

*Occasional Papers Series*

**Arab and Muslim Stereotyping  
in American Popular Culture**

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## **The Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding**

The Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding: History and International Affairs was established in 1993 by Georgetown and the Foundation pour l'Entente entre Chrétiens et Musulmans, Geneva, to promote dialogue between the two great religions. The Center focuses on the historical, theological, political and cultural encounter of Islam and Christianity, the Muslim world and the West. Located in the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, the Center combines teaching, research and public affairs.

The establishment of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown flows from the role of religion in the contemporary international system. Both Georgetown's Catholic-Jesuit heritage and its location in Washington have shaped the University's abiding interest in the study of religion and international affairs. Islam is one of the great spiritual and social forces in the world today; its influence and significance will extend and develop in the twenty-first century. Thus, the study of Islam at Georgetown encompasses its religious content, its cultural significance and role in international affairs as well as the Christian experience in the Muslim world.

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Included among his 300-plus publications are two books, *Nuclear War Films* (ed.), 1978, and *The TV Arab*, 1984, and essays focusing on the impact of stereotypical portraits in college textbooks, academic journals, and periodicals, e.g., the *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, and the *Wall Street Journal*.

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# I

## INTRODUCTION

All good people agree  
And all good people say,  
All nice people like Us, are We  
And every one else is They:  
But if you cross over the sea  
Instead of over the way,  
You may end up (think of it) looking at We  
As a sort of They!  
-- Rudyard Kipling, "We and They"

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For more than two decades I have been studying the way Arabs and Muslims are portrayed in American popular culture, and its effects. Here, I will present an overview and analysis of selected portraits, with particular attention to the images generated in reports of the 1991 Gulf War, the 1993 World Trade Center explosion, the 1995 bombing in Oklahoma City and the 1996 crash of Trans World

Airlines Flight 800. The impact of these stereotypical images on individuals and policies, explanations as to why these deleterious images persist, and some plausible ways of curtailing stereotyping will also be considered. This discussion will reveal that stereotyping encourages divisiveness by accentuating our differences at the expense of those things that tie us together.

Examples are drawn from more than eight hundred feature films, hundreds of television newscasts, documentaries, and entertainment shows, ranging from animated cartoons to soap operas to movies-of-the-week, print and broadcast news stories, editorial and op-ed pages, and editorial cartoons. Not included are children's books, comic books, textbooks, print advertisements, toys, and games.

In 1974, I began documenting and discussing Arab and Muslim images for my book *The TV Arab* (1984). I traveled to New York City and Los Angeles to meet with and solicit opinions from a number of news directors, producers, writers, and network executives. I still recall the rationale for stereotyping offered in 1982 by James Baerg, Director of Program Practices for CBS-TV: "I think," he remarked, "the Arab stereotype is attractive to a number of people. It is an easy thing to do. It is the thing that is going to be most readily accepted by a large number of the audience. It is the same thing as throwing in sex and violence when an episode is slow."

Not much has changed since then. Research verifies that lurid and insidious depictions of Arabs are staple fare. The Arab Muslim continues to surface as the threatening cultural "Other." As John Esposito says, "Fear of the Green Menace [green being the color of Islam] may well replace that of the Red Menace of world communism. . . . Islam is often equated with holy war and hatred, fanaticism and violence, intolerance and the oppression of women."<sup>2</sup>

Consider the National Conference's 1994 survey on Inter-Group relations. Pollster Louis Harris conducted in-depth interviews with nearly 3,000 people; Asians, Blacks, Latinos, and Whites were asked

about negative stereotypes. 42 percent agreed with the statement that "Muslims belong to a religion that condones or support terrorism." 47 percent concurred with the assertion that Muslims "are anti-Western and anti-American;" and 62 percent agreed with the declaration that Muslims "segregate and suppress women."

Reporters and image makers define jihad as a holy war. It is not. To struggle against an unjust cause is a more accurate definition: jihad is "the eternal struggle in human life between good and evil forces."<sup>3</sup> Another misused term is "fundamentalism," for which no Arabic word even exists. Although fundamentalism is an American word referring to Protestants who take the meaning of the Bible literally, journalists often tag Muslims fundamentalists, and fundamentalism is equated with fanaticism.<sup>4</sup>

Explains ABC-TV's Peter Jennings to University of Colorado Professor, Stewart M. Hoover [Personal conversation, October 5, 1993]: "... we and our colleagues don't do a very good job covering Islam, and by extension, I assume we are not dealing with religion very well, either." Says Jennings, "at ABC [we] never use the term 'Islamic fundamentalism' because we realize that is a misnomer. Others do use it, but all of us need more consciousness of religion in general."

Muslims are lumped together and our expectations are based more on stereotyping than on empirical research, according to Esposito. All too often the "coverage of Islam and the Muslim world concludes there is a monolithic Islam out there somewhere, believing, feeling, thinking and acting as one." The stereotypical Muslim presented to Americans resembles Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, Libya's Moammar Gadhafi, or Iraq's Saddam Hussein; the imagery "has profoundly affected American perceptions of Islam and the Middle East."<sup>5</sup>

Certainly the truck and car bombings in Beirut in 1983 that killed seventeen Americans at the U.S. Embassy and scores of U.S.



Marines, combined with the June 1985 hijacking of a TWA passenger jet to Lebanon, helped encourage anti-Muslim sentiment, which then began to escalate in 1979, when Iranian revolutionaries took over the U.S. Embassy in Iran, held fifty-two Americans hostage, and brought about the fall of the Shah. Esposito cites the rise of the Ayatollah Khomeini and "Khomeini's denunciation of America as the 'Great Satan' and 'chants of 'Death to America'" as encouraging these attitudes; since most Americans perceived Iran to be an Arab country, Arabs, too, were condemned.<sup>6</sup>

Most Muslims are neither Arab nor Persian, but Indonesian, Indian or Malaysian. Approximately 12 percent of Muslims are Arabs. Yet, many Americans believe only Arabs are Muslims, and many wrongly assume that Iranians are Arabs as well.

In 1980, during the height of the Iranian hostage crisis, a national poll gauging American attitudes towards Arabs revealed that 70 percent of the American people surveyed identified Iran as an Arab country and 8 percent "admitted they did not know whether it was or not."<sup>7</sup>

This perception of course affected American attitudes towards Arabs at the time. Affirms journalist Said Deep in *The Quill*, image makers tend to lump together Arabs, Iranians and/or Turks as dark-complexioned Muslim rogues, flaunting unkempt beards or moustaches. During the hostage crisis in Iran, "thousands of Middle Eastern college students [especially Iranians] were denied visas; during the Gulf War, Muslim and Arab-Americans endured harassment, name-calling, beatings, and others had their businesses vandalized or looted," says Deep. For example, mistakenly deeming Muslims, Arabs and Iranians to be one and the same, a University of Wisconsin student sent this abusive note to an Iranian student: "Death to all Arabs; die Islamic scumbags."<sup>8</sup>

When stereotypical images persevere misperceptions abound, inducing "pictures in our heads," a phrase introduced by journalist

Walter Lippmann seventy years ago. "The subtlest and most pervasive of all influences," cautioned Lippmann, "are those which create and maintain the repertory of stereotypes. We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And those perceptions . . . govern deeply the process of perceptions."<sup>9</sup>

Although Muslims are not alone in having their religious beliefs misrepresented, an abhorrence of the Arab peoples has become firmly embedded in the American psyche. They are being collectively indicted because of the crimes, or alleged crimes, of a few. Affirms Philip Geyelin in the *Washington Post*, "It comes down to a matter of . . . stereotypes in cartoons, on television and motion picture screens and in the written word." Journalists tend "to think and speak of them collectively, to judge the many by the egregious excess of the few," says Geyelin. "Scholars write of Arab 'tribalism' and unsettled 'nomadic' instincts. The suggestion is that Arabs are somehow incapable of statecraft or stable nationhood. They dress funny, carry guns." Thus, a "mindlessly negative anti-Arab prejudice" emerges, says Geyelin. "It is enough to note that for bigotry applied to Arabs [and Muslims] there is no comparable rebuke."<sup>10</sup>

To begin to resist the impact of falsehood and stereotyping, it is essential to improve one's knowledge of Islam, a faith embraced by 1.2 billion people. The word Islam comes from the Arabic root, '*s-l-m*,' which means peace. Advocating "brotherhood and understanding," Islam is a religion of peace. One-quarter of the Muslim peoples of the world are in South Asia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. The remainder are Afghans, Albanians, Arabs, Indonesians, Iranians, Africans, Malaysians, Turks, and others.<sup>11</sup>

This mix of ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds is reflected in the broad range of Muslim viewpoints. Explains Professor Sulayman Nyang of Howard University, "Muslims can be compared to Catholics. They are as different as Mexican American Catholics in Southern California are from Polish and Italian Catholics in Chicago

or Philadelphia."<sup>12</sup> Muslims are a diverse group: the "seen one, seen 'em all" cliché does not apply.

Islam, the fastest growing of the world religions, is now the second largest. It is estimated that by the year 2000, Muslims will constitute 27 percent of the world's population. The 56 states which are predominately Islamic constitute one-third of the membership of the United Nations. The Muslim world ranges from Guinea on the west coast of Africa to Borneo in the South China Sea. China has a Muslim minority of 40 million or 4 percent of the population. Eighteen million--nearly 80 percent--of the world's 23 million refugees, are also Muslims.<sup>13</sup>

Although Islam is one of the three great monotheistic religions, most Americans know little about its teachings, its holy days, or its commonalities with Christianity and Judaism. Muslims believe in many of the same things as Jews and Christians, and in the same prophets. As Ralph Braibanti points out, "While there are profound theological differences between Islam and Christianity, there are also significant similarities. For example, social harmony with Christians and Jews has always been a central tenet of Islam," says Braibanti. "On social problems, for instance, there is almost complete agreement between believing Christians and Muslims."<sup>14</sup>

Approximately 15 million Christians -- ranging from Eastern Orthodox to Episcopalian to Roman Catholic to Protestant -- reside in Arab countries. But motion pictures and television programs never show Arab Christians even though the majority of America's three million Arab-Americans are Christians. According to the American Muslim Council, "about 30 percent" of Arab-Americans are Muslims.

Through immigration, conversion, and birth, Muslims are our country's fastest growing religious group. Approximately five to eight million Muslims—African-Americans, South Asians, American whites and members of other ethnic groups—live in the United States,

writes Cox newspaper-columnist Howard Kleinberg.<sup>15</sup> As responsible citizens, many contribute to their respective communities; among them are teachers, doctors, lawyers and artists, but they remain among the least well understood segments of American society.

