

School's Nation of Islam Handout Paints Founding Fathers as Racists

The mother of an 8-year-old wants to know why a Tennessee school teacher gave her child a handout from the Nation of Islam that portrayed the presidents on Mount Rushmore as being racists.

Sommer Bauer tells me her son was given the Nation of Islam handout at Harold McCormick Elementary School in Elizabethton. The handout asked, "What does it take to be on Mount Rushmore?"

The handout then explains that George Washington hailed from Virginia, a "prime breeder of black people." Of Theodore Roosevelt, it was alleged he called Africans "ape-like." There were also disparaging remarks made of Thomas Jefferson (he enslaved 200 Africans) and Abraham Lincoln.

She said her jaw dropped when she followed the link to a website that was listed on the handout. Imagine her surprise when up popped the Nation of Islam home page.

The Nation of Islam believes there is no God but Allah. They also aren't all that keen on white folks or Jewish folks.

"It raised a number of red flags," she said. "They are basically saying our Founding Fathers are racists."

Sommer told me she reached out to the teacher for an explanation—hoping it was an honest mistake.

"At first, she did not recall which paper it was," she said. "Later in the day, she found the paper and told me she didn't like what it said—and said she must have printed it by mistake."

The teacher also told Sommer that her son was not supposed to take the Nation of Islam handout home. It was supposed to stay in the classroom. That bit of news caused her great alarm.

"I was caught off guard," she told me. "I reassured my son that he needed to feel safe enough to bring anything that the school gave him home to me. Ultimately, while his teachers do care for him, his mother and his father have his absolute number one best interests at heart. He knows he needs to bring everything home to me," she said.

Sommer then reached out to the principal to find out how Nation of Islam material ended up in her son's third grade classroom. She said the principal was cordial—and promised to investigate. She's still waiting for answers.

Superintendent E.C. Alexander sounded genuinely horrified when I read him the contents of the handout.

"My goodness, that we would promote bigoted or racist points of view—merciful heavens," he said. "I can assure you that is not the case."

The school's version of events is somewhat different.

Alexander told me the handout was never meant for public distribution. He said the child took the handout from the teacher's work station without her permission. He said the teacher had been preparing for a presentation on Mount Rushmore and had discarded the controversial handout.

"It was not an authorized handout," Alexander said.

Julie West is the president of Parents For Truth in Education, a Tennessee-based group that is opposed to Common Core.

At this point there is no indication the Nation of Islam assignment was connected to Common Core. However, West said she is alarmed by whatever happened at Harold McCormick Elementary School.

"The fact that students were cautioned against allowing their parents to see anything is deeply troubling," West told me. "The only reasonable explanation is they don't want parents to know what it is their children are learning."

I certainly don't mean to be an apologist for the school—but what if it was just an honest-to-goodness mistake?

"Whatever the reason it came into the classroom, it's not okay," she said. "These are not advanced high school students. This is third grade. They should be learning the basics of our country."

So what's the bottom line?

"We had a teacher who apparently never looked at something, never read something, before it was distributed to a class of third graders," West said. "In addition, she warned the students not to take it home."

That does seem a bit odd.

I've interviewed Sommer at least a half dozen times. Her story has remained consistent. The teacher gave Sommer two explanations for what happened in the classroom. The superintendent gave me a third.

I find it hard to believe an 8-year-old boy would steal a handout from a teacher's desk, bring it home and then concoct an elaborate tale to cover up the crime.

But let's suspend reality for just a moment and say the little boy did take that handout. Regardless, there's no disputing the fact that it was on the teacher's desk.

And I do believe the good people of Elizabethton deserve to know how and why a handout from the Nation of Islam ended up on school property.

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hundreds of radio stations. Sign up for his American Dispatch newsletter, be sure to join his Facebook page, and follow him on Twitter. His latest book is God Less America.