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Democratic Citizenship, Critical Multiculturalism, and the Case of Muslims Since September 11

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Key to democratic citizenship is understanding in a basic sense other people and groups in society. In the United States there has been a lively debate regarding how educators and students should set about doing this, however—how they should respond to differences from mainstream norms, inside and outside their classrooms, and the presence of minorities in society. In this essay, I want to illuminate specific aspects of the challenges public school educators face in constructively and accurately teaching about controversial groups in their classrooms by exploring the case of educating about Muslims since September 11 (9/11). I argue that in this particular instance the ability of multicultural educators[1] to provide students with accurate, balanced understandings of the religion and group is hindered by limitations internal to the traditional approaches to multicultural education in the United States, as well as by expectations set by current

[1] Terms used here such as "multiculturalism," "pluralism," and "assimilationism" have a long history, and their meanings typically vary according to context.Throughout this text I use "multiculturalism" to indicate any attitude sensitive in any way to difference in society, including pluralism or assimilationism. I discuss strategies for optimizing minorities' experiences in the public sphere through tolerating them in their "difference" as "pluralism," while by assimilationism I refer to the attitude that "different" groups should be encouraged to adapt to majority culture. Of course the types described here refer less to easily identifiable, self-described communities, and more to broad theoretical approaches to difference.

educational standards and related constraints set by typical teacher education programs.

I examine the challenges multicultural educators face in this case to clarify within a concrete context what is involved in and necessary to adequately educating students about groups considered "different," or controversial in contemporary society. After critically exploring common multicultural education theories and practices, I will flesh out a strategy I discuss here as "critical multiculturalism," which I argue is more apt for representing controversial minority groups in a balanced and accurate way in classroom settings, toward the end of enabling democratic citizenship. In the final section I consider the training teachers would need to prepare for these practices in pre-service teacher education programs. My ultimate aim then is to provide a more contextualized understanding of multicultural education in the United States, students' needs in learning about difference and minorities, and the options we face in relation.

The Limitations of Assimilationism and Pluralism, and the Possibility of Critical Multiculturalism

Assimilationism

A nation-state of immigrants, the United States has long encouraged assimilation of different ethnic groups, which involved both changes in norms and moral standards, through common schools and other institutions. Both mainstream society and the minority member within it were seen to benefit, according to those advocating for it, including many of its recipients.[2] Those deemed too different, or thought of as unwilling to assimilate to political majority norms—particularly during times of national crisis—were frequently held as inferior, dangerous, disruptive, or threatening to society, however; even the European-descended "hyphenated American" (identifying, for instance, as "Italian-American," rather than as "American") was seen as a potential threat during the first World War, carrying with his hyphen "a dagger that he is ready to plunge into the vitals of this Republic," according to former President Woodrow Wilson.[3]

While an attitude of minimal respect or toleration toward minority cultures is broadly embraced as part of American tradition today, many educators today continue to emphasize that minority markers of difference obstruct their equal participation in society, which has a dominant cultural tradition that should be taught appreciatively to all young people. Diane Ravitch for instance denounces "ethnic cheerleading"—the more substantive cultural recognition pluralists demand—as undermining social stability by needlessly perpetuating a politics of divisiveness over an emphasis on what makes U.S. society more universally distinctive. She disdains, in one particular instance, pluralistic educators who have "seized upon the Mayan contribution to mathematics as key to…boosting the ethnic pride of Hispanic children," in favor of teachers "attempting to

[2] Akam, Everett Helmut, *Transnational America* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).
[3] Ibid., 47. See also the *Caroline Slave Code of 1712,* in Gutman, Herbert G., *Who Built America?* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 387; and Akam, *Transnational America,* chapters 5-6.

change the teaching of their subject so that children can see its uses in everyday life."[4]

Here Ravitch emphasizes that "everyday life" in the United States is neither Mayan nor Hispanic, but American, assuming a "melting" of minority identities as ideal.

Others have identified a false dichotomy within such rhetoric, however, which suggests that supporting America's commitment to individual freedom and equality requires forsaking absolutely minority affiliation(s). Against assimilationists' emphatic claims that recognition of personal origins and group identities is a potential source of harm to minorities and/or society, one can identity meaningfully as female, or black, for instance, without brandishing in any substantial sense a commitment to a broader social field. And teachers need not participate either in "ethnic cheerleading" or nation building, but can do both, at least in a minimal sense, without incomprehensibility or incoherence, as Walter Feinberg suggests in his discussion minimal multicultural recognition:

> If a student felt bad because classmates looked down on her because of cultural or racial affiliation, the teacher may become more active in promoting the self-esteem of the child. This could entail encouraging her to bring in cultural items that speak to the accomplishments of the group. Recognition here is still minimal, however. It is provided in order to aid the *child's performance or comfort in the classroom, and it may or may not have any importance for the culture itself*.[5]

While it is possible that Ravitch and other like-minded thinkers would not see the harm in teachers boosting students' self-esteem in this sense, they often suggest in their texts that this sort of recognition could hardly take place in classroom settings without wasting valuable time that could be devoted to apparently *more important* matters: of social reproduction (teaching the skills needed to participate in society), assimilation (teaching students to identify with the larger, U.S. society), and nation building (teaching students to support the nation-state). Indeed, they commonly paint positive minority recognition and learning what is needed to participate in society as mutually exclusive.

This trend is illustrated in assimilationist educators' discussions of Muslims since 9/11. For example, in the recent Fordham Foundation publication, *September 11: What Children Need to Know*, the editor Chester Finn describes the collection as a critical response to pluralistic pedagogy that emphasizes in the context of the attacks of 9/11 the equality and toleration the United States can afford to its minority citizens, including Muslims, some of whom were attacked and victims of hate crimes after 9/11. As Finn puts it, the pluralist pedagogy "was long on multiculturalism, feelings, relativism and tolerance but short on history, civics, and patriotism," and its antidote, he claims, are voices whose "reverence for tolerance [does not dwarf] their appreciation of other compelling civic values."

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[4] Ravitch, Diane, "Multiculturalism: *E Pluribus Plures*," *American Scholar* 59 (1990): 337-54.
[5] Feinberg, Walter, *Common Schools/Uncommon Identities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 169.

Finn gives an indication of which civic values he finds more compelling by choosing Al Shanker's "side of this pedagogical divide," and his commitment "to teach the *common culture*, the history of democracy and centrality of freedom and its defense against aggressors."[6] One must take a side, suggests Finn: either promote toleration of diversity and difference, or nation building and patriotism in the classroom. Finn implies that if one is oriented toward the latter goals, as he is, then interest in inculcating toleration and the like are little more than a waste of energy—a detractor from education for nation building (and national defense), as he sees it.

Likewise, Ravitch suggests that history textbooks' financially based concessions to pro-Muslim and/or Islamic groups desiring positive recognition have led to "their *omission of anything that would enable students to understand* conflicts between Islamic fundamentalism and Western liberalism."[7] As we saw in Finn's editorial, promoting tolerance in this case is cast as at odds with teaching "anything that would enable understanding," or "what children need to know"…. What makes Muslims too different is not explicated; it is merely assumed that they should not be treated as an internal or *similar* group, but as an outside, *different* group, that conflicts with the Western liberal tradition that Ravitch sees undergirding U.S. society. Any potential harms done to Muslim students through representing them and their beliefs in this basically negative way is not viewed as important relative to the need to educate about an American ideal apparently incompatible with Islam.