By the year 2000, Islam is expected to overtake Judaism as America's largest non-Christian religion. American-born Muslims bring to our country a variety of languages, cultures, professions and political concerns. Muslims now outnumber Episcopalians 2 to 1; within a few years Islam may well become the second largest religious community in the United States. In 1970 there were fewer than 1,000 Muslims in Houston; today there are an estimated 60,000. Nearly half a million Muslims now reside in the Chicago metropolitan area; the region boasts seventy mosques and Islamic centers.<sup>16</sup> Approximately 400,000 Muslims live in New York City; the city's five boroughs feature seventy-plus mosques.<sup>17</sup> Today, "the U.S. is part of the Muslim world," writes Diana L. Eck. "From New Orleans to Portland one may see examples of American Islamic architecture." Many of these new mosques are being designed and built by American architects like the Islamic Center at 96th Street and Third Avenue in New York designed by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, says Eck.<sup>18</sup> Writes Steven Barboza in *American Jihad*, "There are more than 200,000 Muslim businesses [in the U.S.], 1,500 mosques, 165 Islamic schools, 425 Muslim associations and 85 Islamic publications."<sup>19</sup>

Nearly 40 percent of America's Muslims are African-Americans. Though they belong to various persuasions, media systems tend to identify them all with Louis Farrakhan's radical and highly publicized Nation of Islam and wrongly perceive that they are all his followers. For example, in 1996 newspapers such as *USA Today* and the *Washington Post* reported that Farrakhan, seeking to influence U.S. elections with foreign funds, "cavorted with Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi and the Iranian leadership." Iran's newspaper *Kayhan* quoted Farrakhan as saying: "You can quote me: God will destroy America by the hands of the Muslims."<sup>20</sup> Farrakhan told Gadhafi that should he need assistance, he could provide "40 million

[American] Muslims" to support him." Few reports disputed this statement. In reality, wrote *Washington Post* reporter Yasmine Bahrani, Farrakhan's Nation of Islam is "a tiny splinter group," with "less than 20,000 members."<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, "the overwhelming majority of mainstream American Muslims, many of whom are recent immigrants, not only object to Farrakhan's inflammatory and misleading declarations, they are frightened by his rhetoric." America's Muslims have no desire to destroy the United States. They appreciate the religious freedom here, freedom not always available in the lands they left.<sup>22</sup>

Religion reporter John Dart in his book, *Deities & Deadlines*, remarks that "Muslims are justifiably sensitive about careless news-media characterizations of radical activists who claim to act in the name of Islam."<sup>23</sup> He advises those engaged in the production and dissemination of news to "resist the frequent device of quoting only the most vociferous, extreme positions."<sup>24</sup> One such extreme position appeared in a 1993 American Immigration Control (AIC) newsletter, warning concerned Americans about "America's growing Illegal Alien Crisis" that would very soon affect their communities. Readers were told that no longer are illegal aliens only a "BORDER STATE PROBLEM," but constitute a national security threat. Among those threatening the United States "are drug-smugglers, criminals, and Arab-born aliens who support terrorist activity and remain loyal to Middle East tyrants."<sup>25</sup>

Syndicated talk-show hosts offer extreme views. On May 15, 1996, Janet Parshals, the host of a nationally syndicated evangelical radio program, told her listeners that Muslims worship the "Moon God."<sup>26</sup> Her comments were repeated by Dr. Robert Morey, whose lectures and publications *The Moon-god Allah, Islam The Religion of the Moon God, Behind the Veil: Unmasking Islam* and *The Islamic Invasion: Confronting the World's Fastest Growing Religion* and monthly newsletter, "The Truth Seeker,"<sup>27</sup> spread such nonsense as the "Religion of [the] desert moon god Allah is worming its way into

S.C. prisons," and the Muslim "god Allah was a pagan deity. In fact, he was the Moon-god who was married to the sun goddess and the stars were his daughters."<sup>128</sup> Ibrahim Hooper of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) told me that the "Moon god" myth is commonly believed, especially by evangelical Christians, who perpetuate such fantasies in their comic books.<sup>29</sup>

These twentieth century feelings of hostility can, according to Braibanti, be traced back to the Crusades, when general Christian repugnance scapegoated Muslims. Braibanti points out that in Dante's *Inferno* Mohammed is regarded as "the figure who broke the hold of Christianity, hence was sentenced to the cruelest punishment . . . being cleft from head to crotch."<sup>130</sup>

Washington Irving writes that although the Prophet Mohammad was "a man of great genius," his judgments were the result of "sickness and religious fanaticism."<sup>131</sup> In his Oriental story, *The Giaour, a Fragment of a Turkish Tale* (1813), George Byron writes about a vile Musselman who kidnaps and enslaves the western heroine, then throws her into the sea. In the end, a young Venetian unbeliever avenges his sweetheart's death, a virgin "locked in the grip of Islamic despotism."<sup>132</sup> A century later, John Lloyd Stevens wrote in his 1920's travel narrative that "every devout Musselman had thirty-six perpetual virgins to minister his needs." The accompanying illustration displays two nude, full-breasted bedouin women with this caption: "What Every Pious Moslem Expects to Find in Paradise."<sup>133</sup> Warns Paul Watkins in his 1990 novel, *In the Blue Light of African Dreams*, Moroccans intend to use a Westerner's "skull as a paving stone for one of their mosques."<sup>134</sup>

Distorted ideas find their way into books with titles like *Inflamed Islam* and *The Fire of Islam*, and magazine and newspaper articles labelled as "The Roots of Muslim Rage," "Rising Islam May Overwhelm the West," "The Islamic War Against Modernity," and "Muslim Time Bomb."<sup>135</sup> Exposed to such material, is it any wonder

that some Americans perceive Muslim men to be intolerant, sex-crazed, and hypocritical?

Images of Muslim women also mislead, as Muslim culture is presented as oppressively patriarchal. For example, the Middle East chapter in a sixth-grade Social Studies textbook, *People and Culture* displays pictures of camels, tents and veiled women. The authors contend that "Traditional Muslim girls do not go to school." And "Women cannot own property." And "A man can divorce his wife by saying three times, I divorce you." The authors pose this question to readers: "Would you like to be a woman in the Middle East?"<sup>136</sup>

There exists a commanding link between such stories and reality. Although Muslim-Americans are an integral part of the American landscape, seldom is the United States referred to as a Judeo-Christian-Muslim nation. A recent national survey, cited by the *Los Angeles Times*'s John Dart, reveals that the Americans polled viewed Christians in general, Jews, and on balance, Mormons, as good influences on U.S. society, but more than 30 percent regarded Muslims as having a "negative influence."<sup>137</sup>

Muslims maintain they are perceived as a "negative influence because the American press and entertainment industry are ignorant of Islam and as a result tend to focus on a violent and extreme minority, according to James Brooke, writing in the *New York Times* Muslims are always shown with raised fists, chanting "Death to the Great Satan" as they burn Uncle Sam in effigy.<sup>38</sup> Muslims from Beirut to New York City are shown as anti-Jewish and anti-Christian "terrorists."

## II

# ARAB MUSLIMS ON TELEVISION AND IN THE MOVIES

The popular caricature of the average Arab is as mythical as the old portrait of the Jew: He is robed and turbaned, sinister and dangerous, engaged mainly in hijacking airlines and blowing up public buildings. It seems that the human race cannot discriminate between a tiny minority of persons who may be objectionable, and the ethnic strain from which they spring. If the Italians have their Mafia, all Italians are suspect; if the Jews have financiers, all Jews are part of an international conspiracy; if the Arabs have fanatics, all Arabs are violent. In the world today, more than ever, barriers of this kind must be broken, for we are all more alike than we are different.

—Columnist Sydney Harris, "The World Shrinks and Stereotypes Fall," *Detroit Free Press*, April 11, 1986.

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Film and television function as both art and entertainment; screen images both provide information and help shape values. Motion pictures and television programs present powerful messages that serve to educate and help to convince viewers of a particular world view. Intentionally or unintentionally, images teach people whom to fear, whom to hate, and whom to love. As President John Fitzgerald Kennedy said, "The great enemy of truth is very often not the lie,



deliberate, contrived and dishonest, but the myth, persistent, persuasive and realistic."<sup>139</sup>

The dislike of "stranger's" image, which the Greeks knew a xenophobia, forewarns that when one ethnic, racial, or religious group is denigrated we all suffer. Screen myths, such as the Catholic Church as a monolithic institution, weaken our ability to understand the world. Hollywood's villains illustrate who is to be demonized and ridiculed: viewers see the Asian as "sneaky;" the black as "Sambo;" the Italian as the "Mafioso;" the Irishman as the "drunk;" the Jew as "greedy;" the Indian as the "savage;" and the Hispanic as "greasy." In the "enlightened 1990s such offensive labeling is no longer tolerated. Now, "it appears that we're down to one group, the Arabs," writes columnist Jay Stone. "When was the last time you saw an Arab character in a movie who was anything but one of the three B's (billionaire, bomber, belly dancer)?"<sup>140</sup> "One group should not be singled out as enemies of all that is good and decent and American," adds Stone. "Where are the movie Arabs and Muslims who are just ordinary people? It is time for Hollywood to end this undeclared war."<sup>141</sup> Sar Keen, author of *Faces of the Enemy* (1986), also shows how Arabs are still vilified: "You can hit an Arab free; they're free enemies, free villains—where you couldn't do it to a Jew or you can't do it to black anymore."<sup>142</sup>

For more than a century movies have dramatized myth making. Ever since the camera began to crank, the unkempt Arab has appeared as an uncivilized character, the cultural Other, someone who appears and acts differently than the white Western protagonist, someone of a different race, class, gender or national origin. The diverse Islamic world is populated solely with bearded mullahs, shady sheikhs in their harems, bombers, backward bedouin belly dancers, harem maidens and obsequious domestics. Image makers cover women in black from head to toe and have them follow several paces behind abusive sheikhs, their heads lowered, a mute, uneducated, unattractive, enslaved being, solely attending men.

Mindlessly adopted and casually adapted, such portraits narrow our vision and blur reality. The screen Arab Muslim lacks a humane face. Continually demonized they are carefully crafted to frighten viewers. They live in mythical kingdoms of endless desert dotted with oil wells, tents, run-down mosques, palaces, goats, and camels. These rigid portraits belittle Arab and Muslim hospitality, their rich culture, and their history.

As visual lessons movies, like books, last forever. After Hollywood's features leave the movie theaters, they are delivered to video stores and shown on TV screens. From 1986 to 1995, I tracked features telecast on St. Louis, Missouri, cable and network channels and found that 15 to 20 movies a week are telecast that mock or denigrate Arab Muslims. Viewers see American adolescents, intelligence agents, military personnel, even Inspector Clouseau's son, massacring obnoxious Arab Muslims in numerous films such as *Navy SEALs* (1990), *Killing Streets* (1991), *The Human Shield* (1992), *The Son of the Pink Panther* (1993), *Bloodfist V: Human Target* (1994) and *True Lies* (1994).

Producers have regularly inserted unsightly Arab Muslims and prejudicial dialogue into more than 150 movies that otherwise have nothing at all to do with Arabs or the Middle East. In films such as *Reds* (1981), *Cloak and Dagger* (1984), *Power* (1986), *Puppet Master II* (1990), *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1990), *American Samurai* (1992) and *Point of No Return* (1993), Muslim caricatures appear like phantoms. Beginning with Universal's *The Rage of Paris* (1921), in which the heroine's husband is killed in a sandstorm by an Arab, Hollywood's studios needlessly maligned Arabs. Currently, Libyans are the favorite target. In non-Middle East scenarios such as *Back to the Future* (1985), *Broadcast News* (1987), and *Patriot Games* (1992), Libyan "bastards" shelter Irish villains, bomb U.S. military installations in Italy, and shoot the heroic American scientist in a mall parking lot. *The American President* (1995), an otherwise agreeable romantic comedy about a widowed president falling for a lovely environmental lobbyist, mentions Libyans who bomb a U.S.

weapons system. In this case at least writer Aaron Sorkin softens the anti-Libyan dialogue by expressing sympathy for the Arab janitor and other innocents about to be annihilated.<sup>43</sup>

Although the industry is now attempting to curb biases, the tyranny of counterfeit portraits persists. Some image makers still reproduce discriminatory images of Muslims advanced by Mark Twain more than 100 years ago in his book, *Innocents Abroad* (1869). Twain describes the "Muhammadeans," as "sinfully ugly pagans," "infidels" and as "ravaged savage[s]" with eyes "fierce and full of hate." Beginning with motion pictures such as *The Sheik* (1921) and *Son of the Sheik* (1926), which starred the popular Rudolph Valentino as Sheikh Ahmed, the movies portrayed brutal slavers and promiscuous Arab Muslim desert sheikhs. Contrary to popular belief, Valentino's Ahmed is not an Arab. Note the dialogue.

