the provision of historical context to explain why certain events occurred. Here the Ottoman Empire loses its hegemony over multiple centuries, and quite literally an entire section of “world” history disappears within Texas’s periodization of history. There should be no ambiguity in the description of Ottoman influence on world economics, culture, and politics. Yet neither the Mamluks nor Ottomans are not mentioned during the period between 1450 and 1750 in isolation from European history. It is as if time stops for the Middle East, and the colonization project of Europe is most consequential in historical time within the Texas periodization of history.

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88 Texas Education Agency, 13.
Additionally, the Ottoman Empire’s role during the Great War is virtually non-existent in this framework, eliminating any explanation for the future units to be studied about the Middle East. A fundamental larger issue with the design of the Texas framework is that it lacks fluidity, context, and continuity. Students are exposed to various cultures, histories, and societies, yet there lacks a balanced approach to historical topics. While the mandates are mentioned in relation to the Treaty of Versailles, it does not address mandates outside Middle East. Additionally, the mandates are not referred to again in the entire framework despite that nationalist movements are briefly addressed in the Middle East. Ultimately the issue with the Texas framework is that it is oversimplified and unbalanced for what purports to be a “world history” course. While several “Knowledge and Skill” points are dedicated entirely to the perspective of European history, non-Western histories are compressed into one section. Under one section, students must learn about nationalist movements in three different regions. This contrasts to the fact that all social movements essential to Europe such as the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment are studied in greater detail.

The Ottoman Empire is also completely omitted from WWI narratives, and the war is reduced to a largely Western European centered conflict. Finally, following a brief note on the mandate system, the language use regarding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict as well as the War on Terror is particularly frustrating. On the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, it states: “explain how Arab rejection of the State of Israel has led to ongoing conflict.” The entirety of the conflict is not only reduced to an alleged stubbornness on the part of Arabs, but there is not even a specification of Palestinian identity. Instead Palestinians are mentioned only within the context of terrorism. What is even more troubling in this framework’s orientalist paradigm, is the fact that an entire ethnicity is identified as expressing terrorist aggression: “The student understands the development of radical Islamic fundamentalism and the subsequent use of terrorism by some of its adherents. The student is expected to: (A) summarize the development and impact of radical Islamic fundamentalism on events in the second half of the 20th century, including Palestinian terrorism and the growth of al Qaeda.” 

“Palestinian” terrorism is also equated with Al-Qaeda, implying that the two organizations originate from the same umbrella of “Islamic fundamentalism” and have the same political goals. The Texas framework misses the opportunity to highlight the political nuance behind the motivations of terrorist groups.

89 Texas Education Agency, 15.
Grouping these organizations together is an unnecessary overgeneralization of the phenomenon. Not naming the specific Palestinian group engaging in violent acts is purposefully misleading and implicates the entire people. The lack of care in approaching the sensitive and ever evolving topic of terrorism is so staggering, one wonders what exactly is the point of de-orientalizing the post-secondary academic field when mainstream history that is being taught in schools remains to be so deeply politicized.

Indeed, this framework’s approach to terrorism is indicative of the disconnect between specialized area studies and social studies. World history as presented by this framework teaches students that Europe should be regarded as the center of historical time, even in relation to the United States. Furthermore this structure carries the implication that US’s understanding of itself is framed within European historical identity. Yet this type of thinking has less to do emphasizing the differences between east and west, but more to do with historical thinking which contributes toward centralizing identity around the United States as Western power and champion of emancipatory democracy. The United States, as I interpret it here in this document, bases its global identity on the way it views world history or “a survey of humanity” on the trajectory of Western Europe. More than anything else, this presents an American nationalism ironically grounded in another continent’s interaction with the rest of the world. To exist beyond Europe after 1450, meant to not possess any independent existence at all.

The Texan framework follows the same design as “Western Civilization” university courses between 1940’s to 1970’s. This is demonstrated in the way the framework emphasizes and highlights Western and Eastern binaries.90 The role of Christianity in modern western government is overemphasized and reflects the core of American conservative cultural identity, rather than an accurate portrayal of modern history. It is therefore unsurprising that in the section on culture, the frameworks states, “explain how Islam influences law and government in the Muslim World.”91 The framework fails to identify what it considers to be the “Muslim world” and this use of broad language can be quite dangerous. For example, are students being exposed to Islamic law as it is practiced in Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, or Malaysia? This statement

90 Texas Education Agency, 17-18.
91 Ibid, 18.
also fails to specify at which time period it is referring to, which drastically affects the context of such history.

Education expert Julio Noboa has written on the erasure of human pasts in the Texas Knowledge and Skills framework, criticizing its lack of balance in its world history curricula. This is a common occurrence among various states. As mentioned, the task of teaching global history to better serve a multicultural student population is indeed ambitious a project when considering the socio-political obstacles in the US despite considerable action that has been achieved. Social Studies in the politicized arena of public schools additionally has to align with narratives approved by education authorities. Therefore, historical accuracy and the efficacy of epistemological debates are further inhibited from the discussion as frameworks come in closer contact with educators and students. Noboa says, “also missing is any mention of Mesopotamian civilizations, such as Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians. These could provide a basis for students’ understanding of the cultural and historical context of biblical peoples and of the Holy Land of Jews, Christians, and Muslims.” Noboa goes on to discuss the imbalance demonstrated in this framework between Europe and all other societies. Greater time is spent on Europe than any other region, and statement often credit the continent for all human advancement. To summarize, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills provides a good example of how a curriculum can be flawed in its understanding of the world. The document’s structure is limited, unbalanced, and presents history in a fragmented way. History should not be separated from categories of “economics,” “culture” or “government” as Texas has designed its framework. They should all fall within the realm of historical study.