When it comes to educating about Muslims, assimilationists thus pit against each other positively recognizing difference and developing and sustaining a distinctive and coherent U.S. society, seeing the former as unnecessary for, if not disruptive to, the latter goal. In accepting the premise that the difference Islam makes is too great for toleration of Muslims to be tenable, such thinkers follow the political theory known as the "clash of civilizations." Defended recently by Samuel Huntington, its thesis is that Western societies face significant challenges today particularly from Muslims, whom are cast as members of a fundamentalist, pre-liberal culture that developed in relative isolation from Western civilization and is thus a world apart socially today.[8] Likewise suggesting that the development of Islam and the norms of Muslims are simply too dramatically different from those of U.S. mainstream society to be positively recognized in the classroom, Ravitch and Finn promote an education about Muslims and Islam that is cautionary rather than pluralistic or tolerant.

Yet as critics of this view point out, there is no real, empirical boundary between Muslims and the West to justify the view that these are completely separate entities that cannot coexist peacefully. Demographically, Muslims are of the West, Europe, and the

[6] Finn, Jr., Chester E., ed., *September 11: What Our Children Need to Know* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 2002).
[7] Ravitch, Diane, *The Language Police* (New York: Vintage, 2004).
[8] Huntington, Samuel P., "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993).

United States, as well as of the East, Arab, or Islamic "world." Historically, most Muslim cultures have developed side by side with those of "Westerners." And the challenges some particular contemporary Muslim groups pose to Western societies need not cause wide-scale prejudice or bias toward a much larger and more diverse cross section of the world's population, that includes as well a significant population of Muslims living peacefully and successfully within the United States.

Others critiquing the "clash" thesis argue that its perspective on cultural difference is limited by its traditional anthropological conception of culture. As Edward Said and Renato Rosaldo observe, Western European and North American cultural anthropologists have traditionally studied particular aspects of a group—the common language and behavior, physical artifacts, and religious and other beliefs and norms, as observed and as described by group members—to compare and contrast features *between* groups, describing this sum of contrastable things as the group's culture.[9] However, this can obscure other aspects of a group's culture that are not simply different or unique.

> Although the classic vision of unique cultural patterns has proven merit, it also has serious limitations….By defining culture as a set of shared meanings, classic norms of analysis make it difficult to study zones of difference within and between culture…cultural borderlands.[10]

Educational assimilationists such as Ravitch and Finn nonetheless assume the logic of the "clash" view when it comes to educating about Muslims, concluding that Muslims are too different from and threatening to U.S. society to be positively recognized in schools. Yet there is no compelling justification for this logic, or for this educational approach to Islam—no reason to ignore the need for tolerance to teach instead only of "the conflicts between Islamic fundamentalism and Western liberalism," and nothing of what is shared, or of the vast majority of Muslims who are more moderate and peaceful than those who come to mind when one thinks of 9/11, or recent U.S. endeavors in Iraq and Afghanistan. As we will see, pluralistic approaches to educating about difference also have significant limitations, however.

Pluralism

As previously mentioned, pluralists differ from assimilationists in viewing differences from mainstream norms as potential social goods, generally worthy of toleration and recognition in the public sphere, rather than as barriers to equal participation. After it was observed in *Brown vs. Board of Education* that black children were psychologically harmed by a lack of positive representation in educational materials and in society, many educators became aware that classroom strategies for including ethnic and racial minorities meaningfully in curricula could help enable minority youth to access equal educational opportunities, thereby enhancing minority groups' relative

[9] Said, Edward W., *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), pt. 1.
[10] Rosaldo, Renato, *Culture and Truth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 27.

positions in society. By exploring ethnic and racial diversity as significant factors throughout the curriculum, James Banks argued that minorities would be able to access universal cultural knowledge without alienating themselves from their cultures of origin, while privileged group members could learn to appreciate the essentially diverse nature of their society. Thus, "multiethnic" education was promoted as beneficial to all members of the classroom community.[11]

Banks's latest textbooks advocate special educational attention to Muslims.[12] *Teaching About Islam and Muslims in the Public School Classroom: A Handbook for Educators* similarly promotes a pluralist interpretation of Muslims' place in U.S. society, stressing that all students should learn about this group in a more celebratory than derogatory manner, to recognize minority citizens adequately and increase equality and justice throughout society:

> Dr. Martin Luther King, in his famous 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech, talked about "my people who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice." Indeed, possibly the last barrier to the "palace of justice" lies in our lack of understanding and tolerance of religions other than our own. It is through material such as this *Handbook* that we can celebrate our diversity, eliminate stereotypes, and build respect for our fellow humans.

Thus while assimilationists tend to frame Muslims as separate from the American story, vividly portray Islam and the United States as if mutually exclusive, and regard the teaching of tolerance toward Muslims as antithetical to education for patriotic citizenship, pluralists promote positive recognition of Muslims in schools to debunk stereotypes, celebrate national and international diversity, and decrease injustice in education and elsewhere in society toward Muslims. The pluralist approach to difference seems preferable in this instance, as Muslims need not be portrayed as anti-American, unworthy of empathy, or separate from America or the West, to promote civic values such as patriotism, equality, and freedom.

Yet some remain more cautious in representing controversial groups, including Muslims, substantively and positively in the schools. While there is little need to treat Muslims or Islam as threats in the classroom, pluralist discourses as expressed strategies toward boosting minority self-esteem, increasing social equality, and preserving traditional cultures remain questionable. That is, it is not clear that positive recognition of difference in the aim of these goals is particularly effective, educationally sound, or even necessarily beneficial to minorities in society. Additionally, when the difference being addressed is religious, as in the case of Muslims, pluralist approaches are particularly worrisome as the United States aims to maintain neutrality in public institutions toward religious groups, aiming neither to diminish nor enhance their meaning in individual's

[11] Banks, James A., *Multiethnic Education* (Upper Saddle: Allyn & Bacon, 1993).
[12] Banks, James A., and Cherry A. McGee Banks, eds., *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2004).

lives.

Treating the minority individual as distinguished in relation to his or her minority affiliation need not and frequently does not aid students' self-esteem, as critics point out. Kwame Anthony Appiah observes for instance that a pluralist education that aims to develop personal pride about things that mark individuals as minorities can limit one's options for self-understanding, tying one's sense of self needlessly to markers of historical stigma, rather than opening up new possibilities for growth and development:

> The large collective identities that call for recognition come with notions of how a proper person of that kind behaves: it is not that there is *one* way that gays or blacks should behave, but that there are gay and black modes of behavior. These notions provide loose norms or models, which play a role in shaping the life plans of those who make their collective identities central….
>
> Demanding respect for people as blacks and as gays requires that there are some scripts that go with being an African-American or having same-sex desires….It is at this point that someone who takes autonomy seriously will ask whether we have not replaced one kind of tyranny with another. If I had to choose between the world of the closet and the world of gay liberation, or between the world of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Black Power, I would, of course, choose in each case the latter. But I would like not to have to choose. I would like other options.[13]

As Appiah points out, being taught with regard to one's presumed, apparent, or actual ethnic or minority identity does not simply fail to secure that students' self-esteem needs are met, but can restrict one's sense of options by emphasizing one as a member of a minority group over other sources of selfhood.