Diana, the heroine: His [Ahmed's] hand is so large for an Arab.

Ahmed's French friend: He is not an Arab. His father was an Englishman, his mother, a Spaniard.

Hollywood's sheikh of the 1920s became the oily sheikh of the 1970s and 1980s, and now the fanatical "fundamentalist" terrorist who prays before killing innocents. Today's sheikhs are uncultured and ruthless, attempting to procure media conglomerates (*Network*, 1977), destroy the world's economy (*Rollover*, 1981), kidnap Western women (*Jewel of the Nile*, 1985), direct nuclear weapons at Israel and the United States (*Frantic*, 1988), and influence foreign policies (*American Ninja 4: The Annihilation*, 1991).<sup>44</sup>

Motion pictures such as *Not Without My Daughter* (1990) show the Muslim male as a religious hypocrite, a liar abusing Islam and kidnapping his American wife and daughter. Not only does he imprison and abuse his wife in Iran, he slaps her face, boasting, "I'm a Muslim!" After breaking an oath sworn on the Qur'an, he brags: "Islam is the greatest gift I can give my daughter." When he departs

the mosque followed by his relatives, the camera cuts to a poster of a grim Ayatollah Khomeini. The editing implies that the offensive actions of Muslims towards American women and the behavior of Iran's late Ayatollah are one and the same.

There is a dangerous and cumulative effect when these repulsive screen images remain unchallenged. The Arab Muslim image parallels the image of the Jew in Nazi-inspired German movies such as *Robert and Bertram* (1939), *Die Rothschilds Aktien von Waterloo* (*The Rothschilds' Shares in Waterloo* 1940), *Der Ewige Jude* (*The Eternal Jew* 1940), and *Jud Süß* (1940). Resembling the hook-nosed screen Arab wearing burnouses and thobes, screen Jews also dress differently than the films' protagonists, wearing yarmulkes and black robes. They, too, appear as unkempt money-grubbing caricatures who seek world domination, who worship a different God, who kill innocents, and who lust after blond virgins.<sup>45</sup> Delivered simultaneously, stereotypical films, editorial cartoons, radio programs, and newspaper essays made the Jew the scapegoat for Germany's problems.<sup>46</sup>

Hollywood's Arab Muslims now surface as a swarthy menace; projected as religious fanatics, they threaten our freedom, economy, and culture. Producers selectively frame the Palestinian as a demonic creature with neither compunction nor compassion toward men, women or children. The images are drawn from the same stereotype of the fanatic Jew, the Arab Muslim sheikh, and the American Indian, displayed in more than 1,000 feature films, especially in early Westerns, as the "savage."

In 1960, in Otto Preminger's *Exodus*, the idea first surfaced that a Palestinian was a terrorist. In the 1980s, ten features, including *The Ambassador* (1984), *The Delta Force* (1986), *Wanted Dead or Alive* (1987), and *Ministry of Vengeance* (1989), made the Palestinian Muslim Enemy Number One, "scumbag," "son of a bitch," "the Gucci Terrorist," and "a fly in a piece of shit," "animals," "bastards," "f---in' pigs," and "stateless savages" who "massacre children." The

slurs are not rebuked by other characters in the films, possibly providing some viewers with the false impression that the remarks are accurate.<sup>47</sup> Several made-for-television movies also paint the Palestinian as a despicable being; they include films such as *Hostage Flight* (1985), *Terrorist on Trial* (1988), and *Voyage of Terror* (1990).

Two 1990s box-office hits, *True Lies* (1994) and *Executive Decision* (1996), also portray Palestinian Muslims as sadists killing American innocents, including a priest. Both display Palestinians as screaming, murderous "terrorists." In *Lies*, Muslims ignite an atom bomb off the Florida coast.<sup>48</sup> Avi Neshet, a former Israeli commando working in the Hollywood film industry was "incensed by the sick humor of a [*Lies*] scene in which an Uzi tossed down a flight of stairs inadvertently mows down a roomful of Arabs." In the October 17, 1996 issue of the *Jerusalem Report* [p. 49] Neshet told correspondent Sheli Teitelbaum: "You were supposed to laugh? I fought Arabs and I had Arab friends, but this was completely dehumanizing a group."

In *Decision*, Muslims hijack a passenger jet, terrorize the passengers, kill a flight attendant, and prepare to unload enough lethal nerve gas to kill millions in Washington, D.C., and along the east coast. Throughout, Islam is equated with violence. Holding the Holy Qur'an in one hand and a bomb in the other, a Palestinian Muslim enters the swank dining room of London's Marriott Hotel and blows up innocent couples.

Even the Walt Disney Company denigrates America's Arabs and Muslims in its family films. In December 1995, Touchstone Pictures, a subsidiary of Disney, released a remake of Edward Streeter's 1948 book, *Father of the Bride*. The Disney film, *Father of the Bride, Part II*, a sequel to the 1991 Steve Martin remake, is the fourth feature based on Streeter's work. *Bride II* was listed for months among the top ten weekly money-makers. *Entertainment Weekly* reported the film was "a booming money-maker, grossing more than \$80 million for the studio."<sup>49</sup> In *Bride II*, disagreeable Mideast-Americans are

introduced for the first time. The original 1950 Spencer Tracy - Elizabeth Taylor film and all the other *Father of the Bride* movies have focused on marriage and love. Muslims and Mideast-Americans do not appear in any of these earlier versions. What prompted Disney to inject stereotypes in its 1995 *Bride II*?

Consider the plot. Steve Martin and Diane Keaton appear as the happily married George and Nina Banks; they have everything, including a wonderful "Brady Bunch" home. When George convinces Nina to sell the house, an American couple, with mideast roots, the crass Habibs, are introduced. The film's ferocious Doberman pinschers behave better than this disagreeable duo.

The rich and unkempt Habib (Eugene Levy) smokes, needs a shave, and talks with a heavy accent. When Mrs. Habib attempts to speak, her husband barks mumbo-jumbo, presumably imitating Arabic, at her. Cowering like a scolded puppy, Mrs. Habib shrinks and becomes mute, perpetuating Hollywood's image of the mideast woman as submissive nonentity.

Blurts Habib to George: "When can you move? You sell, we pay top dollar!" Habib purchases the house, demanding the Banks be out in 10 days. Habib commands, "You got a key, George? The key!" Next, he crushes his cigarette on the immaculate walkway. The message is clear: There goes the neighborhood.

Though Habib owned the house for just "one day," he makes much more than a "substantial profit," returning the house only after maneuvering George into forking over \$100,000.

Critic Ken Tucker of *Entertainment Weekly* explained that "the caricature of a cold, rich . . . [Habib] amounts to a glaring ethnic slur."<sup>150</sup> *Washington Post* critic Jane Horowitz admitted that, although Disney "exploit [ed] Arab . . . stereotypes," the Habibs "provide much of the film's uneven comic energy."<sup>151</sup> No one working on *Bride II*

denounced the stereotyping, nor did protests emanate from members of the Screen Writers', Actors', or Directors' Guilds of America.

Laila Lalami's *Los Angeles Times* "Counterpunch" essay criticizing *Bride II* was answered a week later in the *Times* by actor Terrence Beasor.<sup>52</sup> Beasor advised Ms. Lalami, a doctoral student in linguistics at the University of Southern California, to "cheer up," adding that stereotypes are a "time-honored tradition," and "not based on racial or gender bias."<sup>53</sup> To this, radio personality Casey Kasem in a *Times* letter responded: "That's exactly what such slurs are based on. It's the thoughtless dismissal of the consequences that allows the practice of slurring to continue doing its harm." The *Times*, however, eliminated Kasem's last sentence, which reads: "Perhaps if everyone named Beasor had been the target of negative stereotyping for the past 75 years, the writer might have had some small idea what it's like to grow up on the receiving end of dehumanizing prejudice."<sup>54</sup>

*Bride II* could easily have displayed the Habibs as a regular Muslim-American couple with likable children. Featuring the Habibs as helpful acquaintances, that the Banks's befriend, would have been a more probable image. Unlike Disney's stereotypical Habibs, most of America's Muslims are indistinguishable from other Americans.

But *Bride II*'s scenario ignores this, as did the writers who were responsible for *Club Paradise* (1986). Like *Bride*, it features a Muslim who craves only money. Concerned neither with the environment nor people, the mute white-robed sheikh threatens to ruin a Caribbean paradise by building factories, high-rise condos, and even a hideous Arabian palace.

Similarly, in *Earthbound* (1980), adorable Americans, much like the Banks, befriend a family from outer space. This film, too, has nothing to do with Arabs or the Islamic world, but the producers inject a sheikh in a burnoose, again threatening to ruin the environment. This Arab wants to buy and sell a picturesque hotel right

from under its American owner, and replace it with "a twenty-story monstrosity." All ends well, as the plot to snatch the hotel is foiled.

In two of these movies, armed with gobs of money, Muslim Arabs from "over there" come to destroy our cherished landscape. *Earthbound's* scheming sheikh attempts to ravage the environment by erecting condominiums; *Paradise's* covetous Arab attempts to demolish the Caribbean landscape; *Bride II's* conniving Muslim-American not only wrings \$100,000 from George Banks, but also nearly demolishes the Banks's quaint Los Angeles home.

Instead of moving to eradicate the stereotype, Disney continues to demean Arabs in *Aladdin* (1992), the second most successful animated picture ever made. After sensitivity meetings were held between some Arab-Americans and Disney executives in July 1993, Disney deleted two offensive lines from *Aladdin's* opening song before releasing the video. That was all. The line, "It's barbaric, but hey, it's home," remains. A shifty, disreputable story teller is used instead of a distinguished story teller, someone like Damascus's Abu Shadi, a poet and expert teller of tales. Dastardly saber-wielding villains still try to cut off the hands of needy maidens, and a wicked vizier still slices a few throats. For generations, these scenes will teach children that Aladdin's home is indeed "barbaric."<sup>55</sup>

A July 14, 1993 *New York Times* editorial complained that merely changing one line from the opening lyric was not enough: "To characterize an entire region with this sort of tongue-in-cheek bigotry, especially in a movie aimed at children, borders on the barbaric."<sup>56</sup> Professor Joanne Brown of Drake University agrees that *Aladdin* is racist. The villains display "dark-hooded eyes and large hooked noses," writes Brown. "Perhaps I am sensitive to this business of noses because I am Jewish." Brown explains how she would feel if Disney studios created a cartoon based on a Jewish folk tale that portrayed all Jews as Shylocks.<sup>57</sup>



Following the *Aladdin* discussions, Disney executives promised not to demean Arabs in the future, but then went ahead and featured hook-nosed, buck-toothed Arab "desert skunks" in their home-video release of *Aladdin's* sequel, *The Return of Jafar* (1994). *Jafar* sold 10 million copies to rank among the 20 top-selling videos. In fact, nine of the 10 best selling videos of all time are animated films from the Walt Disney Company. That same year Disney also featured Arabs in *In the Army Now*, in which "Glendale reservists" deride Arab cuisine, clobber desert Arabs, and encourage the U.S. Air Force to "blow the hell out of them."

