



What Are the Facts about the State Board of Education’s Anti-Islam Resolution?

In July a failed State Board of Education candidate, Randy Rives of Odessa, asked the Texas board to adopt a resolution condemning what he alleged were “pro-Islamic/anti-Christian distortions” in social studies textbooks. The proposed resolution includes a variety of claims designed to demonstrate the alleged bias in high school world history textbooks published in 1999. First, those textbooks are not in Texas classrooms. Publishers updated those textbooks, which Texas adopted in 2002. A review of those newer textbooks, which carry a copyright of 2003, at the Texas Education Agency reveals that the Rives’ claims are superficial and grossly misleading. Below is a sampling of claims in the Rives resolution and the facts that counter them.

Claim	Fact
<p>World history textbooks provide, in some cases, twice as much coverage for Islamic beliefs, practices and holy writings than they do for Christianity.</p>	<p>This claim is based on an incomplete review of the textbooks. In fact, the review appears to ignore whole sections of textbooks that discuss Christianity. Among the ignored topics were the church in the Byzantine Empire; monasticism and church reform in the Middle Ages; the Holy Roman Empire; canon law; religion as a unifying force in Europe; the Reformation; and Christian influences on art, architecture and culture in the Renaissance and other eras. Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● McDougal’s world history textbook, p. 425, in a discussion of writers during the Northern Renaissance: “Although some of Erasmus’s most stinging barbs were aimed at the clergy, his work is strongly Christian. Erasmus believed in a Christianity of the heart, not one of ceremonies or rules. He thought that in order to improve society, all people should study the Bible.”
<p>World history textbooks “dwell” on atrocities committed by Christian Crusaders during the Middle Ages while ignoring similar atrocities by Muslim leaders such as Tamerlane.</p>	<p>These claims are based on passages often taken out of context or ignored altogether. That the Crusaders were guilty of various atrocities against Muslims, Jews and Christians is historical fact. In addition, however, nearly all world history textbooks used in Texas classrooms also discuss conquests and atrocities committed by Muslim leaders, including those by Tamerlane. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Glencoe’s textbook, p. 269, includes this passage about a Muslim attack on Delhi in India in the 14th century: “As many as 100,000 Hindu prisoners were massacred before the gates of the city. It was India’s first meeting with Timur Lenk (Tamerlane).” ● McDougal’s textbook, p. 444, discusses the same massacre: “In 1398, he swept through northern India, leaving destruction and decaying corpses in his wake. He butchered the inhabitants of Delhi and made a pyramid of their skulls.” ● The same McDougal textbook also describes how Timur the Lane (Tamerlane) burned Baghdad to the ground.



<p>World history textbooks “whitewash” Islamic culture by ignoring Muslim practices involving sexism, slavery and persecution outside groups.</p>	<p>Textbooks used in Texas classrooms do discuss the treatment of women and slaves in Islamic society. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Glencoe, p. 205: “According to Islam, all people are equal in the eyes of Allah. . . . One group of people in the Islamic world was not considered equal. They were the slaves. As in the other civilizations we have examined so far, slavery was widespread.” ● Glencoe, p. 206: “Islamic teachings did account for differences between men and women in the family and social order. Both had duties and responsibilities. As in most societies of the time, however, men were dominant in Muslim society. . . . After the spread of Islam, older customs eroded the rights enjoyed by early Muslim women.” ● Glencoe, p. 270: “Like rulers elsewhere at this time, many Muslim rulers in India were intolerant of other faiths.” ● Prentice Hall’s textbook, p. 254: “Although later Muslims overlooked Muhammad’s principle of tolerance, in general, the People of the Book [Christians and Jews] enjoyed religious freedom in early Muslim societies.” (p. 255): “Though spiritually equal, men and women had different roles and rights. For example, the amount of an inheritance given to a daughter was less than that given to a son. A woman could seek a divorce, but it was harder for her to get one than for a man.” ● Textbooks also discuss how Muslims over time adopted practices of people they conquered, including a requirement that women be veiled and genders kept separated.
<p>The resolution claims that Muslim influence over world history textbooks will increase as Arabs invest in publishing companies and it notes, in particular, Arab investors in the parent company of publisher Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.</p>	<p>In the modern era’s globalized economy, foreign investment in U.S.-based publishing companies has not been unusual. For example, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt is part of Education Media and Publishing Group, which is registered in the Cayman Islands (a British territory) and run by Irish businessman Barry O’Callaghan. The British company Pearson controls numerous educational publishing units, including prominent U.S. brands such as Prentice Hall and Scott Foresman. Neither of those companies has been accused of sneaking pro-British or pro-Irish propaganda into American textbooks. It would be just as unlikely that Arab investors want to risk their capital by trying to politicize textbooks sold in markets that would probably be hostile to pro-Muslim propaganda.</p>