Others charge additionally that positive recognition of minorities in the classroom does not necessarily meet the complex needs of minorities for greater equality, the second goal expressed by pluralist educators. Classroom recognition of minorities can be at odds with their treatment in the hallways and elsewhere within mainstream society, such as in the mass media, and thus pluralists' ease in regarding classroom recognition as crucial to mainstream representation is idealistic, after several decades of pluralist educational reform and continued injustice and prejudice toward minorities in society. As Bhikhu Parekh writes, educational recognition and social equality are simply two different things, which require different processes:

> Misrecognition has *both a cultural* and a *material* basis. White Americans, for example, take a demeaning view of African Americans partly under the influence of the racist culture, partly because this legitimized prevailing systems of domination, and partly because the deeply disadvantaged blacks do sometimes

[13] Appiah, K. Anthony, "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction," in Gutmann, ed., *Multiculturalism,* 159 and 163.

> exhibit some of the features that confirm white stereotypes. Misrecognition, therefore, can only be countered by *both* undertaking a *rigorous critique of the dominant culture* and *radically restructuring the prevailing inequalities of economic and political power.…Cultural self-esteem cannot be developed and sustained in a vacuum and requires appropriate changes in all major areas of life*.[14]

Here Parekh articulates a divide between the inequalities of classroom representation and those of economic and political power, to caution against conflating the two in the hopes of resolving macro social injustice through micro, classroom interventions. Injustice is not based merely in ideology, and cannot be fought effectively with only ideology.

The critique of pluralism as a means toward self-esteem building and increasing equality both hit home in the case of Muslims, who often express a desire for maintaining a normal, rather than *different*, classroom identity in public schools,[15] and whose religious identities are represented elsewhere, in the media, in ways that can effectively undermine pluralist pro-Muslim classroom recognition as a means toward decreasing social stigmatization.[16] But the final goal of pluralists, cultural preservation, is particularly problematic when considering the case of Muslims. In the case of a pluralist education that deals with religion, positive recognition implies that the schools should not remain neutral toward various religions, but support them substantively as traditions informing students' sense of self and self-esteem, which goes against the ideal of neutrality regarding religion in the public sphere held in U.S. society.

In the last few decades, self-professed patriots have scoured school texts and resources for positive portrayals of Islam and Muslims, which they frequently regard as evidence of a pro-Islamic bias.[17] While it seems unlikely that there is any large-scale, concrete effort toward such at work today, critiques of pro-Islamic bias raise an important point about the end of education in a liberal democratic society: The goal is not to teach students only that information that aligns with or complements that provided at home. Rather, the end is to *expand* student's horizons and understandings of their opportunities and potential in society, to enable their capacity for meaningful and autonomous decision making in life.

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[14] Parekh, Bhikhu, *Rethinking Multiculturalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 343.
[15] Rizvi, Fazal, "Representations of Islam and Education for Social Justice," in Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow, eds., *Race, Identity, and Representation in Education* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
[16] Jackson, Liz, "Images of Islam in U.S. Media and their Educational Implications," *Educational Studies* 46, no. 1: 3-46.
[17] See for instance, Stillwell, Cinnamon, "Islam in America's Public Schools: Education or Indoctrination?" *SFGate*, June 11, 2008, http://www.sfgate.com/cgibin/article.cgi?f=/g/a/2008/06/11/cstillwell.DTL&type=printable; Bennetta, William J., "How a Public School in Scottsdale, Arizona, Subjected Students to Islamic Indoctrination," *The Textbook League*, http://www.textbookleague.org/tci-az.htm; and Sewall, Gilbert T., *Islam and the Textbooks: A Report of the American Textbook Council* (New York: American Textbook Council, 2003).

While one's home community and ability to learn may be linked, making discriminatory or ethnocentric representations of minorities ineffective when teaching minority students, as discussed previously, educators are nonetheless not charged with preserving, protecting, or maintaining different groups in society, but with educating youth to function autonomously in the public sphere:

> Public schools often have good educational and political reasons to acknowledge a child's cultural meanings. For example, many children learn better where they feel they are respected and their background honored.…The obligation, however, involves the instructional aid required to enable the student to become a functioning citizen of this country. The obligation is not primarily to the child's original community.[18]

As Feinberg writes, texts or teachers that respect their students' backgrounds, including religious backgrounds, and honor their students' cultural meanings, rather than deny, dismiss, or mock these, move rightfully away from the assimilationist approach to difference in order to more effectively teach students, in ways that do not burden them as members of the classroom community. Such education may include developing some recognition and understanding throughout the classroom community of different groups in society, to sanction classroom differences and inform about social differences.

However, such educational adaptations must be distinguished from promoting groups more generally in the classroom, which neither serves the minority student's autonomy and development, nor that of other members of the classroom community. And when the student is from a traditional cultural group whose norms and values are commonly seen as going against the grain of mainstream U.S. society, such as a minority religious community, one must emphasize the individual's interests in autonomy over the group's interests in cultural preservation, in order to maintain his or her commitment to education for equal opportunity. As Feinberg reminds, as educators "We do not respect a tradition as such. We respect the availability of a tradition given a situation in which the individual has the ability to choose otherwise."[19]

For this reason, controversial practices of minority groups—such as the wearing of *hijab* or head covering by some Muslim females upon entering adulthood—should be the subject of *minimal* rather than *substantial* recognition, regarded in the case of covered students as worthy of minimal recognition and toleration, but otherwise with neutrality—recognized as tolerable, but not promoted, for instance, in the context of both covered and non-covered students.[20] None should be expected to wear, or to not wear,

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[18]. Feinberg, *Common Schools/Uncommon Identities*, 122.
[19]. Ibid., 143.
[20]. Interestingly, the materials discussed here that promote Islam—*Multicultural Education* and *Teaching About Islam and Muslims in the Public School Classroom*—sidestep *hijab* as a controversial issue, perhaps aiming to provide a generally positive perspective. This case illustrates how negative issues are obscured by the pluralist educator, however, in such a way that makes positive classroom recognition distinct from

hijab, and educators may discuss various perspectives on *hijab*—that it is a sexist practice, or a source of cultural or religious pride, for instance—in upper-level classes, as relevant, but must not favor one perspective or another on the issue as right or correct. Otherwise, the preservation of particular traditions may be prioritized over individuals' educational interests, future autonomy in society, and personal practices and beliefs, and the public school educator fails to be neutral toward religious expression.

In addition, as we saw in the case of pluralists tying minority self-esteem to markers of difference, the internal diversity and dynamism of communities reveals that there is no single correct way to participate within a cultural community—in this particular case, to be Muslim. For an educator to substantially recognize a minority group or tradition, however, he or she must make claims about that group, which carry with them expectations for behavior, as Appiah notes, that need not align with a minority student's *a priori* self-image or vision for his or her future. Thus, the case of Muslims indicates a problem with pluralist education generally: it aims to shape the self with regard to minority cultural identity in unnecessary, limiting, and potentially harmful ways, and as such goes against the primary interest of education for equal opportunity and personal liberty. An approach to difference is needed that is responsive to the limitations of these traditions of multicultural education, and can better address the needs of controversial minority groups such as Muslims in U.S. schools today.

Critical Multiculturalism

As we saw previously, assimilationists typically regard expressions of cultural difference from mainstream society as barriers to social success, thereby accepting a view of difference as stigma, while pluralists view differences from majority norms within minority communities more positively, as *a priori* legitimate and worthy of recognition. Thus assimilationists and pluralists take different perspectives on the difference divergences from mainstream majority norms make. Yet neither encourages students to see social differences as context-based and socially constructed, or equips them to effectively make up their own minds about what differences matter and the situations of

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concrete prejudice elimination, as discussed previously: if examples of sexist Muslims are discussed in the media, for instance, failing to deal with the controversy associated with *hijab* today in the classroom is highly ineffective, as a disconnect is apparent between classroom knowledge and the "real world."

