

Resources and Strategies for Teaching about
the Middle East

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George Pruden (Armstrong State) responded to Craig Lloyd's editorial in the Fall 1990 Newsletter ("Do We Teach About the Middle East?") by suggesting a panel during the next annual meeting to explore this question. He recommended that Robert Claxton (West Georgia College) chair that session because, as executive director of the Georgia Committee on U.S.-Arab Relations, he edits the only Georgia newsletter which provides information to teachers about new instructional materials and meetings of interest to Middle East history teachers. The panel participants were: Emily Abdi-Wheeler (Georgia College), Mark Berger (Columbus College), Y. Lynn Holmes (Brewton-Parker College), Ann Ellis (Kennesaw State College), and Marc Gilbert (North Georgia College). The discussion provided a survey of the state of Middle East history instruction in Georgia today as well as some helpful advice for future development.

The panelists had followed diverse paths to "arrive" in the Middle East. Emily Abdi-Wheeler, a Latin Americanist, reacted to current events while on leave at the University of Georgia. She is studying Islam and Arabic now and will participate in a related National Endowment for the Humanities Seminar this

summer at Columbia University. Mark Berger, building upon his Jewish heritage, spent time in Israel in 1979 under the sponsorship of American Professors for Peace in the Middle East. Later, during the Gulf Crisis, there was understandable interest in the Middle East among his students from Fort Benning. Lynn Holmes originally prepared for the ministry. Following seminary, he received his Ph.D. in ancient history from Brandeis. While studying temporarily at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, he met a Palestinian woman whom he married. Last summer, he toured Tunisia as a Malone Fellow, sponsored by the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations. Ann Ellis is a United States history specialist she is particularly interested in women's history. Through her study of Arab women, she also participated in the Malone program, visiting Egypt and Iraq. Since her return to the United States coincided with the invasion of Kuwait, she was very much in demand as a speaker. Marc Gilbert, a Malone Fellow in Yemen in 1988, includes the Middle East as a logical and necessary part of world history. (He is founder of the Georgia World History Association.) He prefers to be known as a "Southern Asia" specialist, deemphasizing a nineteenth century European way of looking at the world and emphasizing instead the historic flow of goods and ideas from Southeast Asia to North Africa. Robert Claxton is also a Latin

Americanist. Initially interested in Islamic medieval Spain, he too went to Yemen in 1988 and has followed Latin America-Middle East ties more closely ever since.

The panelists explained some handouts which they had prepared for the audience. Readers may obtain these items by writing to the appropriate compilers. Abdi-Wheeler offered a reading list on Arab nationalism and Iraqi geopolitics. She especially recommended *Middle East International* for current events. Berger presented the syllabus for his course, "The Persian Gulf War and its Aftermath." The syllabus contained many probing questions regarding the background, events, and results of the war. Ellis circulated an annotated bibliography from *Introduction to the Arab World* (Mideast, 1989) and suggested that those interested in the status of women should contact the National Council on U.S.-Arab Relations for a 100-page bibliography (Suite 515, 1735 Eye Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006). Gilbert warned that polemic writings can antagonize students unless they understand such material represents a distinctive view only. He recommended books by Bruce Bothwick and Maxine Rodison as balanced. He also distributed a collection of basic information about Islamic civilization and copies of a new quarterly for social studies teachers published by Arab World and Islamic Resources (Suite 9, 1400 Shattuck Avenue, Berkely,

CA 94709). Claxton made available the addresses of sources of relevant maps, statistics, books, videotapes, course outlines, and reading lists. He cited the *Daily Report* translations of Arabic media by the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, readily available at Georgia Tech and the University of Georgia.

The Colleges which the panelists represented are offering a number of credit and non-credit courses on the Middle East. Georgia College has had an honors course on the Gulf Crisis. Columbus College will continue such a course, taught jointly by Berger and political scientist Raymond Gonzales; both had recently attended a workshop on Islam at Dartmouth. Brewton-Parker offers "Modern Middle East" every three years and invites representatives from various Jewish and Arab organizations to campus; they are often willing to come at their own expense. Holmes spoke before some fifty church groups during the Gulf Crisis. Kennesaw State offers Middle Eastern history twice a year and recently introduced a course on "Middle Eastern Politics." Kennesaw has cooperated with the American-Arab Affairs Council to sponsor workshops for pre-college teachers. That college will also offer a course on the Arab world through its Elderhostel program. The Gulf Crisis was a sobering episode for North Georgia's many military science students. "History of the Modern Middle

East" and Islamic Civilization" are regular courses there. The college recently sponsored non-credit programs on the Gulf Crisis and Salman Rushdie. West Georgia College offers "Near East in the Middle Ages" and "Modern Middle East" (taught by Ara Dostourian) and some faculty from the Middle East have participated in an adult forum at a local church. Students have sent a delegation to the Southeastern Model Arab League for the past three years.

There was a general consensus in the discussion that the Gulf Crisis did more than anything else in anyone's memory to stimulate renewed interest in the Middle East.