New York

In New York, world history is called “Global History I & II” split across grades 9 and 10. Grade 9 addresses history between 10,000 BCE to 1750 CE, while grade 10 continues from 1750 CE to the present day. On the surface, the NY grade 9 framework offers a significantly less Eurocentric worldview than its Texan counterpart. The first periodization of history titled “The


First Civilizations” is expanded to wider time period beginning from 10,000 BCE past 600 CE, to 630 CE. There is a unit dedicated entirely to the study of “belief systems” including Confucianism and Daoism. The establishment of Islam in the NY framework is placed within a greater historical context. Contrary to Texas, cultural and social phenomena which occurred outside of Europe are embedded into essential historical knowledge rather than written as a footnote to the core of the course’s historical timeline. While the Umayyad Empire is not mentioned in this document either, the Abbasid Empire is studied as part of “An Age of Expanding Connections, ca. 500 - ca. 1500.” The early period of the Ottoman Empire is also studied extensively, in relation to the Ming dynasty, under the time period: “Global Interactions, ca. 1400-1750.” This section emphasizes the cultural hegemony asserted by the Ottoman Empire through “Islam,” and the unit approaches the subject through a comparative analysis. This contrasts with the Texan framework which did not mention the Ottoman Empire outside of its influence on Eastern Europe. The Middle East as a region is also emphasized as one which had a deep influence on trade and dissemination of knowledge, technology, etc. Generally, the grade 9 framework offers a historical timeline that is far less isolationist with a provision of a variety of topics. A wider sense of the world before 1750 is offered through this framework; one where the Ottoman Empire is explored beyond its role in WWI and the Armenian genocide.

The grade 10 framework however, merits a harsher critique. Despite a significant difference between the NY and Texas approach to historical events which occurred prior to WWI, this curriculum falls into the similar problem of centralizing twentieth century conflict in Europe. In the section titled “Unresolved Global Conflict,” there are no mentions of the participation of the Ottoman Empire thus eliminating an extremely important unit of context to preface the section on “Nationalism in the Middle East.” The effects of WWI on colonized regions are not extensively explored in American public education, and the lack of contextualization to the interwar period has contributed to many misguided perceptions surrounding MENA today. There are no explanations for why Syria would have a more difficult time separating from Anatolia than Egypt. WWI is taught according to a passive Eurocentric narrative. This ultimately harms the students’ understanding of Arab nationalism which is

95 Ibid, 14
described as “often influenced by factors such as religious beliefs and secularism.” In the Middle Eastern Studies field, there is heated debate surrounding an overemphasis of religion versus secularism in Arab nationalist movements. Yet, here this statement contends a kind of Middle Eastern exceptionalism wherein tensions between secularists and religious conservatives are framed as a core factor to nationalism. However, these were aspects of the region capitalized upon by colonizers in order to destabilize independence efforts such as in Syria and Lebanon. In the cases of Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan, these factors did not directly affect nationalizing efforts to an extent that it should be the only topic discussed in relation to Middle Eastern nationalism.

These narratives framing the Middle East which have become normalized in world history have caused the characterization of Arabs to be one-dimensional with an overemphasis on secularism versus religion. More dangerously, these statements directly associate secularism with independence and democratic efforts, laying the groundwork to delegitimize any other forms of political power that would emerge in the region. In the section called “Tensions between traditional cultures and Modernization,” the statement “Students will investigate, compare, and contrast tensions between modernization and traditional culture in Turkey under the rule of Kemal Ataturk and in Iran under the Pahlavis and the Ayatollahs,” echoes sentiments proliferated with Western understandings of modernity. Here, “religious traditionalism” is equated with “traditional cultures” in order to encompass similar phenomena which occurred in other previously colonized regions. This type of language presents “Islam” as immutable, traditional, and antithetical to modernization which is defined as “secular, urban, industrial condition.” The title of the section itself adopts language which reflects a binary of secularism as modernism and religiosity as archaic, which in turn affects the students’ understandings of how modern life is conducted in non-Western regions. To summarize, the NY framework offers a reductionist perception of Islam in a modern context and contributes toward the problematic notion that nation-states should be divided based on their acceptance of secular modernity. The narrative that there is division between religion and the achievement of “modernity,” is deeply rooted in the the notion that there is exclusivity to being modern. According to these types of statements not only is modernity unachievable by Muslims who continue to practice

97 Ibid, 25.
99 Ibid, 25.
traditionalism, but this resistance to secularism would have placed them in an “imaginary waiting room.” Although subtle, these interpretations of historical events carry the weight of established stereotypes. The dichotomization of modernization with religiosity fails to account for nuance in examples such as Indonesia or Saudi Arabia. In the case of Saudi Arabia, the country has achieved considerable “urban, industrial condition” yet whether the country has reached a status of achieving modernity as it has been previously understood may be debatable.

In terms of language use, the NY framework is more careful and deliberate in regards to certain contentious topics. For example, the way terrorism is discussed is significant: “Students will examine threats to global security, such as international trade in weapons (e.g. chemical, biological, nuclear), nuclear proliferation, cyber war, and terrorism including a discussion of the events of September 11, 2001.” Unlike the Texas framework, Islam and the Middle East are not explicitly or directly mentioned in relation to terrorism. Furthermore no ethnic groups are broadly identified as agents of terrorism. The consequence of this careful language ensures that individual groups retain responsibility of terrorist acts, rather than the misconception that entire countries participate in such acts. Additionally, terrorism is referred to as one of many problems which pose threats internationally to “global security.” This offers a more nuanced view of what “terrorism” means in relation to other manifestations of violence and crimes against humanity. It is not reduced to a problem exclusively confronting the West. The decision not to write terms such as “Islamic fundamentalism” is perhaps a concerted effort to dissociate the religion of Islam from the participants of terrorist acts. I interpret this language as a direct attempt to de-orientalize the conversation surrounding terrorism today.