An excellent example of the controversy associated with *hijab* is found in the case of French public schools recently banning *hijab*—along with all other forms of religious expression—in classrooms. For an analysis of this debate that highlights the diversity of perspectives involved within and outside Muslim (and feminist) communities, see Jackson, Liz, "Choice Versus Equal Opportunity: On What Toleration Requires in the Case of the *Hijab* in French Schools," in Howe, ed., *Philosophy of Education 2005*; Gereluk, Dianne, "'Why Can't I Wear This?!' Banning Symbolic Clothing in Schools," in Vokey, ed., *Philosophy of Education 2006*; and . Todd, Sharon, "Unveiling Cross-Cultural Conflict: Gendered Cultural Practice and Meta-Discursive Analysis," in Vokey, ed., *Philosophy of Education 2006*. For an argument elaborating the miseducative effect of *hijab* bans in public places like schools as an act of intolerance through misrecognition that harms student achievement, see Ruitenberg, Claudia W., "B Is For *Burqa*, C is for Censorship: The Miseducative Effects of Censoring Muslim Girls and Women's Sartorial Discourse," *Educational Studies* 43, no. 1 (2008): 17-28.

minorities in society. Instead, they obscure the process of framing social difference from students, expecting or desiring that students take their perspective on minorities and difference, regardless of the availability of, or student intuitions regarding, alternative plausible views. In the case of Muslims, assimilationists expect students to view Muslims with a critical eye, while pluralists require their toleration or appreciation—neither presents the other perspective as worthy of serious consideration.

Critical multiculturalism does not substantively recognize nor reject minority norms or particular expressions of difference in society, but remains more critically oriented, in classroom settings, emphasizing how social differences and norms are actively constructed, accepted (or rejected), and maintained by meaning-making individuals, including their students. Ultimately, each person, and each student, is held as responsible for the views they accept, support, or promote, and as accountable members of society, students are expected to learn how to be skeptical toward others' claims, including those that seem basic or able to easily take for granted. Normalized conceptions of difference are critically investigated, rather than merely accepted and responded to, highlighting possibilities for ideological and social change as the products of individual critical thinking processes, and the contingency of today's norms, which are obscured by both assimilationist and pluralist treatments of difference as more concrete phenomenon, or facts, to be disseminated.

Regarding their students firstly as meaning-making individuals, then, critical multiculturalists seek to enable their students to see the bases of their own beliefs about difference, and hold them up to a critical analysis of related evidence, counterevidence, and additional sources and facts. As Kincheloe and Steinberg note, "Critical theorists want to promote an individual's consciousness of himself or herself as a social being.…how and why his or her political opinions, socio-economic class, role, religious beliefs, gender role and racial self-image are shaped by dominant perspectives."[21] As popular culture is seen by many critical educators as significant influences on personal opinions among youth, a sort of critical media literacy that encourages critical inquiries into representations within media is an important part of a critical multicultural approach to understanding difference in society.

As a large-scale group, Muslims would be *explored* as a social entity, rather than *taught about*, by the critical multiculturalist (this point will be elaborated upon in the next section). Rather than evaluate the religion and its believers in predominantly positive or negative ways, the critical multicultural educator would ask students to identify, explore, and evaluate different view points and sources of evidence about Muslims for themselves. Unlike assimilationists, they would expose students to views counter to the "clash" view regarding their difference from majority norms, to bolster student objectivity, but unlike pluralists, they would not sanction *de facto* positive assessments of Muslim beliefs and practices, but remain substantively neutral, as is required in public

[21] Kincheloe, Joe, and Shirley R. Steinberg, *Changing Multiculturalism* (Buckingham: Open Court Press, 1997), 23.

schools and to emphasize students' active role in understanding others in society. Reactive to both idealistic and romantic and negatively stereotypical portrayals of Muslims, then, the end of critical multiculturalists' examinations of such a group would be to provide students with experience evaluating predicaments involving difference in society, by analyzing a variety of evidence, rather than to provide one-sided information or a preferred perspective, which may additionally seem to students far removed from the information they receive elsewhere.

While critical multiculturalism seems preferable to assimilationism or pluralism for educating students accurately and objectively about difference in society, its approach to difference contrasts greatly with the lessons traditionally taught in high school courses today dealing with difference in society (social studies classes), which frequently emphasize facts and knowledge claims about groups, rather than their socially constructed nature or their interrelatedness with other groups. To implement a critical multicultural approach, then, we would need to change the way we typically regard the social studies teacher, along with social studies teacher education, away from the popular conception of teacher as standards-bearer, accountable for teaching specific social facts to students.

For instance, teachers in Illinois are held accountable for teaching students in eighth grade to "identify causes and effects of turning points in world political history" including "the rise of the Islamic empire." This sole reference to Islam or Muslims in the Illinois standards suggests a preferred interpretation of the causes and effects of the rise of Islam, rather than, as would be advocated in critical multiculturalism, students weighing out and evaluating different factors framed as relevant, rather than merely identifying those suggested by the teacher or textbook.

Standardization may be useful in fields such as English and math, but beyond the locations of today's continents, cities, and states, one would be hard-pressed to identify many similarly objective and universal facts, or standard knowledge, in social studies, a field dealing most substantively with most complex phenomenon: human social relations. Diverse perspectives have developed on the causes and effects of the rise of the Islamic empire—there is no single, correct position on such a complex subject matter, or any sound way to choose one answer over another as official school knowledge on this and all other complex social questions. And given the quantity of standards, time does not allow for a critical classroom examination of different perspectives, or for students to develop nuanced points of view on this or other subjects.

> Even teachers who encourage interpretation, reflection, and exploration of the historical process are pressured into teaching history as isolated facts by the tyranny of tests and standards.…Fragmented, content-driven history programs often run students through a series of memorizations, barring them from a deeper exploration into an event or a period of history. Excluded from such experiences on the basis that they take too much time, students fail to learn how to understand

> the flow of a stream of events, construct a compelling picture of life in a specific historical era, or conceptualize the complex and subtle nature of social, cultural, political, and economic change.[22]

Additionally, given standardization of curriculum, teachers are viewed and prepared as managers of content learning or knowledge retention rather than as developers of cognitive skills, and are therefore typically ill-equipped to effectively teach how knowledge is constructed, or critically explore with students the origins or validity of commonplace beliefs and norms.

To implement critical multiculturalism in social studies classes, then, social studies teacher education would need to change to better enable teachers to understand methods in social sciences and share these with students, engaging them in critical social inquiry. As I will elaborate subsequently, teachers need to be seen as skilled workers, and students as ultimately skilled participants in society, rather than as retainers of standard facts chosen by someone outside the classroom:

> Deskilling has involved taking jobs that demand skill and decision-making and dividing them into simplified actions.…[This logic] precludes the need for teachers to analyze the materials that should be taught, understand the backgrounds and needs of individual students, or adapt certain subject matter and certain methods of informational delivery.…The job of teaching is reduced to merely executing plans that are made elsewhere.[23]

Resistance to these ideas is often framed politically by conservative educators, who typically respond by arguing that problem-based, critical approaches to social studies knowledge such as critical multiculturalism are unsound educationally, and/or inappropriately political, aiming to show students negative things about society and influencing them to fight for changes rather than preserve the United States for "democracy." That students need to learn to walk before they can run is often suggested by assimilationists as well, who frequently regard "basic" facts, or "what one needs to know," and tolerance toward difference and more nuanced views as mutually exclusive options.

