

## Teaching about Islam in Secondary Schools: Curricular and Pedagogical Considerations

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Current demographic trends are contributing to a rapid increase in religious, racial, and ethnic diversity in the United States. This article provides a rationale for teaching about religious diversity, particularly Islam, in public schools and the vital role religion has played in American history. The article provides readers with important information regarding pedagogical and curricular issues related to teaching about Islam in social studies courses and information on how teachers can establish positive relationships with Muslim students by understanding the requirements and core beliefs of Islam.

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, the continuing war in Iraq, the expansion of Islam in America, and persistent conflict in the Middle East and other regions, have generated an intense and ongoing national debate concerning the nature of Islam, one of the world's three major monotheistic faiths, and its relationship to Western civilization, particularly the United States (Douglass & Dunn, 2003; Lewis, 2003; Pipes, 2003; Savage, 2004). This national conversation regarding Islam has taken hold in political institutions, military bases, educational institutions, and the media. Many scholars, educators, journalists, and policymakers debate the nature of Islam, the political and theological divisions within Islam, the compatibility of Islam with democracy, the relationship of Islam to American national security, the status and treatment of Muslims living in the United States, and how Islam should be presented in the public school curriculum, particularly in history and social studies courses.

Considering the vital importance of Islam in history, contemporary international affairs, and pervasive anti-Muslim prejudice and discrimination (Miller, 2004), it is critical that secondary school students be taught about Islam and be exposed to a wide variety of opinions, interpretations, and worldviews regarding this dynamic and fast-growing religion. The difficulty of this task is exacerbated by the sharp disagreements among scholars over the nature of Islam. For example, some scholars argue that Islam and the West are engaged in a struggle

for global dominance spawned by profound cultural differences, opposing worldviews, and dissimilar political aspirations (Fregosi, 1998; Huntington, 1996). Other scholars argue it is *only* Islamic fundamentalism (also called Islamism, militant Islam, radical Islam, or political Islam) that is a threat to the West because it has perverted the true nature of Islam in its quest to achieve their political goals via terrorist attacks on American and Western interests and populations (Burgat, 2003; Findley, 2001; Hotelling, 2003; Kepel, 2002; Lewis, 2003; Pipes, 2003; Tibi, 1998).

These conflicting views regarding Islam illustrate the controversy surrounding the role of religion in American society and public education. Historically, many racial, ethnic, and religious groups—all of which have their specific ideologies and goals—struggled to gain control over the curriculum and determine the appropriate information, materials, and instructional methods. This competition had profound consequences for society and education; the winners write the history that becomes the dominant story of a nation, despite the fact that history can be used as a weapon to dehumanize and demoralize less powerful groups. Thus, the overall view that American educators adopt regarding Islam and Muslims will have profound political, social, and cultural consequences for American Muslims and how they are treated in society and schools. It is important, as well as central to American democracy, that educators deal directly with controversial issues such as religion and race; avoiding controversial issues only exacerbates the inevitable conflicts that will surface in a diverse and free society. Democratic societies that allow open debates, dissent, and competing views can often settle conflicts

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via compromise and peaceful persuasion. Students must understand that the writing of history is a social and political construction of the past and involves competing interpretations, value judgments, partial truths, omissions, and distortions (Douglass & Dunn, 2003). This perspective, rather than confusing students, will help them to understand that all human knowledge is a “work-in-progress” and undergoes revisions in light of new evidence, technological advances, paradigm shifts in thinking, and current cultural and political trends.

## TEACHING ABOUT RELIGION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution requires public schools to remain neutral regarding religion. They must protect the religious freedoms of all students while simultaneously rejecting school promotion of religion (Haynes, Chaltain, Ferguson, Hudson, & Thomas, 2003). However, it is constitutional for public schools to teach *about* religion—the academic presentation of various belief systems, the role of religion in history, its influence on literature and the arts, and the influence of religion on legal and political systems. Indeed, Justice William Brennan argued, “It would be impossible to teach meaningfully many subjects in the social studies or the humanities without some mention of religion” (Stopsky & Lee, 1994, p. 42). Thus, in the 1963 case of *Abington v. Schempp*, the United States Supreme Court ruled that teaching about religions is educationally sound and legal, providing that specific guidelines are followed. For example, public schools cannot inculcate religious beliefs—from any religion—nor promote or denigrate any religion; they must maintain a position of neutrality required by the First Amendment (Haynes et al., 2003).