California

California’s framework has been praised for its globalizing perspectives and pedagogical approaches, yet there are problematic narratives being propagated in this framework. Admittedly, the framework contains greater nuance and detail regarding the story of “modern history.” The framework’s pronouncement of the Enlightenment period as the origin of modernity sets up the course’s tone for what the state understands to be the core of modern

Overall, the Middle East or Islam is discussed or referenced in sixteen different contexts. Due to the structure of K-12 social studies instruction in California, the only “World History” course taught in high school is a continuation of the grade 6 and 7 World History courses. The grade 10 course is called, “World History, Culture, and Geography: The Modern World” which defines modern as 1750 to the present. In terms of its goals, the course “highlights the intensification of a truly global history as people, products, diseases, knowledge, and ideas spread around the world as never before.”

The tone of the class is explicitly centered on globalization, associating modernity with the economic prosperity and secularization. It should however be emphasized that California is particularly careful in its language in addressing controversial issues. Unfortunately, the state’s framework still promotes a historical paradigm which aligns with the ideological superiority of Western culture. The periodization of modern history is centered on Europe’s interactions with the world. The Modern world is driven by major European historical shifts such as the Scientific Revolution, Industrial Revolution, Imperialism, World Wars, and Cold War. In other words, the pasts of other regions only become consequential to humanity in relation to Europe.

The California framework is far more detailed with a length of sixty-one pages explaining one course. This contrasts with the short length of Texas’s framework. Written like an essay, the framework poses various debate questions such as “Why was the modern period defined by global conflict and cooperation, economic growth and collapse, and global independence and connection?,” and then goes on to provide contextual information to answer such inquiries. A valuable quality of any historical curriculum would be its ability to allow for debate and foster historical thinking. However the California framework reads as if it already has the answers to its questions. What is more problematic is the worldview presented in this framework, which although progressive in nature, still falls within restrictive paradigms generated by a Western manifestation of modernity. This is especially evident in the way the course is framed, by introducing “modernism” within the context of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. Of course, the transformative effects of these eras on Europe’s brand of modernism is undeniable. However, the issue remains that non-Western nations were not

considered to be part of the modern world unless they replicated the same ideological and material “modernism” as epitomized by Europe. As we delve into the details of California’s treatment of the modern Middle East, this conceptualization of the modern world is reinforced.

Similar to New York and Texas, discussions of Persian cultural and intellectual influence is missing from the frameworks. This is indicative of American historical thinking which understands cultural interaction differently. It is a reflection of attributing historical significance to the histories of modern nation-states. Instead, the nation-state of Iran is the only reference to the region and singularly within the context of the hostage crisis or the Islamic Revolution. The erasure of Qajar Empire from Middle Eastern and Islamic history is revisionist, creating a void in the narrative. Here an internalized worldview which has its foundation in American national identity is demonstrated. Modern American identity is simultaneously and paradoxically isolationist and imperialist, where it actively rejects the “other” yet bolsters the government’s militaristic influence in non-Western regions. Even within world history, civilizations which had immense cultural impact on European identity such as Persia or North African dynasties are completely ignored or the extent of their influence is diminished.

California’s framework has a more extensive analysis of the Ottomans and its description of it expands beyond the empire’s involvement in WWI conflicts. The Ottoman Empire is described here as a “gunpowder empire” and this framework addresses the region only in reference to its long decline. It does not explain what “gunpowder empire” means but groups the Ottomans with the “Qing China, Mughal India, Ottoman Empire, Safavid Persia, Spain, France, England.”103 It is possible that “gunpowder” refers to the military weaponry adopted by major empires’ armed forces. A current trend in academic research of the modern Middle East is problematizing the decline narrative that stems largely from Orientalist writings on the region from the late 1800’s. Imperialism in former Ottoman regions in the late 1800’s and into the 20th century dominated literature on the region to justify the White man’s venture into restoring the prestige lost through the decadence of Muslim empire. The first specific mention of the Ottoman Empire states: “Leaders in the Ottoman Empire and China engaged in limited industrialization, but their choices were constrained by the earlier establishment of informal European empires.

This accelerated their gradual military decline, which had already begun by the 1700s." This statement is not followed by further remarks on the Janissary revolt or the subsequent Tanzimat reforms. Instead, while the industrialization of Europe is detailed in full, the Ottoman Empire (and China) are set aside in this framework, as if they are generally understood to have had no effect on the trajectory of modernism within Europe. This is a fundamental problem within these frameworks. While California is complimented for being “inclusive” by referencing other non-Western societies, there is little attention paid to how these tidbits are contextualized within the larger paradigm. The framework also judges “industrializing” according to a singular standard. It further attests that the Ottoman Empire failed as a result of rising European empires, not elaborating on the military training relationships which would emerge between the Sultan and France and later, Germany over the next century.

Yet despite these unimaginative historical narratives, California’s choice to involve the Ottoman Empire in its descriptions of World War I as an equal imperial threat to the British and French empires, is indicative of the deep flaws in other states’ frameworks. The rarity of this is alarming, and too often in American narratives of WWI is there such a blatant erasure of the Ottoman Empire’s impact on their European allies and enemies. It is too often that American descriptions of WWI focus on the Western fronts, trench warfare, and the lost generation, that the entirety of the war fought on Ottoman land is ignored. There are no direct mentions of any major battles that would take place involving the Ottomans. No major figures or military leaders are highlighted. Interestingly enough there is a significant portion of the framework allotted to discuss the Armenian genocide. A common pattern in state frameworks is there is never a failure to mention the Armenian genocide, and rightly so. Yet often times, the Armenian genocide lacks contextualization in these frameworks as well. Another issue is this framework explicitly refers to “the Turkish government” despite that the Turkish government did not yet exist. Of course this does not mean that Turkish officials of the Ottoman Empire should be devoid of responsibility. However this framework does not address the entirety of the Turkification project that was occurring during WWI which served as a primary motivator for the Armenian genocide.