Americans of Middle Eastern heritage are again targeted in a Disney children's film called *Kazaam* (1996), starring Shaquille O'Neal, in which Malik, Hassan, and El-Baz, three dark-complexioned Muslim villains needing shaves and speaking with heavy accents, covet "all the money in the world." Sloppy Malik gobbles "goat's eyes" like a pig swallowing corn. He punches good-guy Americans and tosses Max, a twelve-year-old boy, down a shaft presumably to his death.<sup>58</sup>

Disney films do not vilify the Campolongos, Goldsteins, Gonzaleses, O'Reillys, or Yamamotos. To do so would engender an onslaught of criticism. Whatever the intent behind Disney's singling out of Arab Muslims for humiliation, they remain accountable for these stereotypes. Nor can executives employing the stereotyping use ignorance as an excuse. They remind me of Peanuts' Linus, stubbornly clenching his security blanket. Both Linus and the producer know exactly what they are doing. They know their conduct is wrong, but they refuse to alter their behavior.

Clearly, continuously repeated, gratuitous scenes of violence and prejudices projected in movies serve to influence people. Four days after the film *Executive Decision* was released, employees of a Denver radio station burst into a mosque and began heckling worshipers while the station broadcast their goings-on. One disc jockey played the national anthem on a trumpet. Another wore a mock tur-

ban and a T-shirt, featuring Denver Nuggets Muslim basketball player Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf.<sup>59</sup> Violence and prejudices projected in movies affect action.

Image makers should consider the following conversation between *Earthbound's* alien father and son:

Asks the boy: Why do they [the police] hate us, so?

The father says: I guess because we're . . . different.

Contests the boy: Just because somebody's different doesn't mean they have to hate 'em. It's stupid!

Concedes the father: It's been stupid for a long time.

Stereotypes engender in America's Arabs and Muslims feelings of insecurity, vulnerability, and alienation; some even deny their heritage. One can only wonder how long it will be before people begin to understand that just because someone is different, does not mean he is bad and that it is unbecoming to denigrate people because of their religion, color, ancestry, or country of birth.

For nearly half a century, America's Arabs and Muslims have remained unseen on television as well. Why in 1997 are they still invisible? This absence is wounding. There is not a single series featuring an Arab-American character. Surely image makers know what happens to young people when someone in authority portrays a society in which they do not appear. Such an experience, writes Adrienne Rich, can generate "a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in a mirror and saw nothing."<sup>60</sup>

From 1950, when only 1 in 10 American families owned a television, until today, only one Arab-American and one Arab Christian immigrant have appeared in a television series. The first was Uncle Tanoose, the Lebanese patriarch, portrayed by Hans Conreid in "The

Danny Thomas Show" (1953-71). Tanoose occasionally appeared in episodes, visiting his relatives in the United States. The second was Corporal Maxwell Klinger, an Arab-American soldier in "M\*A\*S\*H" (1972-1983), played by Jamie Farr, who tries to get himself discharged by wearing women's clothing.

Aside from these, series such as "Chicago Hope," "Murphy Brown," and "NewsRadio," never include characters of accomplishment. People modeled on heart surgeon Dr. Michael DeBakey, UPI's White House correspondent Helen Thomas, or radio's Top-40 celebrity Casey Kasem never appear.

Since 1974, when I began to document images on entertainment shows, the rogues have often been Arab Muslims. A selective overview of more than 200 programs, including network newscasts, documentaries, comedies, soap operas, children's cartoons, dramas, and movies-of-the-week yielded the following results.

John Buchan in a novel called *Greenmantle*, written in 1916, wrote: "Islam is a fighting creed, and the mullah still stands in the pulpit with the Koran in one hand and a drawn sword in the other."<sup>61</sup> Clones of Buchan's fanatical mullah surface in several mid-1980s television movies such as *Hostage Flight* (NBC, 1985), *Sword of Gideon* (HBO, 1986), *Under Siege* (NBC, 1986), *The Taking of Flight 847* (NBC, 1988), *Terrorist On Trial: The United States vs. Salim Ajami* (CBS, 1988), and *Hostages* (HBO, 1993). These TV movies are now constantly rebroadcast on both cable and network systems.

In *Hostage Flight*, the protagonist says, "These [Arab Muslim] bastards shot those people in cold blood. They think it's open season on Americans." In *Under Siege*, the U.S. Secretary of State tells the Ambassador of a Muslim nation: "People in your country are barbarians." Also, the FBI director scrutinizes Dearborn's Arab-American community for terrorists who have blown up shopping malls, not to mention the White House. Coincidentally, the Detroit-

Dearborn area boasts the largest Arab-American community, with approximately 250,000 people. In Dearborn, the director lectures his African-American colleague: "Those people are different from us. It's a whole different ball game. I mean the East and the Middle East. Those people have their own mentality. They have their own notion of what's right and what's wrong, what's worth living for and dying for. But we insist on dealing with them as if they're the same as us. We'd better wake up." In *Terrorist On Trial*, a Palestinian Muslim boasts that he ordered the deaths of American women and children and advocates the use of nuclear weapons, saying, "We will strike at them in their home country as well as overseas. Long live Palestine!"

What is so disturbing about these television movies is that they effectively show all Arabs, Muslims, and Arab-Americans as being at war with the United States. Accomplished Arab-American actors are obliged to play terrorists and to demean their heritage. Nicholas Kadi, for example, a competent character actor, makes his living playing Arab Muslim kuffiyeh-clad terrorists. In 1990, Kadi lamented on the news show "48 Hours" that he seldom speaks in films. Instead of talking, directors tell him to impart "a lot of threatening looks, threatening gestures, threatening actions. Every time we [he and others playing heavies] said 'America,' we'd [be directed to] spit." Says Kadi, "There are other kinds of Arabs in the world besides terrorists. I'd like to think that some day there will be a positive Arab role out there."<sup>62</sup>

Kadi plays stereotypical roles in films such as *Navy SEALs* (1990), and in TV shows such as "Scimitar," a 1995 NBC *JAG* episode. In "Scimitar" the Iraqi-born Kadi impersonates a Saddam-like colonel holding Meg, an innocent U.S. army officer, hostage. The lusty Kadi tries to force himself on the attractive blond. One screen myth maintains that Arabs consider "date rape" to be "an acceptable social practice." The camera dwells on the drooling Kadi wielding a Damascus scimitar slowly to remove Meg's uniform. The rape is thwarted and Kadi is killed just in time.

Years ago Washington Irving compared the "stern" character of the American Indian with the Arab.<sup>63</sup> Today, too, writers demean Arab Muslims as they once demonized the American Indian. Clad in strange garb, they are made to speak garbled English and to crave blond heroines. Just as screen protagonists call Indians "savages," they label Arabs "terrorists." The closing frames of "Scimitar" show an Iraqi helicopter pursuing Americans. When the chopper goes down in flames, the Marines cheer: "Yahoo. It's just like *Stagecoach* with John Wayne." Puzzled by the reference to Wayne, a motion picture idol, Meg asks the Marine: "John Wayne was killed by Iraqis?" He replies, "No, Indians!" Commented Ron Samuels, the producer of *Iron Eagle*, a 1986 movie displaying an American teen blasting Arabs, "It reminded me of the old John Wayne westerns." Also, in the Gulf war movie, *Hot Shots Part Deux!* (1994), U.S. soldiers prepare for an Iraqi attack. Warns one G.I.: "Indians on the warpath."

Situation comedies in syndication such as "Married . . . With Children" and "A Small Wonder" humiliate Arabs. Concerned about what happened to their children, Al Bundy asks Peg, his wife: "How about the kids, Peg? Did they really go to your mother's house? Or do they belong to the Arabs now?" The audience howls.

In a "Wonder" segment, Akeem, a prosperous 13-year-old, attempts to trade one of his mute teen Muslim maidens for Vickie Lawrence, an American. Why? He believes Vickie to be "obedient." Barks Akeem: "You must do as I say and fluff my pillows." Retorts Vickie: "You can fluff your own pillows, turkey....You clap your hands one more time at me, Buster, and I'll fluff your mouth." Akeem is tagged a "camel jockey;" Mustafa, his guardian, has "camel breath."

A November 1996 segment of *FX: The Series* displays Rashid Hamadi, a stereotypical Arab drug addict who deliberately runs over and kills a New York City police officer in cold blood. But when policemen move to apprehend him, Hamadi boasts, "I have diplomatic immunity. You can't arrest me." In the end, Hamadi is caught

smuggling counterfeit plates into New York city; his "Lebanese" and "Iranian" friends in Beirut fabricated the bills. Final scenes show policemen seizing Hamadi, that "piece of garbage" and "slimeball bastard."<sup>64</sup>

On the "Jon Stewart Show," U.S. soldier puppets kill white-robed Arab puppets. Waving the American flag, one soldier boasts: "I killed many of them!" Says another: "I decapitated quite a few of them myself." Stewart's audience applauds.<sup>65</sup>

In "Twisted Puppet Theater," Ali, the Muslim puppet sporting a black beard and turban, shouts: "There is only one God and Mohammed is his prophet!" Then he turns and shoots Kukla, the good clown puppet, dead.<sup>66</sup>

Even television soap operas such as NBC's "Santa Barbara" and CBS's "The Bold and the Beautiful" imply all Muslims are oppressors, their women appendages and inferior to women of the West. For months during the summer of 1990, viewers witnessed two shady sheikhs fighting each other in "Santa Barbara." One has killed a sheikh's "mother and father and two sisters" right before his very eyes. Both potentates hold Americans hostage. One of the hostages is Eden, the blond American heroine. Operating as the Ann Landers of Arabia, Eden frees the prisoners. Plus, she rescues oppressed Muslim women. For example, a sheikh of a "two-bit country" plans to execute one of his wives, because she ran away. Eden proceeds to teach this Arab, who thinks that "to take advice from a woman is equal to a bubble floating on air," to stop humiliating harem maidens. In the end, the ruler not only forgives his run-a-way wife, he gives up his backward ways, and grants the women of his kingdom freedom and equal rights. Finally, observing the sort of love Eden and the American hero share, the ruler remarks that sincere affection like that is rarely seen among Arab Muslims.<sup>67</sup>

During 1995, Prince Omar of Morocco appeared in CBS's "Beautiful" as the benevolent protector of Taylor, the seriously ill

Western heroine. Omar rejects all eligible Moroccan maidens; only Taylor is suitably beautiful and intelligent to become his mate. Thanks to Omar's attentiveness, the ailing Taylor recovers, but loses her memory. Instead of continuing to assist her, Omar capitalizes on her memory loss, acting like a typical TV-Arab Muslim hostage-taker. Not only does the Muslim potentate dupe Taylor into marrying him, he prevents her from flying home to her loved ones. Omar has imprisoned Taylor in the palace.

Beginning in December 1991 through early 1992, MTV regularly sandwiched between music videos, "Just Say Julie" segments showing Julie addressing unsavory Moroccan buffoons as "scum" and the "creep with the fez." Armed with explosives, the two "fiendish" Arabs move to blow up the television channel.

Ever since the 1926 animated short, "Felix the Cat Shatters the Sheik," I have viewed and studied scores of American cartoons denigrating the Arab. In "Porky in Egypt" (1938), for example, Arab Muslims in prayer suddenly become Amos 'n' Andy shooting craps; a sexy harem maiden removes her veil, revealing an ugly face. Since 1975, more than 60 comparable cartoons have surfaced on television, depicting Arabs as swine, rats, dogs, magpies, vultures and monkeys. Favorite cartoon characters such as Popeye, Bugs Bunny, Woody Woodpecker, Daffy Duck, Superman, and Batman, ridicule and trounce Arabs.<sup>68</sup>

"Inspector Gadget" and "Heathcliff" cartoons show animated Muslims, not praying to God, but idolizing Westerners. In "Heathcliff," Egyptians believe the cat to be their ancient ruler; in Heathcliff's presence they continually prostrate themselves. When Gadget discovers an ancient relic, Muslims repeatedly bow, mumbling "the chosen one, the chosen one."

