**Significant Omissions**

*Patriotism in Portrayals of 9/11*

Textbooks place 9/11 in a patriotic framework. In representing the event, most textbooks show American icons such as the Statue of Liberty with the smoke from the 9/11 attacks in the background; Congress singing “God Bless America” on the Capitol steps; firemen raising the American flag against a backdrop of the Twin Tower debris; or American flags in yards, on front doors, and draped across fences and bridges. These symbols evoke feelings of patriotism. In this case, patriotism is unquestionably viewed as an outstanding virtue that was targeted by the terrorists who attacked the United States, and as a benefit to the nation.

Patriotism combined with fear, however, can influence individuals to act in ways that might never be accepted during peacetime. At times, this was the case after 9/11. Absent from these textbooks are discussions of the intense patriotic feelings that led to violence and discrimination. For example, patriotism resulting in misplaced anger against Arab Americans, Muslims, and South Asians is not recorded in the pages of these textbooks. No incidents of harassment or hate crimes against Middle Easterners and other “Middle Eastern–looking” people that were reported in the aftermath of 9/11 are mentioned, nor are bomb threats at a Muslim school in Detroit, the three hundred protesters who stormed a Chicago-area mosque, or the singling out of Arab Americans in airports. Even though President Bush publicly voiced concerns, textbooks are mute on the fact that American anger coupled with fear often forced Arab Americans and Muslim communities to face experiences similar to those of Japanese Americans after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Furthermore, these texts fail to mention that leaders of influential Muslim organizations within and outside the United States were quick to condemn the 9/11 attacks and call upon Muslims to help alleviate the sufferings of the victims. More important, only two textbooks explain that, as one asserts, “the terrorists claimed to act in the name of Islam, but the vast majority of Muslims are peaceful and do not support terrorism” (Boyer and Stuckey 2005, 831).

One of the most valuable lessons that students can learn from 9/11 is how patriotism can be both a force of unity for a nation and a tool of oppression when coupled with fear. Textbooks should draw comparisons with other historical events, such the Japanese American interment during World War II or the rise of McCarthyism during the Cold War. Further, students should be able to differentiate between Muslims and extremists to challenge stereotypes about Middle Eastern cultures and peoples. The majority of textbooks, however, omit these vital issues, and students often cling to stereotypes based on inaccurate information.