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) (1998), reflecting previous judicial decisions, issued a position statement acknowledging that an educated individual must have a basic knowledge and understanding about religion, thereby establishing clear guidelines for the study about religion in public schools. These guidelines require that the study of religion be academic in nature, objective, descriptive, and provide a comprehensive and balanced examination of world religions in a climate free from advocacy. Furthermore, the study of religion should emphasize the role of religion in history, the humanities, and contemporary events; student knowledge and understanding, not conformity or acceptance, are of paramount importance. The study of religion or “beliefs and values” is sanctioned in the ten major themes that form the foundation of the NCSS (1994) curriculum standards; this enables teachers to discuss religion in a wide variety of social studies courses. Also, Nord and Haynes (1998) provide an excellent resource—*Taking Religion Seriously Across the Curriculum*—for teachers con-

cerned with the legal and educational issues associated with teaching about religion.

This educational challenge is exacerbated by the fact that courses about religion—not indoctrinating students into any religion but teaching about major religions and their critical roles in world and American history, jurisprudence, contemporary global affairs, and the humanities—constitutes a very small part of the curriculum in American public schools and universities (Nord, 1995). Public educational institutions, including colleges and schools of education—reflecting the secularization of America’s dominant political, economic, and social institutions and the remarkable success of science in explaining human existence—have removed religion from the curriculum (Nord, 1995). The removal of religion from the curriculum has occurred because some educators have misinterpreted the “separation of church and state” doctrine to mean that any discussion of religion in schools is prohibited. Thus, the many secondary school and university students could earn diplomas and college degrees without ever taking any courses in religion. Given the central role of religion in American and world history and contemporary international politics, this is tantamount to educational malfeasance.

Indeed, some scholars assert that America’s political, legal, and educational institutions are hostile to religion, which is often viewed, particularly by cultural elites, as an anachronism devoid of relevance in the modern world (Bruce, 2003; Carter, 1993; Nord, 1995). Many educators assume “that religion is irrelevant to virtually everything that is taken to be true and important” (Nord, 1995, p. 1) and the vast majority of students are exposed to only secular ways of viewing history and reality (Nord & Haynes, 1998). Therefore, the scarcity of knowledge and understanding about Islam among the general public is symptomatic of a greater problem: the failure of American educational institutions to take religion seriously as a viable worldview to understand human existence (Nord, 1995). Nord and Haynes (1998) argue “that most proposals for multicultural education virtually ignore religion” (p. 86) and educators are woefully unprepared to teach about religion throughout the curriculum (Nord, 1995).

Thus, most Americans are woefully ignorant of the importance of religion in American and world history and have great difficulty in understanding political affairs in regions where religion is central to daily life (Findley, 2001; Nord, 1995). Indeed, if students do not know “how Islam traditionally fuses the sacred with the secular, how are they going to understand the politics of the Middle East?” (Nord, 1995, p. 207). Of course, without understanding Islam (as well as Hinduism, nationalism, and geography) students cannot comprehend the Indian and Pakistani conflict over Kashmir, recent political events in Asia, or some of the religious and political tensions in Western Europe or the United States.

Although the theological tenets of Islam are universal, Islam has expressed itself in many diverse ways in different regions and historical eras (Esposito, 1999). Islam, like Christianity and Judaism, has splintered into different sects—Sunnis and Shiites in Iran and Iraq, Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia, the Druze in Lebanon and Syria—and Islam, over the course of 14 centuries, has interacted with indigenous cultures across the Middle East, Africa, and Asia to produce unique Islamic societies, civilizations, or empires (Esposito, 1999; Haddad, 1999). Thus, there is a crucial distinction between Islam (as a religion with a specific theology, laws, rituals, and requirements) and Islamic cultures, which exhibit high degrees of political and socioeconomic diversity.