Writers give cartoon Arabs names like "Sheikh Ha-Mean-ie," "Ali Boo-Boo," "The Phoney Pharaoh," "Ali Baba, the Mad Dog of the Desert, and his Dirty Sleeves," "Hassan the Assassin," "The

Desert Rat," "Desert Rat Hordes," "Ali Oop," "Ali Mode," and "Arab Duck." While monitoring cartoons on November 23, 1996, I saw "Well-Worn Daffy" on the Nickelodeon channel. Wearing a white *kuffiyeh* and armed with a shotgun, Daffy shoots at three winsome Mexican mice. The mice call Daffy, among other things, "Arab Duck!" Adult viewers may be able to separate fact from animal, but for many children the animated world of cartoons consists of good people versus bad people, e.g., Superman versus Arabs.

Viewing these cartoons brings back memories of dense African-Americans, savage American Indians, "dirty" Latinos, buck-toothed "Japs" and hook-nosed Shylocks in burnouses. Jewish mothers in Europe of the 1930s and the 1940s, as well as African, Indian, Hispanic, and Japanese mothers in the United States during the period, tried to shield their children from such imagery. Continuously pounded into the psyche, such hateful portraits provoke bigotry.

America's Muslim mothers, too, strive to shield their children. Citing scores of old motion pictures being telecast on cable systems, along with cartoons, re-runs of television dramas and sit-coms, plus newly created TV programs and TV movies-of-the-week, they fear the stereotyping has become more pervasive than ever. Conversely, image makers are now giving children of other ethnic origins positive roles models to identify with. Characters appear on the screen that make children feel good about themselves: American Indians, African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Jews, Italians, Polynesians, Irish, English, Poles, East Indians, Scots--just about every racial and ethnic group on the planet, except the Arabs.

Even the Hollywood trade publication, *Variety*, participates in the Muslim-bashing. In October 1995, *Variety* published a color illustration showing militant desert Arabs, saber and rifles raised, ready to mow down the cartoon characters Tom and Jerry, who are tied to the stake. Accompanying the illustration is a story critical of Kuwait's Muslims.



Why unfairly single out Muslims as extremists? Peter Warg writes that Muslims are unfairly protesting the vast number of American cartoons broadcast in Kuwait, saying the images may adversely effect their children.<sup>69</sup> Kuwaiti officials were urging the production of Islamic cartoons featuring more accurate portraits of Arabs. If Asians, Africans, or Greeks expressed similar concerns about cartoons being telecast, would *Variety* mock them by displaying a repulsive illustration?

Certainly, Kuwaiti anxieties are legitimate. Eighty percent of the programs telecast by Kuwait's English Channel in 1995 are U.S. imports.<sup>70</sup> Americans earn millions from these syndicated shows, and profits flow in only one direction. Our networks never import or telecast Arab shows.<sup>71</sup>

Not only are Arab and Islamic productions not readily accessible on U.S. screens, there exists almost no market for motion pictures from other nations. "The total of the entire world cinema shown in the United States," says French director Bertrand Tavernier (*Round Midnight*), "is less than two percent."<sup>72</sup>

Addressing the impact of popular entertainment, Henry Kissinger cautions, "In an age when far more people gain their understanding of the past from movies and television than from the written word, the truth is not a responsibility filmmakers can shrug off as an incidental byproduct of creative license."<sup>73</sup> Kissinger's observations are echoed by author Clive James, who writes: "And since what is said (and seen) in the field of entertainment is what mostly corresponds to, and very probably helps form, the ethical assumptions of the whole country, what is said [and seen] is of real importance, even in the apparently marginal field of comedy."<sup>74</sup>

### III

## PRINT AND BROADCAST NEWS

The way we see other people depends on the window on which we look at the world, what we see through it, when, under what lights and shadows, and, especially, in what larger setting, for whatever the many varieties of individual experience, each one's outlook is perhaps most heavily influenced by the larger political, economic and cultural facts of the relationship at the given time.

—Harold R. Isaacs, *Scratches On Our Minds: American Views of China and India*, (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1980), p. ix.

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Truth, John Stuart Mill said, will prevail in the free marketplace of ideas, and America's liberties are supposed to be founded on a free and vigorous press properly informing citizens. Yet, myth combined with purposefully misleading information about America's Arabs and Muslims leads to inaccuracies which take hold in the American psyche. Odious portraits and themes surface in news reports as well as on movie and television screens.

When President George Bush initiated Operation Desert Shield transporting more than 200,000 Americans to Saudi Arabia, a *New York Times* editorial cautioned against our continuing "anti-Muslim sentiment": "Bigotry thrives on slanderous stereotypes, and the crazed Arab is today's version of the Teutonic hordes and the yellow

peril.<sup>175</sup> Repeating the *Times's* counsel immediately after the war, General Norman Schwarzkopf told the departing American troops in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia: "You are going to take back home the fact that 'Islam' is not a word to be feared, a religion to be feared. It's a religion to be respected, just as we respect all other religions. That's the American way."<sup>176</sup>

Schwarzkopf's advice and the *Times* editorial notwithstanding, as a direct result of the conflict, a wave of anti-Muslim, anti-Arab racism swept over the United States and Canada. Reporter Zuhair Kashmeri in his book, *The Gulf Within*, reports that when the Canadian government went to war against Iraq, many Canadians of Arab or Muslim background found that they, like their counterparts in the United States, were being identified with the enemy. On the street, in work places and in schools, they suffered from intolerance, racial harassment, and violence.<sup>77</sup>

As soon as Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990, assaults on American Arabs began, and continued even after the war ended on February 28, 1991. An ADC Committee reports that more than 119 attacks were committed against America's Muslims and Arabs. Passenger Mohammad Ghonoudian, for example, "was taken off a Miami to New York flight just before takeoff and interrogated for three hours," reported Sam Hussein.<sup>78</sup> Assaults increased following the February 23, 1993, bombing of the World Trade Center. A handful of Arab nationals and Muslims were perpetrators of this deplorable act that killed seven and injured many more.

*New York Times* reporter James Brooke points out that, unfortunately, some reports on the bombing linked all Muslims with domestic terrorism in the minds of many Americans.<sup>79</sup> Immediately after the explosion, instead of focusing on criminal proceedings against individual suspects, some journalists reported that Islam was responsible. Writing in the *New York Times*, Leslie Gelb declared that "Islam doesn't recognize coexistence as a basic doctrine. Coexistence goes against Islam's sense of world order."<sup>180</sup> In numerous reports, the sus-

pects were identified by their national and religious affiliation. For example, the headline of the March 5, 1993, *Washington Post* reads: "Militant Islam Battles Against Western Values: Violence on Fringe of Fundamentalist Renewal." A May 7, 1993, *Washington Times* story by Martin Sieff warns citizens to be on the lookout for "Islamic terrorists." "Radical Islam, West, Face Off Again in NYC," was the title of a *USA Today* story on January 9, 1994. The story concerned the selection of jury members for the World Trade Center bombing. Reporter Steven Emerson is quoted in the story as saying, "This is going to be one of the most important trials . . . in the whole war between radical Islam and the West."<sup>81</sup>

Ignored in reports was this: individuals who commit acts of terror, whatever their origin, are a tiny minority whose deeds are politically rather than religiously motivated.

Cautions columnist Richard Cohen in the *Washington Post*, July 29, 1993, "A fear of Islam is embedded in Western culture. [We must] stop affixing labels to a vast religion [Islam] or a whole people [Arabs] whose diversity is stunning. They have their fanatics, of course, but before we throw stones of gross generalizations, we ought to check our own glass house."<sup>82</sup>

Americans have a history of committing terrorism against other Americans. An April 1995 *Los Angeles Times* report states that of 171 people indicted in the United States for "terrorism and related activities" in the 1980s, 11 were connected to Arab groups, 6 percent of the total.<sup>83</sup> *Boston Globe* reporter Derrick Z. Jackson supports Cohen's thesis, adding that the press marks the boundaries of acceptable and deviant behavior. Jackson explains that some reporters employ a double standard, depicting all Muslims, but not all Christians or Jews, as violent radicals. For example, following the 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, reporters accurately referred to the Prime Minister's assassin as yeshiva student Yigal Amir. Appropriately, they did not link this violent act to Judaism by tagging Amir a Jewish terrorist and/or fundamentalist.

Although most newspapers did not link David Koresh's Waco group with the Bible or Christianity, says Jackson, many headlines connected Islam with those who bombed the World Trade Center. To bolster his thesis, Jackson cites two deceptive headlines: *USA Today's* "Break in Case Points to Muslim Radicals," and the *Wall Street Journal's* "FBI devises a ruse to snare Muslim extremist in blast at New York's towers."<sup>184</sup>

Adds Jackson, "Why headline writers do not tar Koresh and [Dr. David Gunn's killer] Michael Griffin as 'Christian crazies' the way they refer to 'Muslim extremists' speaks to religious arrogance. Deep down, we cannot tolerate the thought that the majority religion of the United States can be used in as evil a way as we seem to presume Islam is."<sup>185</sup>

More than a year after the Trade Center bombing, Steven Emerson continued to imply that the Muslim world was at war with the West. He appeared on CBS-TV's "Eye On America," saying that money is being raised by America's Muslims for a "holy war" here, and in the Middle East.<sup>86</sup> On November 13, 1994, he made a similar pronouncement on CBS-TV's, "60 Minutes." Finally, on November 27, 1994, Emerson's one-hour PBS documentary, "Jihad! in America," disclosed to viewers that it "seem[s] inevitable" that Americans would soon be attacked by "Muslim radicals." Emerson's documentary sets Muslims apart from Americans. [As a result, some peace-loving Muslims who genuinely love and respect the United States may have been victimized by vicious slurs or hate crimes.]

Lamentably, Emerson's "Jihad!" has been joined by other documentaries such as "The Islamic Bomb" and "The Sword of Islam;" books with names like *Inflamed Islam* and *The Fire of Islam* and magazine and newspaper articles like "The Roots of Muslim Rage" and "Muslim Time Bomb."<sup>187</sup>

Following the Trade Center explosion, Muslim and Arab-Americans again became targets of harassment. One was attacked in

a Raleigh, North Carolina, restaurant. His assailant told him: "I hate Muslims. I hate you guys."<sup>188</sup>

When Rabia El-Amin, an American-Arab, hopped on a bus en route to her job in Washington, D.C., on an especially hot day, she politely asked the driver to turn the air conditioning on; he refused, saying, "You can't tell me what to do." Pointing to her Islamic dress, the driver mocked her "long clothes" and "the rag" atop her head. He said, you "just got off the boat" and threatened to "call the police" unless she was "quiet." Eventually, with the assistance of the ADC, Rabia "received a personal letter of apology from the company's General Manager."<sup>189</sup>

In July 1993, Mahmoud Tamer, an Arab-American Muslim working as a New York transit policeman, took his own life as a result of suffering from racial and ethnic slurs. Explained New York's *Daily News*, "The stream of insensitive jokes and remarks climaxed a few weeks ago, when he was humiliated in front of a large group of cops and was told no one wanted to work with him."<sup>190</sup>

"Stereotyping is dangerous," writes Nancy Nielsen, Vice President of Corporate Communications at the New York Times Company, "because it can lead the public to create social scapegoats and focus on the wrong issues and wrong priorities." Also, "Misleading characterizations can be picked up by the global news services and satellite systems, which have the power to perpetuate the distortion, and could fuel further conflict."<sup>191</sup> Adds Nielsen, "The global news media . . . affect how people understand different ethnic and religious groups." They "can profoundly affect the way people understand—or misunderstand—their world, their safety, their options, and their future."<sup>192</sup>

To give examples of how some journalists create "social scapegoats" and some newspapers perpetuate distortions, consider the reports following the April 19, 1995, bombing of Oklahoma City's Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, resulting in the deaths of 169

men, women and children and the injury of 500 more. Though no Arab or Muslim was involved, they were instantly suspect. Only hours after the terrorists destroyed the Murrah building, journalists, law enforcement and government officials, and terrorism experts reported that "Arabic-looking men in jogging suits [were] running from the scene." Without hard documentation and credible witnesses, journalists accepted the supposition that the suspects were "Middle-Eastern-looking men." Some reporters began questioning the loyalty and integrity of America's Arabs and Muslims.

