

## **RETHINKING THE REGION:**

### **New Approaches to 9-12 U.S. Curriculum on the Middle East and North Africa**

#### **UNIT:**

#### **SOCIAL AND POLITICAL MOVEMENTS**

Our review of commonly used World History textbooks found that textbook authors often excluded key social and political movements throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). When the topics were discussed, our analyses found that they were often framed from a Eurocentric vantage point, and they solely highlighted the effects of these movements on international affairs and external interests. These framings correspond to how public protest in the MENA region is typically represented, and tend to neglect how and why social and political movements begin, as well as what significance they hold, from the perspectives of those who participate in them. Given the current groundswell of protest and political activism throughout the region, we believe that it is important for teachers and students to critically engage with the rich history of anticolonial protest and movements for greater accountability and rule of law that have characterized the region since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This may in turn foster a deeper understanding of current events by providing a historical context for previous political movements and struggles for justice.

The lessons in this unit have been designed with the several interrelated objectives in mind:

- To critically interrogate dominant representations of political thought in MENA as symptoms of a “clash of civilizations” or recurring bouts of “Muslim rage”
- To link political and social movements with the specific social, economic, historical, and political circumstances in which they have occurred
- To highlight how ordinary citizens have played a role in shaping social and political developments in the region
- To provide opportunities for student-directed learning to critically consider the political history of the region from different vantage points

As they participate in these lessons, students and teachers will have opportunities for critical reflection and to connect the past to the present. A diverse range of readings, historical documents, video footage, and political cartoons provide students with new opportunities to supplement, challenge, and go beyond the content in their textbooks with respect to social and political movements in the Middle East. The activities in the lessons are similarly designed to provide students with opportunities to consider history from more than one perspective, and as a result, challenge the authority of a text or prevailing cultural representation.