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104 California States Department of Education, 332.
The mandate system is mentioned in three different contexts: the end of WWI, post-war impact, and the Cold War.\textsuperscript{105} The mandate system is mentioned as an answer to the question “How did World War I end? What were the consequences of the postwar agreement?” which accurately frames the mandate system as a new order to govern newly separated regions.\textsuperscript{106} The effects of the post-war period on the Middle East are also discussed briefly but it is not dealt with in detail until discussions on the Cold War period. California’s presentation of the decolonizing movement in mandates is by far the most nuanced compared to the other four states. The framework addresses the Arab World within the context of Cold War dilemmas and identifies key effects of the mandate order such as widespread nationalism.\textsuperscript{107} California has also provided greater historical context to the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict by describing the involvement of the British empire, the UN, and the effects of the holocaust on international public opinion. One critique I have of this section however is regarding this statement, “Arab nations, such as Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and parts of Turkey, also achieved their independence through their respective mandates.”\textsuperscript{108} This should state that Arab countries were able to gain independence \textit{in spite} of mandates, rather than through them. The mandate system should be identified as new temporary colonial order imposed on a former Ottoman provinces. This statement loses the opportunity to highlight the violent repressive nature of these mandates.

Finally, this framework addresses terrorism similar to New York by identifying the problem as “global” rather than exclusively a threat to Western society. September 11th is identified as the catalyst which would come to determine the future of terrorist acts in the twenty-first century.\textsuperscript{109} This a missed opportunity to frame terror acts committed by Muslims as a byproduct of increased foreign military presence rather than simply a renewal of religion in the region and the fundamentalization of Islam. In a section on “rights, religion, and identity,” the framework highlights the revival of religion as something occurring at large in the Middle East. Although the language used here is indeed careful by including the revival of all religion including in the US and India, the discussion is centered on the phenomenon as it emerged in

\textsuperscript{105} California States Department of Education, 345-346, 359.
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid, 345.
\textsuperscript{107} California States Department of Education, 359.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, 359.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid, 367.
recent decades rather than in the years leading up the Iranian Revolution. The comparative approach to studying world history also inhibits analysis that can be done in isolation. An overemphasis in social studies education to “compare and contrast” cultures eliminates the unique qualities of religious revival in specific regions. The intensification of White conservative evangelism may be part of the larger discussion on religious revival in response to secularism, but it does not mean that it is occurring within in the same context of a modern Islamic revival in the Middle East. World History should not be dichotomized, or reduced to oversimplified patterns. The counter argument is that a “compare and contrast” perspectives counters the practice of othering. However the concern here is that excessively searching for comparisons may diminish the cultural context of an “Islamic Revival.”

The main issue with California’s framework, is that the development of non-Western modernities are deemed completely inconsequential to the present as defined by the West. Although the framework evokes “globalization” tones, it is still European centric. Even if the latter half of the framework tries to contemplate question surrounding Western hegemony, it has already attributed to the West ideological superiority throughout the document. It is clear that the progressive California framework has sought to diversify its presentation of the Modern world, but historians should still be critical of the its approach. Indeed, California contrasts with Texas in that its approach is far less American-centric by the inclusion of a diverse range of topics. However the division between the East and West still remains thus encouraging dichotomous thinking when considering history.

The merit of the California framework is a significant effort to conceptualize the MENA as complex and consider contemporary topics. More importantly, it addresses the impact of twentieth century events on present day challenges and phenomena. This is something that is missing in the Texas framework, and to a lesser extent in Virginia’s as well (as seen below). What is perhaps most impressive about California is its critical tone toward Western imperialism by directly addressing contemporary consequences, which is lacking in the Texas, Virginia, and North Dakota frameworks. The California framework provides a critical thinking activity for students to address what would be a controversial topic in another state. The section titled “A New Role for the West,” asks whether the Western world, the dominant force in world politics

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110 California States Department of Education, 372.
since the late fifteenth century, is in decline today and “What is the role of the West now that the colonial era has ended, now that Western prosperity depends on borrowing from East Asia, and now that the international influence of Western powers is being supplanted by rising states, notably Brazil, Russia, India, and China?”\footnote{California States Department of Education, 371.} Rather than try to conceal the imperialist role of the West and the United States in the twentieth century, California asks its students the contemplate colonialism head on while considering new emerging dynamics of power.

In comparison to other states frameworks, it is not surprising that California is heralded as as exemplary social studies framework. California’s modern history is comparatively the most inclusive of non-Western histories and presents a historical narrative that is far more cohesive than others. Additionally, it is written in a way that poses questions rather than list facts, providing a space for debate and discussion. The true flaw of the California framework is its overemphasis on Europe as a the definitive actor in driving forward historical time. It is perhaps not surprising then that California fails to challenge Western historical thinking, rather than endorsing it. In terms of its approach to the Middle East and North Africa, California’s inclusion of the Algerian Independence War and detailed account of the Armenian genocide is indicative of a move toward an expanding point of view that addresses significant occurrences between WWI and the War on Terror. The framework should indeed be complimented on its overall portrayal of the Middle East, but detailed improvements can be made to deconstruct its association of the Arab World with a brand of conservatism rejected by modern society. As is the case for most of these state frameworks, more needs to be done about the erasure of religious minorities in the Middle East. The Middle East should not be singularly associated with Islam, as this denies the experiences of Arab Christians, Jews, and other groups. Additionally, this framework could be further enhanced by including more details about how the Turkification of Ottoman society leading up to defeat in WWI would come to affect nationalist movements during the mandate period. Such an explanation would clarify the movement for Pan-Arabism in later decades. For educators, instruction that introduces this layer of Arab nationalism could further enhance the teaching experience. These are all essential historical narratives which have yet to penetrate the mainstream understanding of Arab history. Perhaps we will see more improvements in the coming decades as state continue to adjust and rewrite their frameworks.
Virginia