Furthermore, the diversity within Islam has generated intense disagreements among scholars over the true nature of Islam. This that may leave teachers confused over the facts and deter them from teaching this important, albeit controversial, topic in their social studies classes. This is unfortunate, because teaching about Islam, like all religions, presents students with opportunities to expand their knowledge and understanding of the world, develop tolerance for religious and cultural diversity, take an active and informed role in American politics, and develop critical thinking skills that could generate viable solutions to religious, political, and cultural conflicts (Nord & Haynes, 1998).

## OPPRESSION AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

Oppression, discrimination, and violence aimed at Muslims in the United States began in the 17th century when the colonies began importing African slaves for agricultural labor on plantations (Haddad, 1999). Scholars estimate that approximately 10–30% of the slaves were Muslims who, because they were the most educated of the captives, vigorously resisted slavery and the forced conversions to Christianity in their attempts to maintain their identities (Austin, 1984; Haddad, 1999; Hasan, 2000; McCloud, 1995). Throughout the ensuing centuries, Muslims, like other minorities in the United States, were often targeted for discrimination and violence; much of this behavior was created by fusing religious and racial discrimination spawned by entrenched notions of white Christianity superiority (Spring, 2004). Specifically, many religious minorities—Jews, Catholics, Mormons, Muslims, Native Americans, and others—were labeled “inferior races” and have suffered from segregation, verbal insults, violent assaults, exclusion from the curriculum, abridged legal protections, and other forms of discrimination in public education and other institutions; indeed, strong anti-Catholic sentiments, including violence, initiated the development of Catholic schools throughout the United States (Levin & McDevitt, 2002; Spring, 2004). Educators should be aware of the

complex and subtle nature of discrimination; what appears to be racial or ethnic discrimination may, in reality, be religious discrimination or vice versa. Today, Muslims are a prime target for various forms of discrimination owing to current international events and their growing presence and influence in the United States.

When major events in the Middle East occur, such as the 1979 Iranian Revolution or Palestinian/Israeli conflicts, Muslims in the United States experience increased harassment, discrimination, and violence. Thus, the hundreds of incidents regarding violence, intimidation, and discrimination aimed at Muslims or people that “looked” like Muslims in the months following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC were the latest in a long history of anti-Muslim acts (Haddad, 1999; Haynes, 2004; Levin & McDevitt, 2002). Apparently, people of color or individuals speaking with an accent, were singled out for attacks by perpetrators of hate crimes unconcerned with the fact that the vast majority of Muslims reject terrorism and violence. Moreover, these attacks, including murders and vandalism against mosques and temples, were carried out by individuals who did not know or care that there are profound differences among Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and other religious, racial, ethnic, and cultural groups (Levin & McDevitt, 2002).

Many Americans are profoundly ignorant regarding Islam and often conflate Islam with terrorism and political regimes that unjustly conscript Islam to justify their oppressive policies and practices (Brockopp, 2003; Douglass & Dunn, 2003; Kassam, 2003; Reinhart, 2003). Therefore, many Muslims and Arabs have taken steps to combat the harmful stereotypes and discrimination they have experienced in the United States. For example, many organizations, such as the American Muslim Council, the Council for American-Islamic Relations, the Council on Islamic Education, and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, were formed to increase the political power of Muslims in the United States, to fight violence, racism, and discrimination against Muslims, to ensure that their constitutional rights are protected, to provide economic opportunities, and provide accurate information and teaching resources regarding Islam to educators and the American public (Haddad, 1999).