Yet few deny today that social studies education must *engage* students to be effective, and that rote memorization of basic facts fails to inspire or develop students' abilities. Teaching social studies as facts neither enables student retention, nor engages students, and does not aid student cognitive development. As Joe Kincheloe argues, while teaching facts uniformly to students may increase test scores, it results in "deskilled students" who can collect "technical skills and atomistic bits of knowledge which can be measured," but have been discouraged from thinking about "the relationship of one fact to another, the connection between what one learns and how such knowledge might affect

[22] Kincheloe, Joe L., *Getting Beyond the Facts* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 596.
[23] Ibid., 192.

his or her fellow human beings, the kinship between the school curriculum and what constitutes a good society."[24] The latter is clearly more appropriately the end of social studies education within a liberal democratic society.

In the case of religion, social studies education that relegates religious beliefs to a facts-only domain strips religion of its practical significance to students who live in a world made up largely by diverse interrelated religious believers. Yet because of standardization practices and controversies surrounding religious difference, very few standards consider Islam or Muslims since the medieval ages, despite its tremendous growth and influence on civilizations worldwide since. By aiming to avoid controversy or sensitive, subjective content, the minimally religious curriculum is unimportant and irrelevant in today's world, while it is widely recognized as crucial "in a democracy to help children and young people gain the capacity for interpretation and critique by examining the beliefs"[25] of others around them. Students can hardly learn to weigh in on important policy issues regarding religion, such as religious expression in public settings (like wearing *hijab*), when they do not learn much if anything about it.

While a social studies education that employs a critical multicultural approach may seem a distant possibility today, taking stock of what is needed to enable young people to take responsibility for improving society, and think and analyze, leads to this more critical than "basic" approach, which can be made possible by changing our conceptions of the proper role and necessary training of social studies educators. It is clearly a better route than assimilationism or pluralism for teaching students about minorities today in an accurate and balanced manner, and for aiding their greater, more democratically informed understanding of how cultures and differences are variously interpreted and how they make a difference in our society and our world. As I discuss in the next section, the changes required to the teacher education curriculum to enact such an approach are not in themselves overwhelming, when one recognizes, crucially, that social studies teachers must be adequately trained to perform one of the most important and necessary social functions: educating future citizens to participate meaningfully in a democratic society.

Fundamentals of a Critical Multicultural Approach

Ideal Practices Using a Critical Multicultural Approach

In this section, I want to explore in a bit more detail what would be required to enact a critical multicultural approach to educating about difference in the case of Islam and Muslims, both in terms of ideal educational practices, or educator capabilities, and teacher education. Starting with the former, I argue that in order to enact a critical multicultural approach to understanding difference in the classroom, educators must (1) grapple with difference democratically in the classroom, and (2) critically model and

[24] Ibid., 51.
[25] Ibid., 61.

teach students critical literacy skills. Let us consider each of these ideal practices in turn.

As discussed previously, critical multiculturalism does not accept traditionally or normally conceived categories of difference as valid *a priori*, or as absolute truth, but assumes that these views are the results of people's choices and perspectives. In turn, they see their students as active, independent thinkers, whose ability to explore and consider various points of view and sources of evidence they aim to develop and enhance in the classroom. When it comes to teaching about Muslims and Islam, critical multiculturalists then question the normal conception of difference by considering the diversity of Muslims today and comparing and contrasting Islam with other religions. Both of these practices are facilitated not to simply argue against mainstream conceptions, or discover the "real truth" of the matter, but to ensure that students develop independent points of view, informed by their critical and reflective analyses of various knowledge sources, rather than their acceptance of what their texts or teachers claim.

In one recent study of teaching practices since 9/11, one educator in particular makes considering the diversity of Muslims the goal of one lesson: "he pointed out that Islam was not a uniform religion that could be understood without the proper 'cultural' context in which it was practiced around the world. He made this point by saying 'What do I know about Islam in Bangladesh? Nothing!'"[26] The teacher then asks his students to conduct research and find information about different historical and present-day Muslim communities to increase diverse representations of Muslims in the classroom.

Teachers can additionally discuss the differences and similarities among Islam, Judaism, and Christianity in their classrooms, highlighting what they share, as well as the things that may divide them. While some may view it as inappropriate since 9/11 to identify Islam and Christianity as similar religions, one need not communicate that it is a "fact," for instance, that these religions have much in common, particularly if one perceives this as a contentious perspective. Rather, in cases where claims may cause upset or be contrary to widely held views (such as the "clash" view), an educator can teach *about* this alternative view of the religions' similarities and consider with students its merit, without putting forward the claim as a fact or truth. The point here is not necessarily to change a point of view or steer it one way or another, but to ensure that it has been systematically developed rather than intuited from the teacher, society, or popular culture. Indeed, one need not frame their personal beliefs or perspectives as relevant or correct in discussing such topics, to be effective in exposing students to a variety of points of view from which they can better make up their own minds.

Many teachers are highly effective in such contexts in leaving their personal beliefs at the door, and it is in line with a critical multicultural perspective on difference for the educator to not have the right answer, as there is no essential truth about social difference—just different points of view that may make more or less sense depending

[26] Kaviani, Khodadad, "Teachers' Gatekeeping of the Middle East Curriculum," PhD diss. (University of Washington, 2007), 133.

upon one's perspective, knowledge, and experience. When one remains focused on developing students' critical thinking skills rather than teaching them certain interpretations of difference, it makes little sense to privilege one perspective in the classroom above others, unless, of course, that perspective is more informed by the critical examination of multiple factors and points of views…which students simply aiming to consent to their teachers' views necessarily fail to develop.

> "…I don't necessarily want my kids to have the same views as me. I want them to come to their own decisions in a valid way, and what I mean by 'valid' I mean understanding the issue, learning about it, figuring it out, and then coming to an educated decision. Because if you reflect the way your parents think and it's because it's the way your parents think, it's not educated."[27]

As this educator expresses, if the students think as you do because it is how you do, you are not teaching them to think for themselves, the fundamental aim of a critical multicultural approach that prepares students for democratic citizenship by developing their independent critical thinking skills and decision making capacities. One need not obscure their own perspective from the classroom to teach with a critical multicultural approach, but one should at least emphasize how it has been informed by personal experiences and independent reasoning, and should not be taken as the truth.

> Sherry revealed her opinions on selective issues.…"Whatever I have to say, I can tell them my opinion, if I can back it up." If students disagreed with what she was saying, then she gave them "newspaper articles" to read that supported her views and encouraged them to find evidence to back up their views too. She also told her students that she was "still learning. There are things that are difficult for me. I might be leaning one direction—and I don't want to say that I'm wishy-washy." She recalled that at some point in the past she was "100 percent pro-Israeli." However, she no longer felt that way.[28]

Marking one perspective as the correct one should not be the teacher's aim, as much as illustrating how intelligent decision making involves independently weighing different options, engaging in democratic interpersonal deliberation, and scrutinizing one's sources of evidence. That it is wrong, for instance, to view Islam as more terroristic or threatening than Christianity, or to regard Islam and Christianity as completely unrelated belief systems, can be expressed as a point of view requiring student exploration, without identifying it as a knowledge claim about which students must concur to academically succeed. In line with the critical multicultural viewpoint, then, the truth should not be determined beforehand with regard to controversial issues, so that students can learn to develop their perspectives more independently, as necessary to be prepared for democratic citizenship and personal autonomy in society.

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[27] Ibid., 79.
[28] Ibid., 167.

While some have raised concern that such an approach does too little to interrupt injustice,[29] it is helpful to realize here that students do not normally view their teachers' role as a moral one in their lives, and are likely to separate their teacher's attitudes in such cases from their own ethical and social views.