Virginia’s *History and Social Sciences Standards of Learning Curriculum Framework 2015*, published by the Virginia Department of Education was approved on January 28, 2016. According to Virginia’s standards, the two major courses are split into “World History and Geography to 1500 A.D. (C.E.)” and “World History and Geography: 1500 A.D. (C.E.) to the Present.” The introduction states, “The standards and Curriculum Framework are not intended to encompass the entire curriculum for a given grade level or course, nor to prescribe how the content should be taught. School divisions are encouraged to incorporate the standards and Curriculum Framework into a broader, locally designed curriculum...the Curriculum Framework facilitates teacher planning by identifying essential understandings, knowledge, and skills.”¹¹² This statement reiterates discussion in Chapter 1, which emphasized localized education as central to the American interpretation of effective education policy. Even at the state level, government agencies may be reluctant to police the content of coursework at the local level. For both courses, the framework contains two aspects under each standard: Essential understandings and Essential Knowledge split across two columns in a chart. “Essential understandings” describe central points pertaining to the standard, and “essential knowledge” will include several bullet points identifying important historical events.

There are approximately twenty standards across both course frameworks pertaining to the Middle East, Islam, or Arabs. Generally this framework does not provide answers and bold statements on historical events in contrast to New York or California. Virginia’s approach is much more flexible, containing ideas which can be expanded on further by local school districts. The framework flows chronologically, and history is periodized as follows: Human Origins and Early Civilizations, Prehistory to 1000 B.C. (B.C.E.), Classical Civilizations and Rise of Religious Traditions, 1000 B.C. (B.C.E.) to 500 A.D. (C.E.), Postclassical Civilizations, 300 to 1000 A.D. (C.E.), Regional Interactions, 1000 to 1500 A.D. (C.E.), Emergence of a Global Age, 1500 to 1800 A.D. (C.E.), Age of Revolutions and Imperialism, and the Modern Era. Similar to New York, Texas, and California, Virginia’s periodization of history is also centralized around

European timelines. More recent centuries are particularly focused on the transformative movements which impacted European politics, economics, culture, and society. It is interesting to note that Virginia’s framework does not limit the historical presence of Islam to the Middle East. History of Islamic civilization in the Golden Horde, India, and West Africa are also included in this framework. Although this study is not too concerned with other regions, it is important to recognize the importance of diversifying students’ exposure to Islam into other regions besides the Middle East.

In the first course, standard WHI.9a-b focuses on the early beginnings of “Islamic Civilization” from 600 to 1000 C.E. by “a) describing the origin, location, beliefs, traditions, customs, and spread of Islam, with emphasis on the Sunni-Shia division, and the Battle of Tours; b) assessing the influence of geography on Islamic economic, social, and political development, including the impact of conquest and trade.”113 Under “essential understandings,” the origins of Islam are discussed including Muhammad’s role, the five pillars, and the centrality of monotheism to the religion. This is the first framework to reference the Battle of Tours and therefore by extension, also discussing the history of the Umayyad Caliphate in the West. Another bullet point mentions the Crusades, indicating the the framework understands conflict with Christians an essential historical occurrence in Islamic history. Generally, Virginia’s summary of what should be taught about Islam is well rounded in that it explains the basic theological components of the religion while also considering the cultural and physical impact it had on the Middle Eastern region.

One of the bullet points for “historical turning points” under “essential knowledge” is “Death of Ali: Sunni-Shi’a division” which raises a few questions.114 While it is true that the Sunni-Shi’a divide is motivated by the violence leading to the death of Ali, this statement eliminates the important history of developing political strife immediately following the prophet Muhammad's death. The statement implied the Sunni-Shia division was instantaneous and immediate, yet the reality is that it was not until at least a century after the prophet’s death that Shi’a theology had developed into a tangible sect separate from Sunnism. Due to the very

unrestricted nature of the framework, statements such as these erase the complexity and nuance of such historical phenomena. A more accurate description of the Sunni-Shia divide would be to say, “the death of Ali was the major catalyst for a definitive divide that would grow over two centuries.” To say that the Sunni-Shia was an effect of the death of Ali, while not entirely inaccurate, is an oversimplification. The development of the Sunni-Shia divide is often painted in broad strokes, and projects modern aspects of the division onto the past. Despite this concern for the Sunni-Shia divide, these frameworks lack discussion of any major Shia empire. The only two empires ever discussed in detail are the Abbasid Empire and the Ottoman Empire. Neither the Fatimid, Buyid, Safavid nor Qajar Empires appear within the context of the Sunni-Shia divide. While it is not realistic to discuss every single Islamic empire, discussions of Shi’i empires should not be excluded from these narratives especially considering their contributions to Islamic civilization as a whole. The West's attempts to interpret the sectarianism as a constant in Islamic history yet failing to accurately explain its origins is frustrating when comparing these curriculum’s extensive discourse on the development of Christian sects.