## DIVERSITY AMONG MUSLIMS

Furthermore, the Muslim population, far from being a monolithic entity, is characterized by enormous diversity in terms of national origin, languages, socioeconomic status, historical experiences, political ideology, and theology (Reinhart, 2003). For example, there are profound differences between Sunni Muslims and Shiite Muslims,

the two major divisions within Islam, over theology, law, and religious practices. Shiites believe that only direct descendants of Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law, can be the true leaders of Islam. Sunni Muslims, however, claim that only descendants from the Umayyad dynasty are the legitimate leaders of Islam (Donner, 1999). Understanding the differences between Shiites and Sunnis is important if students are to understand the current conflicts in Iraq, Iran, and other countries, as well as disagreements among American Muslims over theological, social, and political issues in the United States (Esposito, 1999; Nasr, 2004).

The Muslim population in the United States, currently estimated to be about 8 million (Findley, 2001), is growing rapidly due to immigration and relatively high birth rates; simultaneously, this important demographic trend is being accompanied by the Muslim community's increasing political and economic power and contributions to American science, engineering, medicine, culture, and business (Esposito, 1998; Khan, 2002). American Muslims, according to several socioeconomic and educational indices (levels of education, proportion in professional occupations, annual median income, and entrepreneurship) are doing well in the United States; this fact helps to dispel the myth that Islam (as practiced in the United States) is incompatible with democracy (Hermansen, 2003; Pipes, 2003). According to Pipes (2003), many Muslims (66.1%) reported feeling accepted and respected in the United States and believe that American Muslims are doing well and experiencing little bias and discrimination in an increasingly tolerant multicultural democracy (p. 168).

The increased presence and political power of American Muslims, in conjunction with increased efforts by some American institutions to accommodate the Muslim community, has resulted in some important changes in schools. These accommodations include curriculum issues, discipline concerns, and providing for a safe learning environment; most Muslim students in the United States attend public schools and these institutions have taken reasonable steps to protect students from discrimination and to accommodate their religious needs. School officials have an obligation to protect all students from violence and discrimination; however, this entails educators knowing and understanding the unique position that many minority students must confront in public schools (Haynes, 2004). If educators are going to work effectively with Muslim students, they must understand the basic tenets and requirements of Islam. These requirements (e.g., prayer at specific times, fasting during Ramadan, general dietary needs, dress codes, gender interactions) are complex, and, therefore, making accommodations can be very difficult and may even require judicial decisions regarding the legality of the accommodations (Haynes, 2004; Nord & Haynes, 1998). Yet, this is an important step as America continues to evolve into

a more just democratic society balancing national unity with cultural diversity.

## ISLAM IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

The teaching of Islam to American students is a relatively recent phenomenon and is heavily influenced by the Arab-Israeli conflict, the legacy of colonialism, competing narratives of Islam, and American policies throughout the Islamic world (Douglass & Dunn, 2003). Generally, the teaching of Islam in the United States has been characterized by perpetuating numerous stereotypes, distortions, omissions, textbook inaccuracies, and within the boundaries of Western Civilization's politically motivated narrative (Hermansen, 2003; Kassam, 2003; Reinhart, 2003; Wheeler, 2003). Schlesinger (1998) argued in *The Disuniting of America*, history and education are weapons that can be abused to justify all forms of oppression—genocide, slavery, discrimination, segregation, and deculturalization—and manipulate, for political purposes, the memory of a culture or civilization. Therefore, prudent educators must consider the sources when evaluating the validity of all historical narratives, materials, and teaching activities.

### Curricular Considerations

Despite competing historical narratives, pervasive stereotypes, and the difficult choices over designing an appropriate curriculum, scholars generally agree that there are some core values, beliefs, historical events, and practices that characterize Islam and should be part of the secondary school curriculum (Wheeler, 2003). Most scholars agree students should know the theological meaning of Islam, the transcendence and indivisibility of Allah, the role of Muhammad and his deeds and sayings (hadith), the importance of the Quran to Islam, Shariah (law), the Five Pillars of Islam (five requirements that are at the heart of Islam), the Six Pillars of Faith, the contributions of Muslims to world civilization, reasons for the rapid expansion of Islam, and the divisions within Islam (Lawrence, 1999; Nord & Haynes, 1998; Wheeler, 2003). Of course, students, if they are to understand major historical events and current international affairs, must understand the conflicts and competition between Islam and Christianity spawned by different theological and political worldviews (Haddad, 1999; Lewis, 2003; Pipes, 2003).