> I try to explain to my pupils that envy is despicable, and at once I feel the secret resistance of those who are poorer than their comrades. I try to explain that it is wicked to bully the weak, and at once I see a suppressed smile on the lips of the strong. I try to explain that lying destroys life, and something frightful happens: the worst habitual liar in the class produces a brilliant essay on the destructive power of lying. I have made the fatal mistake of *given instruction* in ethics, and what I said is accepted as current coin of knowledge; nothing of it is transformed into character-building substance.[30]

Admonishments do not encourage democratic deliberation by students.

Of course, controversial issues are issues that *matter* to individuals, and thus discussing controversial subjects democratically in the classroom is no easy, simple, or straightforward task. For one, these topics tend to be highly complex: not easy for informed adults to sum up accurately and broadly in the course of a class period, let alone effectively communicate interpersonally with their students about. In the case of education about Muslims, one is dealing with a highly complex "community" that is hard to make blanket assertions about. In addition, such emotional topics can cause a teacher or student to act rashly under pressure if they sense the importance of the subject in the world. Even the frustration of not having the appropriate knowledge or background, or of being unable to express oneself can create significant tension. Finally, many educators see religious issues as something that should not be discussed at length in the classroom.

However, it is not pedagogically effective or in the aim of students' development of critical thinking to claim that contentious views put forward more abstractly about difference, such as those about the qualities or behaviors of different groups of people, are matters of black and white, or right and wrong, because in real life these are often very complex and controversial issues that do not readily lend themselves to matter-of-fact analyses. As thinkers publicly identified as experts, from Huntington to Said, have very different beliefs, to foreclose discussion on one of their points of view in the classroom demonstrates to students a lack of willingness to consider different perspectives—hardly a model practice in democratic deliberation.

Thus, helping students to understand why people think the way they do,

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[29] Boler, Megan, ed., *Democratic Dialogue in Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004); Applebaum, Barbara, "Social Justice, Democratic Education, and the Silencing of Words that Wound," *Journal of Moral Education* 32, no. 2 (2003): 151-62.

[30] Martin Buber, quoted in Gordon, Mordechai, "Engaging Student Disengagement," in Stengel, ed., *Philosophy of Education 2007,* 346.

scrutinizing their sources of evidence, and the orientation or perspective from which they see the world, enables student engagement and critical thinking far more than does morally educating them to agree *a priori* with certain perspectives on highly complex, dynamic issues. To repeat, the goal is not to teach a certain point of view, but to develop a disposition or attitude toward one's own point of view, which requires a reflective consideration of alternative orientations and their sources of evidence.

> There are numerous reasons why democratic dialogue among students has become suspect.…Nevertheless…it is hard to imagine how one might sustain democracy in its absence.…Central to democracy's enactment is a will to the common good, or "good will," and while there may be disagreement about exactly how we cultivate good will sufficient for democratic citizenship, it is recognized that there is a kind of relatedness integral to it.…we cannot compel moral goodness; we can only nurture it. In this regard, adopting a certain generosity toward human frailty and mistakes is a more likely route to success.…education is an arena where, nominally at least, we learn what our mistakes might be and how to correct them. If we discourage dialogue about these matters in schools, education risks losing even the possibility of transformative value.[31]

While constructively grappling with difference in the classroom can be difficult and stressful, one nonetheless cannot teach in a balanced and accurate way about controversial subjects and groups by pretending to have all of the answers, or by precluding examinations of alternative points of view, if their aim is developing student criticality and autonomy in learning to deal with the tough situations they inevitably will face and citizens in a democratic society. There is no single truth to be had, and democratic societies require autonomous citizens in order to sustain themselves.

The second necessity of a critical multicultural approach is to model and teach a sort of critical media literacy. A first important component of teaching critical media literacy within a critical multicultural approach is modeling the search for a variety of perspectives within supplementary resources. Modeling critical media literacy by providing for diverse points of view in the classroom is fundamental to a critical multicultural approach, because the presentation of alternative views illustrates to students that a variety of perspectives exist beyond that privileged in their textbooks, and that each should be considered in turn as one develops an informed position on a subject. For instance, essays from Said and Huntington could be used together by teachers to help students understand how different people view and treat Muslims and Islam, and how their reasoning and information related to a given topic, such as Islam and terrorism, or Muslim women's lives, differs. Multiple perspectives, both internal and external, should be provided, to model for students how effective reasoning is carried out through a thorough examination of sources of evidence.

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[31] Houston, Barbara, "Democratic Dialogue: Who Takes Responsibility?" in Boler, ed., *Democratic Dialogue in Education,* 106-7.

Hijab, or head-covering, is a common contemporary issue related to Islam for students to consider using multiple perspectives, given that it is connected to negative associations of Muslim societies with gender inequality and female oppression, and also constitutes a cultural norm seen as different within a Western context, that many students are ignorant about. Comparing it to similar phenomena and considering alternative perspectives on it is one effective way to help students gain more balanced and less partial perspectives, while also modeling skills of critical media literacy:

> For her contemporary world problems class, Hilda used newspaper and magazine articles and surfed the internet for news that "pushed the button… Her students visited a photo bank of images on the internet, showing Muslim women in various degrees of body covering and they compared those images to clothing for traditional Catholic women and explained how traditions influenced fashion and in turn, the Islamic fashion could be seen as a form of political statement.[32]

Hilda finds media that is both critical and positive toward *hijab*, from Muslim women and others, as well as images of religious dress more generally, to provide a wide variety of personal, political, and more large-scale and broad perspectives about this topic in the classroom. By using this method, Hilda helps her students realize that whether one views *hijab* as a marker of cultural distinction, as an expression of faith common to many belief systems, or as a symbol of female oppression depends on one's frame of reference. Such an approach is clearly preferable to discussing any one of these perspectives on its own for enabling students to learn to be critical toward media messages.

While many educators use a variety of resources in the classroom, not all use of media is effective for modeling and teaching critical media literacy. For instance, some teachers use media as a reward for students, presenting popular films at the end of a term, while others simply replace historical lessons with documentaries or other televised or film accounts, letting their producers do the task of educating their students for them.[33] While such uncritical uses of media may help build classroom community or create learning incentives, such should not be regarded as a critical multicultural learning activity without an analytic or critical aspect—not just a list of basic comprehension questions, but an evaluation of both content and methods.

In addition to selecting resources encompassing a wide variety of viewpoints, teachers modeling critical media literacy in their classrooms have to be critical about the resources used. The type of critical media literacy education recommended for dealing with controversial minorities should be analytic, tracing the path from the "real world" to its mediation, and critical, foregrounding comparisons of materials and sources, and critical judgments of their relative validity and usefulness as representations of reality.

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[32] Kaviani, "Teachers' Gatekeeping of the Middle East Curriculum," 116.
[33] Hobbs, Renee, "Media Literacy in the K-12 Content Areas," in Schwarz and Brown, eds., *Media Literacy*, 78.

Such analyses can develop not merely students' critical *media* literacy skills, but their more general critical thinking skills, enabling students to evaluate difference knowledge claims, perspectives, and sources of evidence wherever they may find them, to arrive at more autonomous view points.

The journalistic questions of who, what, when, where, how, and why can be asked in comparative explorations of mainstream media presentations, such as movies, television series, and newspaper editorials. By comparing educational resources with mainstream media, or mainstream media with alternative and international media sources, students can see how different groups choose different images, use different words, and quote different people, and evaluate the effects of these choices on the audience. Analyzing how an article about Muslim anti-Americanism in a newspaper compares to a related discussion in a textbook can enable students to be more critical about media as a source of information. To make media literacy programs *critical*, then, students must learn to engage in evaluation activities and debate with others which perspectives on a topic are most compelling and why.