Standard WHI.14b states: “The student will apply social skills to understand the social, economic, and political change and cultural achievements in the high and late medieval periods by B) explaining conflicts across Europe and Asia, including the Crusades and the fall of Constantinople.” Under this standard there are two major historical events that are discussed, the Crusades and the fall of Constantinople which resulted in the establishment of the Ottoman Empire. Under essential knowledge, Virginia’s Europeanized history is expressed through its identification of “Key events of the Crusades” and “Effects of the Crusades.” The Crusades are one-sidedly portrayed from only a European perspective. Saladin is the only Muslim or Middle Eastern figure specifically named from the pre-modern period aside from the prophet Muhammad and Ali.

The importance of the Crusades era is further discussed in terms of its economic effects for Europeans in standard WHI.15a where there was “[a] increased access to Middle Eastern products, [b] stimulated production of goods to trade in Middle Eastern markets.”

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here is that the Crusades are taught from the European perspective. Despite the fact that the Crusades would have profound effects on territorial challenges in the region, this one-dimensional understanding of the conflict eliminates the “Middle Eastern” aspect of the period. The standards referring to the Crusades period are the final ones in the first course framework. The Mamluks, Islamic Spain, and Persia are yet again ignored despite their immense impact on European society. The Mongols are focused on within a single standard, and it mentioned that they often converted to local religions, such as Islam.\textsuperscript{117} The erasure of Islamic Spain from European timelines is that it does not consider the paramount transformation the peninsula experienced from 900 years of Muslim rule. Despite that Muslims had become a critical part of Iberian history, they are treated as outsiders by contemporary narratives. This is exemplified in the fact that Islamic Spain is discussed in terms of its defeat rather than its entire reign. The detachment of consequential Islamic presence in Europe is indicative of how modern mainstream narratives lack historicity.

In the second course, “World History and Geography: 1500 A.D. (C.E.) to the Present,” there are a considerable number of standards which address the Middle East. Firstly, the Ottoman Empire is identified as a major state in the Middle East and is the only Middle Eastern entity studied in this course before before WWI. Standard WHII.6b focuses on studying the Ottoman Empire considering its “political, cultural, geographic, and economic conditions...from about 1500 A.D. (C.E) to about 1800 A.D. (C.E.) by b) describing the location and development of social and cultural patterns in the Ottoman Empire.”\textsuperscript{118} Virginia dedicates an entire section of the Ottoman Empire to be studied beyond of its role in eastern European regions. This is important because too often discussion of the Ottoman Empire’s impact on its conquered regions outside Anatolia is restricted to the WWI period.

Standard WHII.13c is specifically dedicated to both the mandate system and the aftermath of dismantling the Ottoman Empire. Virginia dedicating an entire standard subsection solely to the mandate system within the Middle East should be praised, considering how many other frameworks only mentioned the phenomenon in passing or among other historical topics.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, 55.
The standard places the mandate system in the context of Arab states trying to achieve independence, even naming important figures such as Golda Meir and Gamal Abdel Nasser. Both Meir and Nasser are not named in any other framework surveyed. The figures these frameworks choose to highlight is demonstrative of what American curriculum writers understand to be fundamental turning points. The “Essential Understandings” state: “The mandate system established after World War I was phased out after World War II. With the end of the mandates, new states were created in the Middle East.”119 Included in the “essential knowledge” section are five categories, separated into a general description about how the system was created, French mandates, British mandates, Golda Meir, and Gamal Abdel Nasser. This is very different from what we have seen with other states’ frameworks, where there are no distinctions made between French and British mandates. Britain and France’s differing approaches in administering their respective mandates is a central to contemporary outcomes in Arab states. It is a complexity that is often overlooked in state frameworks. This is also one of the few frameworks which have addressed Egypt in such a detailed capacity, discussing Nasser’s major political acts such as nationalizing the Suez Canal and building the Aswan Dam.120

Finally, standard WHII.14d is the fourth part of the section discussing 21st century issues: “The student will apply social skills to understand the global changes during the early twentieth century by analyzing the increasing the impact of terrorism.”121 In the essential understandings of this standard, it is quite remarkable that the framework does not mention “Islam” in relation to terrorism, similar to New York. Virginia defines terrorism as the “use of illegal violence to achieve political ends” where both “developed and developing nations...faced challenges brought by increased terrorism.”122 This careful language offers a stark contrast to how terrorism is presented in the Texas framework. Similar to New York, Virginia emphasizes the global impact of terrorism rather than framing the contentious subject as a singularly Western problem through mainstream Western media reportings of terrorism’s impact. The impact of terrorism in the developing world is often overlooked, or even ignored completely. Furthermore,

121 Ibid, 72.
the framework references the Munich Olympics bombing as an example of international terrorism which is quite rare. Generally these frameworks identify terrorism to be a 21st century problem, and often operate on the notion that the 9/11 attacks were the first *significant* acts of terrorism. The framework also offers examples of “governmental response” to these attacks, referencing “privacy acts” and “interrogations and detentions of suspected terrorists.”123 This is a useful analysis of terrorism and its impact of government surveillance of citizens. A major impact of terrorism beyond casualties caused by violence is an evolving relationship between governments and its citizens in combatance of insurgents.

Overall, Virginia’s “History and Social Sciences Framework” is similar to New York where while it propagates American national identity, it is careful in its approach to more controversial topics related to the Middle East.

**North Dakota**

The North Dakota standards are by far the least detailed and most lacking in terms of outlining which historical topics should be covered by teachers. The document was published and has been in use since December 2007, by the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction. Contrary to states with larger school districts, the North Dakota “Content and Achievement Standards: Social Studies” includes standards for all grades from K-12 in one document. Additionally, North Dakota did not publish a companion framework outlining further details on the basic “benchmark expectations.” Instead, attached to “benchmark expectations” are “achievement descriptors” that describe the varying levels a student might absorb curriculum standards. In terms of the state’s philosophy regarding the creation of a standard, North Dakota declares that although the document serves as a reference, “local school districts are encouraged to use the state’s content and achievement standards as guides in the development of local, customized curriculum in the core content standards.”124 Therefore North Dakota, similar to Virginia, emphasized the importance of placing the power in local hands. This exemplifies how some states are less concerned with centralized education, instead offering standards as a suggestion.