*Contributions of Islamic Civilizations to World History.* One of the best instructional methods for increasing knowledge, fostering tolerance, and reducing prejudice is teaching the important contributions of different cultures to human civilization. The current political, cultural, and economic problems that exist in many Muslim countries should in no way detract from the remarkable past cultural achievements of Islamic

civilizations in a wide variety of disciplines (Findley, 2001; Hotaling, 2003; Lewis, 2003). Islam, a religion with specific theological tenets, laws, and practices is not synonymous with Islamic cultural achievements. However, shortly after Muhammad's death in 632, Arab conquerors spread Islam throughout North Africa, southwest and central Asia, and Iberia. This rapid expansion of Islam, owing primarily to military conquests and the appeal of Islamic values, such as equality, social justice, and monotheism, produced enormous cultural exchanges with the Persian and Byzantine empires, India, and Greece (Bentley & Ziegler, 2000). Islamic society developed by incorporating various elements of these cultures to produce a truly multicultural civilization; simultaneously, the Islamic religion transformed the cultural traditions of the conquered societies and created the dar-el-Islam—the "house of Islam"—that refers to areas under Islamic sovereignty (Bentley & Ziegler, 2000). Thus, many Islamic achievements are the product of indigenous efforts and the dynamic processes of cultural diffusion. This important lesson will help students learn that there is a symbiotic relationship among civilizations that binds humanity; unity and diversity are both important components in producing human conflicts, cooperation, and progress.

For example, while Arabic became the dominant language of Islamic theology and law, the Persian language was used in Islamic literary works, such as the *Rubaiyat*, *The Arabian Nights*, and other works of poetry, history, and political philosophy (Bentley & Ziegler, 2000). Muslim scholars examined, adapted, and preserved many works of Greco-Roman civilization after the fall of the Roman Empire generated chaos in Western Europe. Muslim philosophers, notably Ibn Rushd (known as Averroes in the West) attempted to reconcile the teachings of the Quran with the hallmark achievement of ancient Greece: human reason as the primary guide to ultimate truth. Ibn Rushd's work had a profound influence on the development of scholasticism, the attempt by medieval European philosophers to reconcile Christian theology with Aristotelian reasoning (Bentley & Ziegler, 2000).

Muslim mathematicians, using Hindi numerals, developed algebra and made significant contributions to geometry and trigonometry. These mathematical achievements, along with Muslim competence in engineering and art, manifested themselves in the brilliant architectural achievements of Islamic civilizations, such as the Grand Mosque in Mecca, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, and the Taj Mahal in Agra, India (Blair & Bloom, 1999; Dallal, 1999). In addition, Muslim scholars made advances in the science of optics, practical astronomy, geography, improved the astrolabe (an instrument used by sailors to measure latitude), created accurate maps of the eastern hemisphere, developed alchemy, and produced *The Canon of Medicine*, a monumental volume that attempted to summarize all of the medical knowl-

edge into one comprehensive structure (Dallal, 1999). These few examples of contributions to human civilization demonstrate the intellectual vitality of Islam and the vital role of cultural diffusion in producing cultural, scientific, technological, and artistic progress.

Teaching American secondary school students about these achievements, as well as the prominent role of contemporary American Muslims in science, computer technology, engineering, medicine, and business, will help to reduce the prejudice and discrimination directed at Muslims (Findley, 2001; Hotaling, 2003). While many Muslim societies have experienced severe political, social, and economic problems during the past few centuries, it would be grossly unjust to ignore, distort, or denigrate the remarkable achievements of Islamic civilizations (Lewis, 2003). Historical knowledge about Islam, the educational and socioeconomic success of many Muslims in America, and the ability to recognize the great diversity in Islamic civilizations—including the profound difference between militant/radical Islam and moderate Islam—may help secondary school students to dispel some of the most insidious myths and stereotypes that haunt the world's 1.2 billion Muslims (Ernst, 2003; Feldman, 2003; Findley, 2001).