Being critical here does not mean that one learns to recognize mediated information as susceptible to bias and therefore develop a tendency to reject news media or popular culture as a whole.[34] Rather, it means asking students where they, and their sources, got the information informing their perspectives, and isolate and evaluate independently the information their sources use as evidence for their claims. Comparing two sources on one issue, or multiple perspectives on a more general situation, from one form of media, or from a variety, are all very easy ways to add critical media literacy as a component of one's lessons about controversial subjects.

In summary, using resources encompassing a wide variety of views is more effective within a critical multicultural approach to education for modeling critical media literacy…so long as these materials are accompanied with guidance and instruction to develop critical media literacy, the last component fundamental to a critical multicultural approach to teaching about difference in a balanced and accurate way in public schools discussed here. To engage in projects involving multiple perspectives and weighing alternative viewpoints, students must be encouraged to explore various perspectives and knowledge claims, and teachers also should be equipped to judge the validity of various sources available for use in classroom discussion. Teachers need not cull from classroom discussions perspectives and data they view as unreasonable or poorly argued, but they must educate their students to evaluate sources using critical media literacy, and actively engage with the viewpoints themselves. In the next section I will expand upon these practices as they relate to teacher preparation.

Teacher Preparation for a Critical Multicultural Approach

[34] Because media is unavoidable in much of social life, teachers do a disservice by merely rejecting media in their classrooms; see Semali, "What Media Literacy Matters in American Schools."

While I have identified democratically discussing difference in the classroom and modeling and teaching a particular form of critical media literacy as the essential components of teaching about controversial groups and subjects such as Muslims and Islam using a critical multicultural approach to difference, common teacher preparation hardly prepares teachers to engage effectively in these practices. Thus I explore here what is needed to enable teachers to better provide students with more balanced understandings of controversial minorities today. Paralleling the previous discussion, I will explore current and ideal teacher preparation for facilitating classroom discussions democratically and modeling and teaching critical media literacy. I argue that while the changes required may be substantial, they are nonetheless necessary for educating students in preparation for democratic citizenship in a diverse society today, leading to their more objective and accurate understanding about minorities and social difference more generally.

As a disposition and orientation toward considering multiple perspectives, there is no particular method required for discussing difference democratically in the classroom, in line with a critical multicultural approach. Yet while teachers need not learn specific practices to facilitate democratic discussions, they should be aided in developing insights on their own strengths and weaknesses as a discussant, through experience with controversy and debate in classroom settings, gaining an understanding of the philosophical underpinnings and practices involved in applying a critical multicultural orientation toward difference in the classroom, and experience meaningfully engaging in inquiries about minorities and social difference, which goes beyond that minimally required today in most teacher education programs today.

Perhaps the most important things one needs to learn to facilitate democratic discussions concern one's own temperament and personal strengths and weaknesses in communicating with others. It is doubtful one can learn these things from anyone else; however, through experience with democratic dialogue in educational settings one can begin to reflectively explore and study one's own habits and ways and common tendencies of interacting, and find out what does and does not work for him- or herself as an individual educator in leading discussions. In the course of developing such reflective teacher practices educators should also be taught that it is acceptable, if not in a sense *obligatory*, to discuss controversial, difficult issues in the classroom.

Though gaining experience with facilitating discussions of controversial issues takes few resources except time, there is no real place to develop reflective discussion practices in the teacher education curriculum. While methods courses and classroom training may provide suggestions about how to not "lose control" of one's classroom during discussions, there is no better way to enhance future teachers' abilities to grapple with controversy in the classroom than to allow and encourage them to practice these activities.

A second, more formal way to prepare teachers to engage in reflective classroom discussion practices is to critically explore with them methods and ideologies of

multicultural education within a social foundations setting. In learning about the approaches of assimilationism, pluralism, and critical multiculturalism, pre-service teachers can consider for themselves the merits and limitations of various philosophies of education, and connect these theories to their own ideals of classroom practice. Additionally, they should learn of debates regarding religious and moral education in schools to gain a better understanding of what is at stake in putting forward one view over another in the classroom, thereby learning about the value of educator neutrality. In this context, teachers' right to discuss religion and ethics in a neutral way in the classroom can additionally be clarified, given the contemporary context where discussing religion in schools is often regarded as taboo.[35]

For those comfortable with discussing controversial issues and groups in the classroom generally, another challenge specific to exploring the case of controversial minorities can arise when teachers lack experience with the topic of difference and the case of minorities in society. Teacher programs should therefore require coursework in sociology, cultural or political anthropology, religious studies, or in areas studies (such as Asian American Studies, African American Studies, Gender Studies, and the like), that requires in-depth, disciplinary exploration of particular cases of difference and/or minority issues, to ensure educators develop the skills needed to approach difference objectively. While educators cannot easily prepare to learn much about many groups in society from such courses, learning about one case of social difference can lend itself to more critical and systematic explorations of others kinds, thereby enhancing teachers' abilities to independently study the situations of minorities in the future in a more objective way.

While pre-service social studies teachers often have a handful of courses required in social sciences, these tend to be lower-level classes in history or psychology, which provide a breadth of knowledge but few opportunities for gaining experience with social research. Additionally, while educators may pursue academic majors in social science disciplines simultaneously or as required to complement their pre-service coursework, these range from economics and political science, history, psychology, and philosophy, and in many of these majors issues related to social difference will not necessarily be studied at length.[36]

In the case of educating about Islam, this means that most teacher enter classrooms without any background knowledge about the religion or any others, or even much knowledge about any minority group in the past or today, in society. While mandating study of Islam or of world religions would clearly also help in this particular case, [37] more essential is simply providing pre-service teachers with substantial

[35] Noddings, *Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief*, 137-9.
[36] For more information contemporary teacher education practices and on the importance of training teachers more systematically in disciplinary methods, see Kincheloe, *Getting Beyond the Facts*.
[37] See Nord, *Religion and American Education*; Noddings, *Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief*; and Kincheloe, *Getting Beyond the Facts* for the importance of training educators in religious education.

experience exploring social difference in any particular case in society, which can prepare them to go on to study various other minority groups more objectively and critically:

> Culture is a complex concept, and few teachers have an opportunity to learn about it. Most teacher education programs are founded on the social science discipline of psychology (and some sociology). Rarely do prospective teachers examine…the discipline of anthropology. And although it is important for teachers to understand their students' culture, the real benefit in understanding culture is to understand its impact on our own lives.…[38]

As Gloria Ladson-Billings notes, teachers can hardly teach their students to understand different groups in society without some formal experience with such inquiries, themselves.

In summary, while there is no way to train teachers to grapple with dialogue most effectively, through providing educators with experience facilitating discussions, in school classrooms or college courses, teacher education programs can help teachers develop more reflective practices for discussing difference in their classrooms. Additionally, by learning different educational philosophies, including the critical multicultural approach to difference and debates related to teaching about religion in public schools, social studies teachers can develop an understanding of how helping students to think about complicated and controversial topics is connected to their role of preparing students for citizenship in a diverse society. Finally, some area study that focuses on a social group, minorities, or social difference will provide educators a final bit of training essential to their being able to collaboratively teach others about minorities and difference in an informed way, enabling their students in turn to develop critically reasoned understandings despite the imbalance of representations of difference often provided in their textbooks, in the media, and elsewhere in society.

