

Context school can  
easily recite and  
apply algebraic



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Context is key when pursuing a true comprehension of anything, and especially critical to any proper global understanding of the past.

One's grasp of the past will undoubtedly strengthen with each additional account and perspective from that time, just as it could be weakened through "willful forgetting" and bias. Western dominance over the last millennia has limited the scope of most by elevating Eurocentric schools of thought while discrediting, underappreciating and demeaning the rest of the world. In *The House of Wisdom*, Jonathan Lyons brings to light how this restructuring of history has led many to believe that Islamic people are violent heirs to a history of savagery, constantly at odds with the West. It is through their many underappreciated academic breakthroughs and modern attitudes toward Muslim people as a whole, that one can truly pinpoint the negative effects of erasing Muslim contributions to European learning and knowledge. Credit is often one of the most highly valued and sought after intangible prizes and yet dominant forces often claim it so lightly that they leave influential parties overlooked. Almost every Western student in Secondary school can easily recite and apply algebraic formulas to a myriad of problems without breaking a sweat, yet one would be hard-pressed to find students who could dissect the word "algebra."

"The questions: Where it came from, what it means, and why algebra is important will surely be met with ill-informed guesses. It is unlikely a Western student would know of the Persian Muslim scholar Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi and "his ability to identify and master algebra and explain it fully and effectively" (Lyons, 73). It would be safe to assume that the student wouldn't know the etymology of "algebra" and that it originated

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from the fifth element of the title *Al-kitāb al-mukhtaṣar fī ḥisāb al-ʿabr wa'l-muqābala*, al-Khwārizmī's treatise on mathematics. Consequently, they would not be aware of his breakthroughs in exemplifying "how relatively simple algebraic operations solve" (Lyons, 74) the settlement of estates of varying sizes and even the calculations of religious annual tax. His studies not only opened the door for more practical applications for mathematics but also helped to somewhat improve upon previous social practices, i. e., "pre-Islamic Arab practices dictated that women generally received nothing" (Lyons, 74). He solidified mathematical analysis as a viable form of reasoning worth studying by relating analytic and geometric solutions and introducing the decimal system.

Prior to his work, most held only geometry in high regard due to Greek emphasis on the subject and little on other mathematical pursuits. While Western churches were busy prosecuting academics and denouncing their work, Islam was pioneering an age of reason in harmony with religion before the enlightenment, and much to its aid. Very few individuals would question mathematics' importance and innovation's vitality which stemmed from the studies of Islamic thinkers, yet even less would know to credit Muslims in the first place. Schools urge students to critically examine information as presented and still, very few scholars ask why a culture that thrived on reason and broadened the scope of the world, look through the limiting lens of tabloid news and preconceived notions bequeathed by the West.

The erasure of Muslim contributions has produced a comical world where Western media offers up a seemingly endless supply of tabloids covering Islam's supposed hatred toward the West, and simultaneously Western

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history books gloss over the history of Islam in a page when generous. All that said, that contradiction is not nearly as peculiar as the fact that many Medieval European thinkers sought to collaborate with and learn from their Muslim counterparts, much to the chagrin of the church. As Lyons points out, Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II was a “proponent of Arabic learning” (Lyons, xvi) and a supporter of Michael Scot, who translated works from great Islamic scholars such as Averroes, Avicenna, and Maimonides. There was a rich cultural and intellectual exchange between the Middle-East and the West that leaves one to wonder where everything went awry. “Centuries of Western ignorance and outright Anti-Muslim prejudice” (Lyons, 4) have downgraded Islam to tabloids on terrorism, leaving the truth trampled. The deliberate subjugation of Islamic contributions and intercultural collaboration has paved the way for continued resentment toward and misunderstanding of the Middle-East. Underappreciation is an understatement when discussing the neglect regarding Islamic contributions to the West.

It is the lack of appreciation for Islam’s lush history of innovation and the overwhelmingly negative attitudes held by its followers, that really provide the context for how erasing Muslim contributions to the West truly skews the global understanding of the past. Without proper historical context, Islam will go on to be remembered as a violent belief system opposing the West at every turn. Conversations on what preceded present-day views on Muslims and the West’s claim to major discoveries could shift paradigms and open up room for a deeper understanding of and possible collaboration with the people of Islam. Until then, the world is left with accounts of great thinkers of

the West while equally great thinkers of the Middle-East will remain absent from thought.