### Pedagogical Approaches to Social Justice

Moreover, teachers should help students understand the Islamic worldview from the inside and not merely American or non-Islamic interpretations of this highly complex religion (Nord & Haynes, 1998). This goal could be accomplished by using guest speakers and primary sources, such as the Quran, to allow Muslims to articulate the essentials of their religion. Naturally, teachers must exercise sound judgment when choosing and evaluating resources and formulating lesson plans; educators could verify the accuracy of their resources by engaging in research and considering a wide variety of sources for information and teaching methods. Teaching about Islam—like all religions and historical events—requires a comprehensive and accurate presentation of positive and negative events; it is unethical and educationally dishonest to tell only one side of the story (Schlesinger, 1998).

Teachers must be aware of the important issues and potential problems when teaching about Islam or interacting with Muslim students or parents; a prudent educator will recognize that teaching about any controversial topic will provide opportunities to enlighten all students. For example, students might make stereotypical comments (such as, *all* Muslims are terrorists, wealthy from oil profits, ride on camels, hate America, have harems, and so forth) to Muslim students or textbooks or curriculum materials may contain anti-Muslim stereotypes, omissions, or distortions which should be corrected (Haddad, 1999). There are several

strategies teachers could use to shatter these stereotypes and to decrease anti-Muslim prejudice, discrimination, and violence. For example, teachers could develop a geography/global lesson showing students that the vast majority of Muslims: (1) do not live in the Middle East or “Arab” world, (2) that many Muslims experience poverty and oppression in many countries, and (3) the vast majority of Muslims absolutely reject terrorism and violence. Furthermore, by giving examples of successful Muslims, such as *Newsweek* journalist and former Harvard professor Fareek Zakaria, students would learn that American Muslims are loyal and productive citizens who have made important contributions to the U.S. culture. Providing students with concrete examples of people or events that clearly refute the stereotypes is an excellent method to reduce prejudice and discrimination against stigmatized groups. There are excellent resources that teachers can obtain that provide accurate information regarding Islam; for example, *The Oxford History of Islam*, edited by John L. Esposito (1999), provides a wealth of information on Islamic theology, law, history in different regions, cultural achievements, and contemporary issues.

Teachers need to be sensitive when providing instruction on the role of Islam, or any religion, in history and contemporary world affairs—the Crusades, jihads, Western colonialism, and current world events are very emotional topics for many Muslims and non-Muslims—and present all information in a fair manner that ensures that different perspectives are encouraged in class activities (Haddad, 1999; Hermansen, 2003; Wheeler, 2003). Educators, all of whom have biases, must strive to present multiple perspectives. Screening materials (films, textbooks, and handouts) for biases, distortions, and omissions, is a prudent step in preparing lesson plans; searching for accurate materials with alternative views is an appropriate way to ensure balance and stimulate critical thinking, often articulated as a primary goal in education. For example, teachers should provide students with the multiple meanings of complex terms, such as jihad, and stress that definitions change over time and across cultures. Defining jihad as a holy war and ignoring its other meanings, such as the inner struggle to achieve moral self-improvement, is not educationally sound; however, teaching students that complex terms have multiple meanings will enhance their understanding of Islam (Esposito, 1999; Hasan, 2000; Lewis, 2003; Pipes, 2003).

Teaching about the Crusades provides teachers with an excellent opportunity to demonstrate the centrality of multiple perspectives, competing political and religious goals, and the complexity of historical events (Smith, 1999; Wheatcroft, 2004). For example, it is important to point out the role of false rumors, propaganda, greed, and ulterior motives (some Crusaders were motivated, not by God or a just moral cause, but by the desire for wealth, power, war, a title of nobility, or adventure) in

causing Pope Urban II to call for the liberation of the Holy Land from the “infidels,” supporting the Christian view that the Crusades would be morally justified acts carried out in the name of God. Byzantine emperor Alexius I, in an attempt to win Roman Catholic support in the form of armies and funds, said that the Muslim Turks were destroying Christian shrines and hurting Christian pilgrims; both of these statements were patently false, but the damage was done: In 1099 Christian crusaders sacked Jerusalem and massacred Muslims and Jews in cold blood (Spielvogel, 1999). Thus, from the Muslim and Jewish perspectives, the Crusades were indefensible acts of naked imperialism and murder (Smith, 1999); today, almost 800 years after the last Crusade, these religious and political wars continue to impact Western and Islamic relations.