On April 20, without citing sources, CNN reported that federal authorities had arrested "three men of Middle Eastern extraction" and named the men who were detained, even though there was no evidence they had any connection to the case. The suspects proved to be innocent. CNN reporters called it "a Beirut-style car bombing."<sup>93</sup>

Stephen Sloan, a University of Oklahoma terrorism expert, told CNN's Bobbie Battista, "I think there's a real possibility that it was a Middle Eastern group."<sup>94</sup> An April 20, 1995, *USA Today* headline stated: "Bomb Consistent With Mid-east Terror Tactics." On April 20, the *New York Times* speculated that Arab-Muslim terrorists struck Oklahoma City because "some Middle Eastern groups have held meetings there, and the city is home to at least three mosques."

The April 20 front page of the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* displayed a photograph of an emergency worker passing an injured child to a fire fighter. Alongside the photo is the headline: "Experts say car bombing points to Islamic militants." The story, compiled from Gannett wire services, begins with this sentence: "The massive car bomb that devastated a federal building in Oklahoma City points the finger of suspicion at Islamic fundamentalist groups set on waging a war of terror within the United States."

The April 20 *Des Moines Register* headline, "Explosion Terrorizes Oklahoma," follows the *Gazette* report in stating that there

was a "Middle East connection," that "several facts suggested such a link, such as the bomb as well as information that there are several militant groups based in Oklahoma."<sup>95</sup> Talk-show host Tom Snyder cautioned viewers about the large number of "Islamic students in Oklahoma."

The *CBS Evening News* speculated that the bombing "was committed by the militant Palestinian Muslim group, Hamas." During the newscast, Steven Emerson insinuated that Arabs alone are terrorizing America, saying the bombing was "done with the intent to inflict as many casualties as possible. That is a Middle Eastern trait." Emerson also told viewers "not to believe Islamic groups when they denied involvement."<sup>96</sup>

Two days after the bombing, on April 21, the *New York Post's* editorial cartoon displayed the Statue of Liberty under siege. Alongside Lady Liberty in the right corner are three bearded, turbaned Muslims, smiling as they burn the American flag; on the left are flames and a giant mushroom cloud. In the center is the Statue of Liberty, inscribed with this modified version of Emma Lazarus's famous poem: "GIVE US YOUR TIRED, YOUR POOR, YOUR HUDDLED MASSES, YOUR TERRORISTS, YOUR MURDERERS, YOUR SLIME, YOUR EVIL COWARDS, YOUR RELIGIOUS FANATICS . . ."

The *Post* editorial took up the cartoon's message, stating: "Knowing that the car bomb indicates Middle Eastern terrorists at work . . . their goal is to promote fear . . . . In due course we'll learn which particular faction the terrorists identified with—Hamas? Hizbullah? The Islamic Jihad?"

On the morning of the same day, Bob Grant, the talk-show host of New York's WABC radio, railed at a caller who cautioned against a rush to blame Muslims. "What I would like to do is put you up against a wall with the rest of them, and mow you down along with them—execute you with them," said Grant.<sup>97</sup> Concurrently, Boston



columnist and talk-show host Howie Carr asked listeners to call WHDH radio with suggestions as to what should be done to those "towelheads."

For 62-plus hours following the April 19 Oklahoma City explosion, numerous reporters, politicians, and experts wrongly surmised that people looking "Middle Eastern" were responsible. Following the Oklahoma disaster, Edward W. Said remarked: "The assumption is that whenever there is an explosion or some horrible act an Arab or Muslim has something to do with it. I have never seen such mass hysteria and incompetence in my life."<sup>198</sup>

Some experts, as well as academics and journalists, attempted to justify their incompetence. Three days after the reports confirmed the bombers were not Arabs or Muslims, Steven Emerson wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* "that unless the pendulum swings back to the days when the F.B.I. was able to infiltrate legal political organizations, radical Islam will prevail."<sup>199</sup> Emerson's remarks prompted *The Nation's* Robert I. Friedman to quip, "Apparently being a terrorism expert means never having to say you're sorry."<sup>100</sup>

Although *U.S. News & World Report* editor-in-chief, Mortimer B. Zuckerman, ran grisly narratives and prematurely pointed fingers in his magazine, neither he nor his writers apologized to America's Muslims and Arabs. Zuckerman in fact declared it was prudent to suspect Muslims since Muslim extremists are "the other menace to America's civil society."<sup>101</sup> A week later, on May 16, 1995, the tabloid *Globe* printed this headline in bold yellow capital letters: "ARAB TERRORISTS PAID OKLAHOMA BOMBERS."

Specialist Neil C. Livingstone was "not very apologetic" about his "informed speculation" that this act of terror was committed by persons who looked "Middle Eastern." Livingstone argues that experts like himself "did it right," claiming, "I don't think anything went wrong."<sup>102</sup>

Sue Carter, a journalism professor at Michigan State University, said that "most news organizations acted responsibly." She "doesn't believe there was a huge rush to judgment."<sup>103</sup> Daniel Pipes, editor of *Middle East Quarterly*, expanded on Carter and Livingstone's argument when he told *USA Today*, "People have to understand that this is just a beginning. The [Muslim] fundamentalists are on the upsurge, and they make it very clear they're targeting us."<sup>104</sup> Perhaps if similar speculative accounts had tainted the professionals, their families and friends, their attitude toward speculating might be different.

To avoid slandering people, reporters should ponder the meaning of the word, "integrity," which derives from the Latin meaning "whole" or "untouched." They should report events honestly, produce factual and accurate news. Journalists with integrity strive to be objective; they do not tar people with the same negative brush. To insure important issues are fairly documented, the credibility of sources should be examined, experts consulted who are objective in their analyses and harbor no biases against others. Journalists should avoid citing people with hidden political agendas, those so-called experts with deep-seated prejudices.

Finally, on April 22, accurate reports began emerging, stating that two American-born males, Timothy J. McVeigh and Terry L. Nichols, not "Middle-Eastern" men, were being indicted for the crime. McVeigh and Nichols are U.S. Army veterans and are neither Muslims nor Arabs. Still, the initial reports wrongly targeting Arabs and Muslims had caused irrefutable harm. Some callers to talk-radio stations refused to believe that Muslims were not involved.<sup>105</sup>

Reporters did not make Christianity an issue during the crisis in Waco, Texas; journalists referred to David Koresh and others as "cultists." Both during and after the April 3, 1996, arrest of the Unabomber, reporters correctly used the words "defendant" and "suspect" to describe Theodore J. Kaczynski. When twelve members of a paramilitary group in Arizona calling itself the "Viper Militia" were arrested in July, 1996, for allegedly plotting to blow up government

buildings, reporters did not label them as Christians. In October 1996, when seven militiamen accused of planning to bomb the FBI's Criminal Justice Information Services Center in Clarksburg, West Virginia, were arrested, the *Associated Press* referred to the suspects as "militants."<sup>106</sup>

Reporters seldom exploit Christianity or Judaism. U.S. journalists may refer to members of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) as terrorists, but not as "Catholic terrorists." Nor was religion an issue when Baruch Goldstein machine-gunned Palestinian Muslims praying in Hebron's mosque, killing twenty-nine and injuring scores. Journalists did not refer to Goldstein as a "Jewish terrorist." Finally, when terrorists killed "thousands of Muslims in Burma," the assassins were not labeled as "Buddhist terrorists," writes Braibanti.<sup>107</sup> He questions the double standard, saying that when reporters in Bosnia-Herzegovina write about the "genocide of Bosnian Muslims," they do not label the executioners as "Orthodox Christians."<sup>108</sup> Seldom do reports depict the Muslim-as-victim, says Braibanti. He quotes former President Nixon as saying that had Sarajevo been Christian or Jewish, the West "would have acted quickly and would have been right in doing so."<sup>109</sup>

In 1980, the editors of the *New Republic* wrote: "Arabs [and Muslims] have been the victims of ugly racial stereotypes in recent years . . . [and] the widespread casual violation of such standards threatens all potential victims of racial slurs. It ought to stop."<sup>110</sup> It has not stopped.

On October 4, 1984, Amos Perlmutter demonized Muslim nations in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed essay, warning of an "Islamic war waged against the West, Christianity, modern capitalism, Zionism and communism," all at once. Of U.S. policy, he wrote the "utmost priority" was to prepare for "our war against Moslem populism."

Karl E. Meyer characterizes Arab Muslims in his *New York Times* "Editorial Notebook" column [January 29, 1990], writing that "The

[Arab Muslim] fanatic comes from the desert, the creator from the woods. That is the main difference between the East and the West."

Reporter Jan Goodwin, in her book *Price of Honor* (1994), wrote that "in the West today, it is fashionable to designate all Muslims as the new pariahs: terrorists, fundamentalists, fanatics. They have filled the bogeyman niche under the bed where communists used to lurk . . . . There is a perceived oil well in every backyard, a stretch Mercedes and a camel in every garage, a Kalashnikov machine gun in every closet, and a harem in every home."<sup>111</sup>

Salam al-Marayati, director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, cites a 1994 *Times-Mirror* poll, according to which "twenty-nine percent of Americans now believe that Islam poses a security threat to the United States and the West."<sup>112</sup> Notes John E. Woods, professor of Middle Eastern history at the University of Chicago, "Almost immediately after the collapse of Communism, Islam emerged as the new evil force in the world."<sup>113</sup>

Mortimer B. Zuckerman regularly makes scapegoats of Muslims. In June, 1996, he implies the Prophet Muhammad was not honest, writing that "Muhammad could violate . . . a pact with the Meccans" and that he had a "doctrine" of disregarding treaties. Zuckerman says that Yasser Arafat would emulate Muhammad's actions, and not honor his agreements with Israel. Arafat follows "the doctrine of the prophet Mohammed of making treaties with enemies while he is weak, violating them when he is strong," says Zuckerman.<sup>114</sup>

Would Zuckerman speak of Moses or Jesus in the same terms as he speaks of Muhammad? The editor's implication that Muhammad was not trustworthy is erroneous and morally repugnant. It is tantamount to telling readers that the *Protocols of Zion*, the imagined blueprint by which Jews supposedly suppress innocents, are genuine. Imagine the reaction if the editor had questioned the reliability of

President Clinton on the grounds that Jesus Christ broke his word. Eventually, Zuckerman apologized.

