



What Americans for Peace and Tolerance's (APT) Ad Alleges:

According to APT, the Newton public schools curriculum uses Saudi-funded hate and anti-Israel materials and texts in classrooms in order to demonize Israel and Jews, and glorify Islam. This charge lacks evidence and is irresponsible.

ADL Assessment:

- While APT's ad suggests that Newton uses the volume, "The Arab World Studies Notebook" as a textbook to teach hate and extremism, it emerged that the reading that was singled out for criticism was highlighted by one teacher who used it on a sole occasion in 2011 when it was actually used to teach about bias, and not in the context of advancing a political viewpoint. "The Arab World Studies Notebook" has since been removed from Newton schools.
- The APT ad cites the article "A World Where Womanhood Reigns Supreme" as an example of "teaching intolerance," and provides the following quote as evidence: "Western gender equality is 'an unacceptable system of values.'"

This description misrepresents the article, first published in the 1990s by Mary Walker, in which she shares her experience dealing with her "perception of Islam" as a faith "dominated by prejudice and ignorance." According to Walker, the women she met in her travels around the Muslim world made a conscious decision to define their role in society, free from any "male approval." The writer endorses a view, often promoted by other feminists, that "miniskirts and plunging necklines represent oppression."

The quote cited in the APT ad is taken out of context. The original reads: "They argued that the veil signified their rejection of an unacceptable system of values which debased women while Islam elevated women to a position of honour and respect."

- The APT ad claims that the article "Islamic History: The Coming of the West" ignores "Arab genocidal threats against Israel and terrorists attacks prior to 1967" and that "Israeli intransigence not Palestinian hatred and terrorism is to blame for lack of peace."

The article does not cover attacks against Israel prior to 1967, but it is not a comprehensive piece and omits numerous facts about the conflict. APT claims that the article does not blame Palestinian terrorism for lack of peace. While this statement is accurate, APT fails to acknowledge that the article clearly notes how the 1967 war "triggered underground warfare by Palestinian militants, whose attacks were primarily aimed at Israel, but also included strikes in Europe and hijackings on international air routes."



The article also lists significant events after the Balfour Declaration, including a record of how Israel was established and important events in the region that followed Israeli independence, including the peace treaty signed by Israel and Egypt in 1979.

Furthermore, the article blames the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel as a major factor for increased tension in the Middle East, not just Israel, as the ad suggests. The original reads:

“The immediate net result of the treaty, in fact, was a general increase in tension in the Middle East which manifested itself in an apparent increase in Israeli intransigence in the occupied territories and the isolation of Egypt from the rest of the Arab world, including those countries on which it has been most heavily dependent for economic and political backing and which were opposed to the separate treaty because it failed to achieve a permanent and comprehensive peace.”

- We were unable to find an article called “Flashpoints: Guide to World History” listed in the ad. It is possible the ad misidentified the title, which we believe is “Flashpoints: Guide to World Conflicts.” The “Flashpoints” website includes information about various conflicts in the world, including the Israel-Palestine conflict.

The site is not particularly credible and it is critical of both sides, not just Israel. It lists Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine and describes Palestinian attacks against Israeli civilians as providing “the motive and justification for draconian counter-terrorist policies and collective punishment.” It also clearly labels Hamas as a terrorist organization and notes that “some Palestinians and their foreign backers, ignoring the facts on the ground, continue to call for the destruction of Israel.”

It is not an article that ADL would support being presented to students without additional context, but we have seen no evidence that it is being used in Newton school classrooms.

- The APT ad claims that “A Muslim Primer: Beginner’s Guide to Islam” by Ira G. Zepp Jr. is being used as a classroom textbook and that it “recommends the writing of Sayyid Qutb, who inspired Osama Bin Laden and is the father of radical Islam.”

While the book does cite Qutb - “The easiest way to understand Islam and human rights is to heed an observation [about Islam’s “egalitarian streak”] by the Egyptian scholar Sayyid Qutb,” it does not recommend his writing. In fact Qutb’s writing is not listed in the “suggested bibliography” at the end of the book which is described by the author “most helpful” and which he recommends “for those interested in Christian-Muslim relations.”

The book, in part, is an early attempt to respond to some misconceptions about Islam and Muslims. A major shortcoming of the book is the frequent use of Christianity as a contrast to explain Islam; for example, when writing about the issue of the “Oneness of God,” Zepp writes about Muslims’ rejection to the “Christian formula.” The frequent



reference to Islam's objection to specific Christian and, at times, Jewish religious teachings could be seen as non-constructive in today's education settings.

When addressing the issue of Islam's relation to Judaism (page 23) the author uses the Islamic traditional narrative, which attributes the strained relation between Muslims and Jews to the Jewish failure to acknowledge "Ishmael and Jesus the way Muhammad did." This book does not address the differences between Islam and Christianity or Judaism in a thoughtful way. While ADL would not support its use in a classroom to teach about world religions, we also would not advocate for its censorship for availability from a library. We have been assured by Newton school officials that it is not being used as a text in classrooms.

- While an additional ad by APT alleges that Newton schools distributed to high school students the same graphic map used in recent anti-Israel ads at MBTA stations, it was revealed that the map was actually one part of a packet of a range of other maps utilized to provide diverse perspectives.
- On several occasions, APT has also claimed that Newton schools' use of Paul Beran, Director of the Outreach Center at Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, to present to Newton school teachers on potential teaching approaches and resources reflected its use of Saudi-funded hate speech. ADL's interviews, however, revealed that Mr. Beran was utilized on a single occasion, sometime prior to 2009, and that his talk on that one occasion on the Oslo Accords was arranged by an individual who no longer works in the Newton School system.

ADL assessment that APT's allegations are without merit does not stand alone:

- In response to a complaint filed in May 2013, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education found that "no violation of education law, regulation or policy has occurred" with regard to concerns about anti-Israel curriculum and materials in Newton public schools.
- ADL issued a Joint Statement with CJP and JCRC which explained that "there is substantial reason to believe that the allegations made in the ad are without merit."
- American Jewish Committee (AJC) similarly concluded that "APT's evidence did not support its claims; the accusations depended upon quotes from literature that were deprived of textual and educational context."
- In a letter to his leadership Barry Shrage, President of the Boston CJP stated:

"In the past few years, there were reports of incidents where materials containing bias against Israel may have found their way into some Newton classrooms. Newton's school leadership addressed each of the issues and addressed them in a serious, professional and appropriate manner. The essence of propaganda is the ability to take what might be legitimate materials out of context and to place them in a pattern that bears little



relationship to truth or reality if properly understood. APT turned what appear to be isolated incidents into an ongoing campaign, setting their sights on materials in the school libraries, regardless of how those materials may or may not have been used.”