

Daniel Pipes' Witch Hunt at a Public School

In September 2007, the Khalil Gibran International Academy, named for the noted Lebanese Christian poet, became the country's first public school focused on Arabic language and culture.

According to the New York Department of Education (Brooklyn Eagle, 7/30/07) the school was using "the same curriculum packages as other New York City public schools," and the chancellor of schools emphasized (Christian Science Monitor, 6/1/07) that its curriculum would be subject to departmental monitoring as with any other public school.

In short, according to New York schools chancellor Joel Klein, it was not so different from the 60-plus other dual language schools already operating in New York.

However, months before it opened its doors in Brooklyn, N.Y. the school came under fire from detractors who preemptively accused it of "imbuing pan-Arabism and anti-Zionism, proselytizing for Islam, and promoting Islamist sympathies" (**New York Sun**, 4/24/07). Charges were led by the **New York Sun** and its writer Daniel Pipes (see Dirty Dozen – http://www.smearcasting.com/smear_pipes.html), a conservative Mideast historian who runs the Middle East Forum and Campus Watch.

Pipes sits on the advisory board of the Stop the Madrassa Coalition (**New York Times**, 4/28/08), created, according to the coalition's blog (4/29/08), to end the "soft jihad"...infiltrating our schools." Although "madrassa" is Arabic for "school," KGIA opponents used it to mean "a religious school" that would "impose a radical Islamic agenda in its classrooms" (**CNN**, 9/4/07).

Pipes has long argued that "Arabic-language instruction is inevitably laden with pan-Arabist and Islamist baggage" (**New York Sun**, 4/24/07), and fellow **Sun** writer Alicia Colon wrote (5/1/07) that this "pandering to multiculturalism" must have "delighted Osama bin Laden." She then called on her readers to "break out the torches and surround City Hall to stop this monstrosity."

Special abuse was reserved for Debbie Almontaser, the school's main founder who was also chosen to be its first principal. A prominent member of New York's Arab-American community, Almontaser earned praise for her work forging interfaith and interethnic alliances (**New York Times**, 4/28/08), but that history was omitted when right-wing media painted her as "a classic 'stealth Islamist'" (**Weekly Standard**, 4/11/08) with "an Islamist/leftist agenda" (**Pipe Line News**, 4/19/07).

Almontaser was further characterized by Pipes (**New York Sun**, 4/28/07) as a September 11 apologist in connection to her statement, "I don't recognize the people who committed the attacks as either Arabs or Muslims." Pipes failed to include Almontaser's following sentence (**New York Times**, 8/29/07): "Those people who did it have stolen my identity as an Arab and stolen my religion."

Attacks on Almontaser intensified after the **New York Post** reported (8/6/07) that she

had "downplayed the significance" of a T-shirt emblazoned with the phrase "Intifada NYC." The shirt was produced by the group Arab Women Active in Art and Media, a youth media group that shares office space with an organization on whose advisory board Almontaser sits. When asked about the use of the word "intifada," Almontaser explained to the **Post** that it literally means a "shaking off," as of oppression, and that she doubted the girls were attempting to incite violence.

The **Post** began its article: "Activists with ties to the principal...are hawking T-shirts that glorify Palestinian terror," and the following day (8/7/07) concluded that "the hijab-wearing principal...has issued a fatwa against the kids of New York." "Why would this principal defend T-shirts celebrating a Palestinian uprising that has seen suicide bombers killing hundreds and hundreds of innocent Jews?" asked Rich Lowry, guest host on **Hannity & Colmes (Fox News Channel, 8/10/07)**.

In August 2007, as a result of the media onslaught, Almontaser resigned. She has subsequently said that she was forced to do so and is now suing the city of New York. The case is still pending, but in a ruling that denied her request to prevent the Department of Education from hiring a new principal, Judge Jon O. Newman concluded (**New York Times, 4/28/08**): "This was a situation where she was subject to sanction not for anything she said, not for anything she did, but because a newspaper reporter twisted what she said, and the result of it was negative press for the city and the Board of Ed."