The August 19, 1996, issue of *Newsweek* combines Islam with holy war. Editors made this assertion about religious life on the planet Mars: "Must Muslims wage holy war with aliens to extend Islam?" The August 14, 1996, issue of the *New York Times* stated that "in Islam, the line between giving to religious, as opposed to political, causes is often blurred." The *Times* comment prompted *Extra!* reader Ralph Bonheim to ask: "I wonder if donors to the Christian Coalition are aware they are engaging in an Islamic practice."<sup>115</sup>

Between 1994 and 1997, several *Reader's Digest* stories perpetuated the myth that Arabs and Muslims hate civilized peoples, especially Americans and Israelis. Says Ann Bardach in her January 1994 *Digest* essay, "All in the Name of Islam," the "fundamentalist extremists have found nesting sites throughout the country [U.S.]."<sup>116</sup> Bardach declares that American Muslims who resent "any kind of scrutiny or criticism of Islam" are censoring the press. She alleges that the "media, scrambling to be politically correct, . . . have cranked out a plethora of feel-good features on Muslim culture." Her article contains no examples or evidence of fundamentalist "nesting sites," and no examples of censorship or "feel-good" essays. In her opening paragraph she insinuates that all Muslim women are persecuted. She quotes a Canadian official who declares, "There are one billion Muslims in the world, so we're talking hypothetically about 500 million women who might want out," that is, seek asylum in the West where they can flourish. A color illustration shows a veiled woman in black and the late Ayatollah Khomeini with a clenched fist and outstretched arm. The caption reads: "Women are being abused, even mutilated . . . All in the Name of Islam."<sup>117</sup>

What Bardach does not reveal in the essay is that for centuries Muslim women have had property and legal rights greater than those afforded to women in Europe and North America. The Qur`an (93:195, 4:124, 16:97, 40:41) clearly states that there is no discrimi-

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nation between women and men; they are protectors of one another, observing regular prayers, practicing charity and doing their best to obey God. Both have their share of rewards or punishment for their good or ill deeds. Nor does she explain that in Western eyes there are problematic aspects to the status of Muslim women, just as there are problematic aspects to the status of Western women from a Muslim perspective. Like their counterparts in the West, many Muslim women are loved, honored, and respected by their fathers, brothers, and husbands. And although Muslim women are successful physicians, teachers and journalists, as well as homemakers, stories seldom present them excelling in those roles.

Fergus M. Bordewich's, "A Holy War Heads Our Way," was published in the January 1995 *Digest*. To emphasize that readers have reason to fear Islam, above the essay's title, the editors placed an irrelevant color photograph of dead bodies along side a burned-out bus.<sup>118</sup> Bordewich warns readers that "a rising tide of Islamic radicalism" is not only "threatening Western security interests," but "Islamic radicals are capable of bringing terrorism directly to America."<sup>119</sup>

In the *Digest's* March 1996 issue, Brian Eads writes that "Muslim Arabs . . . 300 men on foot, horseback and camels," are assassins and slavers of Sudanese Christians. In his essay, "Slavery's Shameful Return to Africa," Eads reports that in northern Sudan slaves are "regularly beaten and sexually abused."<sup>120</sup> They are branded as if they were cattle" and "exported to Libya and countries of the Persian Gulf."<sup>121</sup> His essay deals only with Sudan, Africa's largest country, and contains factual information about the despicable actions of slavers abusing and killing innocents. Yet Eads misleads readers by painting all Muslim Arabs with the same disapproving brush. Instead of accurately describing the slavers as northern Sudanese, Eads tags them as: "Arabs," "Arab slave-trader[s]" and "Muslim Arabs" imposing "Islamic law."<sup>122</sup>

The July 1996 *Digest* features another essay by Bordewich, entitled, "Alarm Bells in the Desert." In it Bordewich describes Saudi

Arabia's rulers as "royal grafters" threatened by "Islamic extremism."<sup>123</sup> He writes, "Rabble-rousing Islamic preachers" and scores of "religious zealots" imperil the House of Saud. Bordewich quotes one Saudi who tells him, "Teachers and students are taken up in an Islamic fervor bordering on madness."<sup>124</sup> Although Saudi Arabia "pumps one-fifth of all our [U.S.] oil imports," "an alarm bell is ringing in the desert kingdom." Due to the "gathering wave of Islamic extremism," says Bordewich, the "United States might be well advised to wash its hands of a corrupt ally [and] get out."<sup>125</sup> In the *Digest's* February 1997 issue, *New York Times* columnist A. M. Rosenthal describes how world terrorism touches every American. In his essay, "Why Do We Tolerate Terrorism?", Rosenthal says that "Almost all the terrorism directed at the United States originates in the Middle East." Nations sponsoring terror, he says, are Iraq, Iran, Libya, Sudan, and Syria. To say that only Iran and Arab nations instigate terrorism is both inaccurate and counter-productive. Rosenthal should have referred to the State Department's Office of Counter-terrorism document, *Patterns of Global Terrorism*, and the 1995 *Los Angeles Times Report*, which states that 94 percent of those arraigned in the U.S. for "terrorism" were not Arabs or Iranians.<sup>126</sup>

Coincidentally, Milton Prigee's November 30, 1995, editorial cartoon in *The Spokane Review* also makes scapegoats of Arab Muslims. Although the United States also obtains much of its oil from Mexico, Canada, Venezuela, Britain, and Indonesia, Prigee only belittles the Saudis. Prigee's cartoon was inspired by the controversy of the time over whether Washington and the other 49 states should raise their speed limits. In the center, John Q. Public sits behind the wheel of an automobile. To his left, an Uncle Sam angel with a halo urges John to conserve fuel, to "think of the lives, property and insurance rates." To John's right, a hook-nosed Arab devil with pitchfork goads John to push the pedal to 120 MPH. Sporting a goatee, headdress, and robe, the crude caricature enforces the Western perception of Arabs as despots and America's enemies. Why didn't Prigee draw a cartoon in which a "good" and



"bad" American convince John Q. Public to maintain or raise the limit?<sup>127</sup>

On April 22, 1996, only a few months after Prigee's cartoon appeared, the *Miami Herald* published syndicated cartoonist Jim Morin's illustration of a bearded ape-like creature wearing a turban and grasping a club. The word, "Islam," appears on the creature's turban. Above the brute's head in capital letters is the word, INFIDEL. The ape-creature says, "We bomb innocent women and children to smithereens." After receiving a number of calls, faxes, and e-mail from concerned readers, Morin apologized, saying, "I have spoken to many hurt, outraged members of the Muslim faith this past four days. It has been an educational experience for me . . . . To those I have unintentionally hurt or insulted, please accept my sincere apologies."<sup>128</sup>

Even the Olympics became fair game for Muslim-baiters. During his July 23, 1996 broadcast, Scott Sloan, a sports commentator for Toledo's WSPN radio, told listeners: "I am so sick of the Olympics." When Muhammad Ali went to "light the torch" . . . . I was afraid Ali would drop the torch on some greasy Middle Easterner and blow the place up." Despite demands for a public apology, Sloan and radio station officials have so far refused.<sup>129</sup> Consider the reports following the tragic July 17, 1996, crash of TWA Flight 800, in which 230 people were killed. To avoid mistakes that followed the Oklahoma City bombing, President Clinton appeared on national television to caution viewers not to jump to conclusions. New York Governor George Pataki and National Transportation and Safety Board [NTSB] Chairman Jim Hill repeated the President's advice in their press conferences, telling journalists it was "too soon to speculate." But in spite of this some reporters and specialists did speculate that the Boeing 747 was too good a plane to crash because of mechanical failure: that certainly the crash was caused by a bomb and that most likely Muslim Arabs had planted it.

The day after the tragedy ABC-TV's John McWethy told viewers the network received "a piece of evidence [that] seems to point towards terrorists in the Middle East. ABC News has learned that a written warning was sent by a group calling itself the Movement for Islamic Change," he said.<sup>130</sup> One month later, on August 24, 1996, the *New York Times* reported that just "before the crash of TWA Flight 800 . . . leaders of several Middle East terrorist organizations backed by the Iranian government met in Teheran to plan terrorist acts." The following day, August 25, 1996, a *Times* news article reported that "TWA's connection to one of the world's most turbulent regions, the Mideast, has been long and prominent." Reporter Morton Kondracke said on PBS's "McLaughlin Group" that "my thoughts naturally go to the Middle East; Hamas and Hizbullah, something like that."<sup>131</sup> On the "CBS Evening News," a former FBI official told Dan Rather, "If this is a terrorist bombing, the people I talked with would bet on Muslim extremists." CNN reported that "[t]here's a trial underway in New York right now--and we're not trying to infer any connection--but three radical Muslims accused of plotting to bomb U.S. airlines are on trial."<sup>132</sup>

Declared conservative columnist Jeffrey Hart in *The Washington Times*: The correct response to a "Muslim" terrorist assault is an "immediate" and "devastating attack" against a Mideastern country. "There is no reason not to treat Iran, Iraq, Syria and Libya as a single entity," he wrote. When told there would be civilian casualties, Hart said "We have no stake in blowing up camel drivers and date growers."<sup>133</sup>

The news networks reported that during TWA 800's stopover in Athens, security was "lax," and that "a known Arab terrorist was seen at the Athens airport." Asked about possible suspects, CNN terrorism expert Larry Johnson declared he had a list of names.

CNBC-TV's Charles Grodin speculated that, "They blow up 241 Marines in Lebanon. They blow up 19 airmen in Saudi Arabia. Two hundred and thirty people are blown up over New York. What reli-

gion puts you closer to what God that you're responsible for blowing up people?" Asks reporter Sam Hussein, "Who could Grodin mean by *they*? And, "What *religion* could Grodin have in mind?" Even if the villains turn out to be Arabs, says Hussein, "that makes the speculation no less justified. Guessing right [or wrong] is no way to do journalism."<sup>134</sup> On May 7, 1997, FBI Director Louis Freeh acknowledged what NTSB officials had been saying for months, that the 25-year-old TWA jet likely broke apart because of "Catastrophic mechanical failure" [Associated Press reports].

When Arab-Americans are falsely accused of brutal acts and when violence occurs in the Middle East, innocents suffer. Some receive death threats; others are harassed and beaten, their businesses bombed; even mosques are burned and looted. In the wake of the Achille Lauro hijacking, America's Muslims became Palestinian terrorists; during the hostage crisis in Iran, and throughout the Gulf War, they became clones of the Ayatollah Khomeini and Saddam Hussein; following the World Trade Center and Oklahoma City bombings they became Arab terrorists. For the prejudiced, America's Arabs and Muslims became "camel jockeys," "ragheads," and "sandsuckers." Such labeling is not a new phenomenon. Bash-the-Hun hysteria was so prevalent during World War I we referred to sauerkraut as "liberty cabbage." Though the United States has been at war with only one Arab nation, Iraq, reporters overlooked this fact: Muslim American soldiers fought Saddam, as did troops from Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Morocco.

When asked about the journalist's role in a democratic society, ABC-TV's David Brinkley said that "it may be impossible to be objective, but we must always be fair."<sup>135</sup> Concurring with Brinkley's remark, A. Khaliq Muhammad of St. Louis writes: "If people in the press like [Mortimer] Zuckerman [and others] would lay aside their obvious ignorance and prejudice toward Islam and Muslims and start reporting on what Muslims truly represent, they would see that Muslims are just like any other people who want to live in peace and security . . . . The vast majority of Muslims are peaceful and law-

abiding people and abhor the acts that were carried out in Oklahoma City."<sup>136</sup>

Media images, points out media critic Jerry Mander, "can cause people to do what they might otherwise never have thought to do."<sup>137</sup> Following the Oklahoma city tragedy, speculative reporting combined with decades of stereotyping encouraged more than 300 hate crimes against America's Arabs and Muslims. Abuses took place even as Muslims mourned, along with other Oklahomans, the disaster.<sup>138</sup> Mohammed Nimer of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) told reporter Laurie Goodstein, "Most of these incidents have been completely unprovoked . . . Just mere encounters with a person who looks like a Muslim, or a person praying, have prompted bias and violence. That is alarming."<sup>139</sup>

Especially alarming are the number of incidents targeting youngsters. Several children of Arab descent in New York were told to "go back where you came from;" they "went home from school in tears," writes *New York Times*' Melinda Henneberger. "Classmates told them they were responsible for the attack." Muslim girls were taunted; schoolmates pulled off their head scarves (*hijabs*).<sup>140</sup> At a suburban Muslim daycare center in Texas the driver of a passing car shouting, "Here's a bomb for you, lady!," threw a soda can at a teacher and her students.