Furthermore, teachers, in addition to discussing the conflicts between Islam and the Christian West, should point out important similarities because it can generate common ground between Islam and Christianity, which can help to reduce conflicts and misunderstandings. For example, both religions are based on ethical monotheism (this indicates that all men are brothers), both stress important virtues, such as honesty, courage, and compassion, and both religions, at various times in history, have been hijacked by extremists whose rhetoric and actions have perverted the true nature of the faith. It is incumbent upon teachers to present a comprehensive and balanced examination of all major historical events; this entails teaching the achievements and atrocities that are associated with all civilizations and cultures.

Many schools, continuing in their efforts to respect Muslim students, are taking steps to label cafeteria food containing pork products (Zehr, 1999), allowing females to wear head scarves and be excluded from coed physical education classes, fulfill prayer requirements, and making reasonable allowances for students fasting during Ramadan (Haynes et al., 2003). As the United States continues to become more diverse and tolerant, educators will have to become more knowledgeable about all cultures and religious traditions; simultaneously, debates over national identity, discrimination, and to what extent—if any—immigrants and minorities should assimilate into the mainstream will increase throughout the country.

## CONCLUSION

It is important for students, as active participants in American society, to understand that Islam is not a monolithic entity immune from changes over time and across space; Islam, like all religions, evolves as it interacts with the complex factors of race, ethnicity, nationality, social class, gender, local cultural mores, and specific historical (Feldman, 2003). The world’s 51 predominantly Muslim countries are characterized by enormous diversity and

are experiencing cultural, social, and political turbulence in a rapidly changing world. Moreover, the rapid expansion of Islam has produced significant minority Muslim populations in Europe and the United States that have generated a plethora of important questions and issues over national identity, the separation of church and state, the compatibility of Islam with democracy, the degree to which, if any, that religious minorities should assimilate into the dominant culture of a country, and the relationship between religious and civil law (Ezzati, 2002).

While these issues are very complex, secondary school students can be given instruction in the basic history, contributions, values, and practices of Islamic civilizations. Indeed, if teachers developed an overarching educational program that allows students to understand and appreciate the multiplicity of variables that affect cultural, religious, and political changes throughout the world, students could grasp many of the important nuances, controversies, and issues associated with Islam and other complex topics. Islamic contributions to humanity touch all academic disciplines and all teachers—history, math, science, literacy/English—could design lessons that incorporate these achievements in order to dispel stereotypes and help students view Muslims as productive human beings entitled to respect, religious liberty, and full participation in U.S. society. All human civilizations are capable of remarkable achievements and barbarous behaviors; history should reflect the unblemished truths—great achievements as well as atrocities—regarding all cultures and should not be used as a weapon to dehumanize any group (Schlesinger, 1998). By taking a balanced approach, teachers could help dispel the myths and stereotypes that have plagued Muslims throughout history.

It is in this country's best interests to educate citizens about Islam; demographic trends, the Islamic revival, and current international and domestic events suggest Islam will be of increasing importance in the 21st century. Educational institutions must take seriously the role of religion in history and contemporary politics and require teachers to design units or courses that allow students to acquire a rich understanding of *all* world religions and their roles in U.S. and world history, law, and contemporary international relations (Nord, 1995).

Education remains a potent tool in the struggle to balance vital national identity and security concerns with tolerance for religious, cultural, and political diversity. The ideal of *e pluribus unum*—out of many, one— informs the U.S. struggle to maintain, and to improve, a culturally pluralistic democracy.

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