Such coursework also helps develop teachers' research and critical literacy skills, the final components of their ideal education as preparation for teaching students using a critical multicultural approach. Because the "decisions that teachers make about their curriculum influence student learning,"[39] teachers must be trained systematically to both model and teach critical media literacy, to ensure they bring forward in a balanced and critical way multiple points of view in their classroom explorations of controversial minorities, and not just interesting, readily available, and/or easily engaging materials.

One particular problem many teachers face in modeling critical media literacy in social studies is their feeling limited in selecting diverse resources by low student reading abilities. Often, reading abilities dictate the materials brought to the classroom as it

[38] Ladson-Billings, Gloria, "Teaching and Cultural Competence," *Rethinking Schools* 15, no. 4 (2001).
[39] Kaviani, "Teachers' Gatekeeping of the Middle East Curriculum," 190.

makes little sense to require students to read materials they cannot understand.[40] However, students can be aided to understand topics through collaboratively reading materials with their classmates and educators, and increasing reading literacy should go hand-in-hand with teaching difficult materials, as primary sources, historical documents, and other alternative resources can be productively used. This means that social studies teachers should be taught as English teachers are how to track student reading abilities, as well as how to guide students in analytically and more critically comprehending materials as messages and perspectives.

Finally, to model and teach critical media literacy skills in the classroom, teachers need to learn critical literacy themselves, as well as how to impart such to students at various levels. While one might imagine that critical media literacy is developed in pre-service teachers' coursework, such is not always the case, given that learning of public school curriculum often takes place in education courses rather than in social science or literature coursework and as, additionally, teacher education students frequently fail to take many upper-level courses in social science disciplines.

Thus, whether as a course within educational studies or elsewhere in universities (such as in English or communications), a class on critical media literacy that teaches pre-service educators the components of critical media literacy and how to teach them in social studies classes, is essential to preparing teachers to model and teach critical media literacy. As Sandra Goetze, Diane Brown, and Gretchen Schwarz note, "media literacy could well enrich the entire preservice teacher education curriculum":

> In a social studies methods course, preservice teachers can study the ways the media interpret history, from film to newspaper to the History Channel, and how students learn from the media.…All content knowledge can be influenced by the mass media. Even future teachers' own notions about teaching may have been partly formed by seeing such films as *Dangerous Minds* or *Mr. Holland's Opus.*[41]

While many teachers are interested in gaining critical media literacy skills, and while such could be easily provided in one term or less, critical media literacy is fairly uncommon in teacher education undergraduate programs in the United States (except for in English/communications education), though it does appear to be on the rise in professional development classes and graduate study.[42] Nonetheless, gaining experience and skills with critical media literacy is fundamental to providing students with the same, and critical media literacy is, as I have argued here, a basic prerequisite to critically incorporating resources encompassing multiple perspectives in the classroom, as well as for learning to come to independent positions on important social issues surrounding difference and minorities in society.

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[40] Goetze, Sandra K., Diane S. Brown, and Gretchen Schwarz, "Teachers Need Media Literacy, Too!" in Schwarz and Brown, eds., *Media Literacy*.
[41] Ibid., 172-3.
[42] Ibid.

I have considered here what is necessary for preparing teachers to engage in the practices fundamental to providing a critical multicultural approach to difference in their classrooms, which provides students with accurate and balanced understandings of controversial groups in society such as Muslims. In order to engage in discussions of different viewpoints democratically in the classroom, teachers must be provided with opportunities to develop reflective practice, including study of multicultural educational philosophies. And while teachers cannot be expected to know a great deal about every minority group relevant to or part of society, they must nonetheless learn to conduct social research to develop transferable practical experience with studying difference in society. Finally, teachers must be trained in critical media literacy, to model and help their students develop critical media literacy skills, in turn.

While each of these capacities and experiences is necessary for enabling teachers to effectively teach about difference and minorities in society, none are fundamental within social studies teacher education programs today, however. Yet it would not be difficult to add on to the pre-service teacher curriculum in ways that better prepare social studies teachers to grapple with controversial issues objectively with their students, if we perceive teachers' role, as I discussed earlier, as that of a better informed or trained guide. As such, we would reasonable require of teachers more coursework, and more academic training, than is typically required today.

While some may see this as an unreasonable burden to place upon teachers, such represents an ideal education to prepare them to guide the next generation in developing autonomous thinking and decision making skills. And I am far from alone in coming to these sorts of conclusions regarding the need for teachers to be more rigorously prepared for the tasks they face as guardians of the next generation within a democratic society.

> People who are preparing to teach at the high school level need to study the high school curriculum in great depth. Just as physicians must study anatomy, and lawyers torts, teachers need to study the curriculum. It is the backbone of their work.…
>
> The objection might be raised that such preparation would require that people identify teaching as their goal upon entry to college. True. But engineering students are also required to make their choice early, so teachers would not be unique.…Under the plan I am suggesting here, students would study material directly relevant to their career choice.[43]

If we perceive the social studies teacher as a guide to students for developing the capacities required for autonomous democratic citizenship—including democratic deliberation skills and critical media literacy skills as key among them—then requiring of them more rigorously academic study is neither impossible, nor unreasonable. Rather, as

[43] Noddings, Nel, *Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief* (New York: Teachers College, 1993), 135-6.

teachers' development of democratic discussion and critical media literacy skills is essential to their preparing students for the demands of democratic citizenship in a diverse society, social studies teacher education must incorporate coursework toward these ends, to better meet the larger goal of enabling students as future citizens to develop balanced and accurate understandings of controversial topics and minorities in society today.

Conclusion

Here I have explored some of the challenges teachers face in educating about difference and the case of minorities in society, a crucial activity for cultivating autonomous democratic citizenship in schools, by examining some challenges in educating about Muslims since 9/11. Exploring the limitations of traditional discourses of multicultural education, I considered as a means to increasing students' capacity for developing well-informed, balanced, and accurate understandings about this minority group a critical multicultural educational approach that involves democratic deliberation about diverse points of view and sources of evidence in the classroom. I argued that while this approach remains distinct from educational practices encouraged by standards, common doctrines, and the realities of today's teacher training programs, it nonetheless is the best way to meet students' needs for better, more accurate and substantive information about difference and minorities than the others available, in particular assimilationism and pluralism, ultimately crucial for the sustenance of democratic society.

Focusing finally on ideal teaching practices for putting forward a critical multicultural education about difference in the aim of preparing students for democratic citizenship within social studies classrooms, I argued that teachers need to be prepared to democratically facilitate difficult discussions about difference and minorities in society, and to model and teach critical media literacy. While such is not typical in teacher preparation programs today, these innovations are nonetheless fundamental to ensuring students develop accurate and balanced understandings of minorities, such as Muslims, today, which is crucial to their critical autonomy as citizens within a diverse democratic society today, who must possess critical media literacy and the ability to make informed judgments.

There are, of course, potential pitfalls to implementing a critical multicultural approach to classroom practice which require some careful thinking through, such as not adequately preparing students to learn with a critical multicultural approach during lower levels of education. Additionally, a great deal more policy work remains to be done to confront realistically and effectively the challenges of implementing more democratic approaches to difference and the subject of controversial minorities in public schools. However, it is hoped these considerations can help those involved in the fields of policy and curriculum planning by fleshing out more and less effective classroom strategies for teaching about difference and understanding minorities, topics which all citizens must

grapple with to participate effectively within a diverse democratic society. Here I offer a presentation of different options, and hope to compel future research continuing this and related projects, recognizing such as fundamental to enhancing education for democratic citizenship and for personal autonomy, both of which are vital to the continued flourishing of democratic society.