123 Ibid, 72.
124 North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, “North Dakota Social Studies Content and Achievement Standards,” (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, Bismarck, 2007), 6.
The reason for including North Dakota in this analysis was to include representation from the American Midwest and to offer the perspective of a state which operates on the philosophy of limited government authority even by state agencies. Not only does this state have a significantly smaller school district size, but also the published standards are much shorter. In the framework, 9-12 classes are compressed into one section. Similar to California, Social Studies is continuous throughout grades. Therefore history prior to the Renaissance is taught in the sixth grade only. The only world history course taught in high school falls under “Global Period, Events, Figures, and movements including but not limited to Renaissance to Present.” Standard 9-12.2.2.16 states: “Analyze the global causes, course, and consequences of World War II and the post-war events (e.g. worldwide depression, totalitarianism, and militaristic regimes, Holocaust, political and social change in the Middle East, development of the United Nations, Cold War).”¹²⁵ This is the first mention of the Middle East in these standards, but the course lacks a provision of context to truly portray “social and political change in the Middle East” accurately. The prior standards cover the “global impacts of the Renaissance, Reformation, Scientific Revolution, and the Enlightenment,” a concept that is historically inaccurate considering that some of these movements truly affected only Europe. The Ottoman Empire is completely omitted, not even mentioned in the standard discussing WWI. To say that the North Dakota standards are Eurocentric is in fact an understatement. Not only do the standards promote Europeanized understanding of humanity, but the document also misuses the term “global.” On the standard discussing revolutionary independence movements in the non-Western world, no Middle Eastern or North African country is mentioned. This is a remarkable omission considering the Algerian Independence War was one of the most consequential anti-colonial movements in post-war history.

Standard 9-12.2.20 states “Analyze social and political change in the Middle east and Asia in 1948-present (e.g. Camp David Accords, Tiananmen Square, conflicts in the Middle East, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Persian Gulf War, War in Iraq).”¹²⁶ Although this standard asks for political change from 1948, the examples provided are generally issues that have occurred after the late 1970’s with the exception of “conflicts in the Middle East.” What these conflicts might include and omit is never clarified. There is no discussion of the Suez Canal

¹²⁵ North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 33.
¹²⁶ Ibid, 34.
Crisis or Arab-Israeli conflict in this outline at all. If we also consider that many social studies courses are reliant on textbooks, there is more room for error when discussing the history of non-western countries. On the one hand, this type of document with limited text might be favorable to those school districts that prefer to design their own curricula. However the disadvantage is that if educators are uninformed on the specifics of a certain region’s history, there is more room for the perpetuation of stereotypes if teachers begin to rely on their own personal research and national textbooks. Detailed frameworks provide teachers a guideline for what historical topics are most essential to include in their syllabi allowing for more focused research.127

Other than these standards, topics related to Islam, the Middle East, and North Africa are not mentioned again in this compact framework. North Dakota is most direct in its endorsement of Eurocentric beliefs and there are no attempts to be more innovative with the social studies field. Contrary to California, which spent more time in providing a true teaching resource to its educators, the tone evoked in the North Dakotan framework is more concerned with facilitating localized authority in curriculum design. The standard serves as a flexible guide rather than a true “standard” for what students should learn. Compared to other states, North Dakota does not capitalize on the opportunity to provides teachers with an important resource, instead preferring a minimalistic approach to social studies education.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the book *Teaching Recent Global History: Dialogues among Historians, Social Studies, and Students*, the authors interviewed Zachary Lockman on challenges one faces in educating American students on the Middle East. He said in response,

The biggest issue is not that the students come into the classroom without ideas in their heads, but rather that they come in with a lot of ideas. So, the first challenges is to deal with some of those ideas which are often mistaken ideas about Islam in a general sense...so, often the first task is to try to deal with some of these very orientalist perceptions of the region as essentially Islamic in a very monolithic sense, and as radically different from us. That notion is very ingrained and is one of the fundamental building blocks of how we think about ourselves. High school kids don’t think about this

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Lockman’s words help frame the purpose of this thesis. Myths and stereotypes continue to exist among the American public, and it was my intention to consider how education policy might also contribute to a sustained ignorance through this study. Lockman does make the important point that American identity cannot be detached from its origins in Christian Europe and perhaps it is unrealistic to expect the educational system to move away from this ethnocentrism. On the other hand, sustaining the American brand of Eurocentrism can be detrimental to education of students. Michael S. Merry has posited in his article on American education that public schools and textbooks both contributed to “uncritical patriotic disposition” or “loyal patriotism.” He explains that this particular kind of patriotism is problematic for a number of reasons including the provision of a “false sense of history” but also “the demonization of those against whom national policy is set to likely occur.”  

As was discussed earlier in chapter 1, politicizing every aspect of social studies education is the nature of public education, especially in liberal democracies. There is an impetus on the part of the states to balance a wealth of political and social viewpoints, and this conflict is unlikely to fade. Yet the growth of the field to consider more multicultural topics since the adoption of such frameworks in the 1990’s gives cause for optimism.

There are several conclusions based on the findings of this comparative study. In chapter 1, I posed several questions. I asked what place the Middle East and North Africa has in these curricula and whether the frameworks work to challenge or bolster stereotypes expressed by the American public. To address the first question, in the curricula of all five states the Middle Eastern region is largely Muslim and is most relevant at three points in time: early post-classical period, modern, and contemporary. In all frameworks, early Islam is recognized as a vital “turning point” in history. How the advent of Islam is addressed differs; in the case of New York or Virginia early Islam is studied within a unit on belief systems or monotheism. In the case of Texas, the beginnings of Islam and the Islamic conquests are a part of political history in the region. Amy Mills’s discussion of critical place studies is particularly useful here when considering that the Middle East is only loosely discussed in the Texas curriculum prior to the

129 Michael S. Merry, 378
coming of Islam. While Mesopotamia and classical Persia are mentioned, the presence of Christians and Jews is almost lost in discussions of the Middle East after Islam. Therefore while students are exposed to every critical moment of European history, they might only receive brief instances of Middle Eastern history. The concept of projecting modern understandings of geographic space onto the past is also a problem when considering the treatment of Iberian history. Muslims had conquered and lived in Iberia for 900 years yet this part of European history is often overlooked in the frameworks. This is not accidental as borders are social constructs and modern conceptions of Europe are associated with Christianity. Thus, the baggage of Western historical thinking may cost these mainstream narratives to overlook important parts of history. Indeed the historicity of narratives in state frameworks are affected by present day understandings of what it means to be part of the Middle East.

For the modern period, the Ottoman era is usually discussed from its later half erasing the history of Mamluks, Fatimids, Ayyubids, Buyids, etc. Some states choose to discuss the early Abbasid period or its golden age, however most frameworks will skip forward to the middle of the Ottoman Empire. In the case of California, the framework only addresses in more detail the decline than the rise. Secondly, the mandate system and Arab-Palestinian Conflict are the two most commonly discussed topics in the frameworks after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Finally, terrorism is the most commonly discussed topic occurring during contemporary times. The cost of this is that present-day Middle East is singularly associated with terrorism, and the students lack exposure to the region beyond this subject. What this results in is that teachers may try to tackle stereotypes even while the state frameworks fail to work beyond this predicament.

Even in the case of New York, Virginia, or California where the writers were less inclined to write terrorism in association with the phrase “Islamic fundamentalism,” the Middle Eastern region is still associated with the contentious term. Of course it is a sensitive topic and of course there are educators who are conscious of the need for diplomatic language when speaking about terrorist acts committed by Muslims. To clarify, I am not arguing for abridging or lessening the international impact of Muslim-funded terrorism as this is an essential topic that should be debated and questioned. However, my argument here is that the stereotypes of Middle Eastern people can only countered with nuanced and diverse narratives. Discussion of the

130 Texas Education Agency, 13.
contemporary Middle East needs to be inclusive of narratives unrelated to terrorist topics. This may include but is not limited to Arab social workers’ movements, the discovery of oil in Gulf countries, and the Arab Spring among others. This would help diversify the student’s perception of what it means to exist in the Middle East today.

Finally, there are several points to be made regarding whether these frameworks bolster or challenge stereotypes. I will also address the question whether it is even necessary to include the Middle East in history curricula. As demonstrated in chapter 1 and also in the discussion of parties involved in education politics, Christian evangelical conservatives continue to affect the historical narratives disseminated through frameworks. This is relevant to our study because the inclusion of non-Western civilizations in World History is not a given nor is it necessarily a weapon against perpetuating stereotypes. Protestant advocacy groups are so prominent in public school curriculum discourse because other major Christian groups such as Catholics have already left the system for parochial schools. What makes these Christian advocacy groups resistant to an increase of Middle East visibility on state curricula, is that they often criticize multicultural education as diminishing the true role of the West in modern society. My inclusion of Christian conservatism in this discussion is not to make claims that Christians are inherently against accurate portrayals of the Middle East. Rather my point here is that when these groups argue against multicultural education which advocates for the inclusivity of other cultures, they are advocating for sustaining Eurocentrism. Eurocentric attitudes are the primary tool for maintaining Arab stereotypes.

Whether the frameworks challenged stereotypes varied. There were instances where terrorism was described as a “global security” threat rather than a unitarily Western problem that would serve as an example of challenging norms. On the other hand in Texas, stereotypes remained in the discussion of terrorism. When considering the voices in involved in this document, such as David Barton the CEO of Wallbuilders, such language is not surprising. Some stereotypes were far less overt. The dichotomization of West and East as “us” and “them” is prevalent throughout all the frameworks. In California it is more nuanced but in New York, definitions of modernity are standardized in the historical narratives presented. All the frameworks viewed traditionalism, often conflated with religious conservatism, as antithetical to

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131 J. Kelton Williams, 441.
a modern existence. What this perpetuates is that Middle Easterners that live simultaneously with their European contemporaries are denied of their rightful modern coexistence due to their practice of faith. Furthermore, describing the Middle Eastern region only within the context of “secularism versus religiosity” erases the stories of non-Muslims and non-practicing Muslims.

To conclude, this study has only reinforced the notion that it is absolutely necessary for students to study the Middle East. Two educators wrote in response to the dilemma of teaching the War on Terror: “when accountability has become a national mantra, we believe educators must hold themselves accountable for ensuring that students acquire an intellectual grounding in history, civics, and culture that will enable them to develop informed opinions about the war, about U.S. foreign policy toward the Middle East, and about the implications of the war for civil liberties in American society.” The Middle East of course holds significance to the human past, but it is also essential for Americans to gain a sense of what the region means for its present day politics. Effective education policy and proper implementation has the potential to counter Islamophobia, xenophobia, and discrimination. It is my personal hope that this can be achieved step by step no matter the political and social obstacles.

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Primary Sources


Articles


Noboa, Julio. “Missing Pages From the Human Story: World History According to Texas


**Books and Monographs**