According to the ADC, many parents have complained that as a result of the pervasive stereotype, their children have become ashamed of their religion and heritage. Some have asked their parents to change their names from Omar to Johnny, or from Fatima to Ann. Writes Magdoline Asfahani in *Newsweek*, "When initial reports of the Oklahoma City bombing pointed to 'Arab-looking individuals' as the culprits, my 10-year-old brother came home from school crying." And, "I tried to forget the Arabic I knew . . . I lied about where my parents had come from."<sup>141</sup> To paraphrase Goethe, we tend to become what the majority judge us to be.

The *Anti-Arab-American Discrimination Hate Crimes* document, published by the ADC in November 1994, and CAIR's 1996 manual, *A Rush to Judgment: A Special Report on Anti-Muslim Stereotyping* report many similar incidents. In Oklahoma City, Suhair al-Mosawia, a Muslim woman, seven months pregnant, lost her son after vigilantes stoned her home. One Oklahoma City resident suggested putting Arab-Americans in internment camps.<sup>142</sup> In a *Cleveland Plain Dealer* op-ed essay, Hamzi Moghrabi reported that "in Detroit, home of the largest Arab-American population outside the Middle East, business owners, including the editor [Osama A. Siblani] of *The Arab American News*, were subjected to bomb threats" and trash was thrown at mosques.<sup>143</sup>

In Brooklyn, the police department reported that numerous Arab-American businesses had received hostile calls and death threats. One caller said, "We're going to put a bomb in your business and kill your family."<sup>144</sup> A San Francisco mosque received 35 bomb threats.

In Toledo, Ohio, the St. Francis de Sales High School yearbook, the 1995 ACCOLADE, printed in bold-letter capitals "**KILL ALL THE CAMEL JOCKEYS!**" The remark was part of a 500-word essay by a student. Officials immediately issued apologies, however, and the High School President, Rev. Ronald Olezewski, wrote to parents and friends saying that the "insensitive reference" should "never have been written" and "never have been published. We apologize. . . . Please presume ignorance rather than malice and be assured that all at this institution of learning will learn from the wrong."<sup>145</sup>

The day of the Oklahoma City explosion, Abraham Ahmed, a U.S. citizen of Jordanian origin, boarded a plane in Oklahoma City en route to visit his family in Jordan. Two hours after the bombing, it was reported that Ahmed was a suspect. Immediately, some people in Oklahoma City began dumping trash on his lawn; others "spit on his wife." While Ahmed was in Chicago waiting to make connections, FBI authorities escorted him into a room and interrogated him for six

hours. Missing his flight, Ahmed arrived late in London. There he was strip-searched, handcuffed and humiliated. After five more hours of interrogation, the handcuffed Ahmed was sent back to Washington, D.C., for another day of questioning. More than a year after he was cleared, Ahmed, who has lived in Oklahoma City for 14 years, still receives suspicious stares from neighbors. He plans to move back to Jordan.

In Kalamazoo, Michigan, Umar Abdul-Mutakallim, who was a Cub Scout leader for nearly three years, was "rejected for a higher scouting position because of his religion; he is a Muslim." A year after the Toledo 1995 yearbook slur, four students from Berkeley High School in California denounced Arabs in the school's yearbook. Beneath the photo of Saudi Arabia's King Fahd was this caption: "May all the nags and hippie trash die a burning fireball death. I hate all of you."<sup>46</sup> Another student wrote he is "off to kill some f---in' Arabs" next to a photograph of Jordan's King Hussein. In a letter of apology, one student acknowledged, "Instead of creating constructive dialogue and healing, which is what should be happening in places like Israel and Berkeley High right now, racism causes ever escalating hatred which can only end in violence."<sup>47</sup>

In another northern California town a mother noticed that her teenage daughter was often crying. She discovered both students and teachers were harassing the girl. The mother scheduled an appointment with the principal, who told her: "If you camel jockeys don't like it here, then move out of town."

In Colorado, a private parochial school's history book identifies Islam as "a false religion." When an Arab-American family complained, "the principal proposed asking the publisher to label all non-Christian religions as false religions." In Dallas, a high school athletic director barked at an Arab-American student in the locker room, "Get movin', or I'll burn your tent and kill your camel." One Maryland teacher declared Muslims believe in "a lot of gods." Another felt

it "cruel to make children fast during Ramadan." Still another singled out a Muslim boy who did not date, "Are you gay?"

Even some politicians slur Arabs. Terrel H. Bell, Ronald Reagan's first Secretary of Education, writes in *The Thirteenth Man: A Reagan Cabinet Memoir* (1988) about "an apparent bias among mid-level, right-wing staffers at the White House" who dismissed Arabs as "sand-niggers."<sup>49</sup> In August 1990, Nebraska Senator J. J. Exon said: "In the Arab world, life is not as important as in the non-Arab world." Speaking at a Jerusalem fund-raising event in June, 1992, former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said, "You can't really believe anything an Arab says."<sup>50</sup>

Especially derogatory is the January 19, 1994 document, "Islam Against the Church." Submitted to the U.S. House of Representatives Republican Research Committee by the Republican Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare, this report implies that hostile Muslims seek confrontation with Western Christians. "Since early December, 1993," write Yossef Bodansky and Vaughn S. Forrest, the two Committee members who prepared the report, "Islamist leadership and terrorist organizations have launched an increasing barrage of denunciations and attacks against the church." The authors say "the origins of contemporary Islamist opposition to Christianity . . . are the product of a backlash against the Church's humanitarian effort throughout the Third World." Adding, "the Islamists perceive efforts to provide a Western-style education to local populations as an attempt to develop a Western educated leadership class in the Third World that would be hostile to Islam."

Taken together, all these smears are reminiscent of abuses in earlier times directed at Japanese-Americans, making it easier for Americans to tolerate the internment of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War. Backing the internment, the Commanding General of the Western Defense Command, J. L. DeWitt argued, "The Japanese race is an enemy race and while many second and

third generation Japanese born on United States soil have become 'Americanized,' the racial strains are undiluted."<sup>151</sup>

Hateful words and images have their impact on public opinion, policies and reporting. They are picked up and repeated by the global news services, which perpetuate the distortions, triggering further misunderstandings and leading to possible conflicts.

Donald Neff, who served as *Time* magazine's Middle East correspondent, writes that even though he was working in the region "these 'filthy Arab' stereotypes were almost impossible to shatter. This was so even when my eyes confirmed to me every day they [the Arabs] were not cartoons of reality. Yet, I could not completely shed the stereotypes, not in my own thinking. Much less in stories fit to print," writes Neff.<sup>152</sup>

Policy is also shaped, in part, by preconceptions and long implanted biases. In 1922, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee unanimously approved a resolution favoring the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine. Its Chairman, Henry Cabot Lodge, candidly revealed the source of his anti-Muslim attitudes when he spoke to his colleagues: "You may smile when I tell you that, although as a child I read my Bible, both Old and New Testaments, I got my first idea of the present condition of Palestine and the Mohammedan possession from two of Scott's novels, which absorbed my thought when, as a boy of nine, I read with most passionate interest Sir Walter Scott's stories of *The Talisman* and *Ivanhoe*." Continued Lodge, "I had, of course, intense sympathy for the Crusades, and it seemed to me a great wrong that Jerusalem should be beneath the Moslem rule." Thus, "the dominant impression of the boyish mind was hostility to the Mohammedan and an intense admiration for Richard the Lion-Hearted."<sup>153</sup>

More than a half-century after Lodge's address, presidential advisor Theodore C. Sorensen advised those shaping Middle East policies that "it is especially important at this time that the American



government not be blinded by emotions, stereotypes and misperceptions." Otherwise a "tyranny of labels" will induce us to adopt "a cultural smugness," resulting in an "insidious myth—the myth of the single scapegoat." We should expose, not ignore, he says, "the injustice done to those [Arabs and Muslims] who genuinely respect the United States and might someday be needed as a bridge of better understanding."<sup>154</sup>

While some experts, journalists, image makers, and editors erect bridges to better understanding, others use labels to inspire anti-Arab-Muslim sentiments. Two days before the premier of *Executive Decision*, a motion picture defaming Muslims and Arabs, Steven Emerson in the *Wall Street Journal* charged President Bill Clinton with hobnobbing with Muslim terrorists. Instead of commending President Clinton and the first lady for reaching out to America's Muslims, Emerson writes that the President and "the first lady have closely embraced an Islamic fundamentalist group in the U.S. that champions and supports Hamas." Declares Emerson, "This group," the American Muslim Council, "defends other Islamic terrorist groups."<sup>155</sup>

Concerned that misperceptions might hinder genuine peace in the Middle East, *Newsweek* columnist Meg Greenfield wrote, "Actually what I see coming is more like a reversion, a flight back to the generalized, hostile attitudes towards Arabs and/or Muslims as a collectivity that prevailed both as government policy and as public prejudice for so many years." Although progress has been real, Greenfield remains concerned about "the kind of blanket, indiscriminate anti-Arab sentiment one hears expressed in public places these days." "If anything," she writes, "we should be seeking to sharpen and refine our involvement with those Arabs who are themselves enemies and targets of the violent, hate-filled elements in the region. We should be making more distinctions and discriminating judgments among them, not fewer."<sup>156</sup>

Greenfield cautions us that "we do have a tendency to swing to these harsh mass ethnic judgments. And just as people were talking of kicking out all the Iranians during the hostage days, so now you hear and see a tendency to invest all Arabs with the attributes of the vicious terrorist. If we succumb to this," she says, "we will be doing in the very people we should be trying to protect," especially those genuinely respecting U.S. peace initiatives, "and giving our enemies a big win." To prevent the United States from "making a vast foreign policy mistake," Greenfield entreats Americans not "to see them [Arabs and Muslims] all as one vast undifferentiated guilty group."<sup>157</sup>

A decade after Greenfield's essay, Israeli Carine Liebermann, a 28-year old sales trainer, also addressed the dangers of "indiscriminate anti-Arab sentiment." Liebermann told *Los Angeles Times* reporter Marjorie Miller, "The view [in Israel] that Arabs understand only force is ignorance and racism. My belief," said Liebermann, "is that Arabs are normal people with normal aspirations who want to get up and get their children to school, to buy a house and a car, go to pray in churches and mosques, go to the cinema and travel abroad." "They [Israel's leaders] told us for 50 years that Arabs were bad and only wanted to kill us. For the last four years we have been told they are normal people. It will take more than four years to change."<sup>158</sup>

Following the Oklahoma City bombing, Dr. Ifti Ahmad, a Muslim American born in India, explained to *New York Times* reporter Melinda Henneberger that when other Americans break the law, they do so as individuals; their religion and ethnicity are not part of the story. Such is not the case, however, with America's Muslims and Arabs. Because the press tends to employ a double standard, anti-Muslim feelings remain "a serious problem." "Thank God it was not a Middle Eastern person this time," said Dr. Ahmad, "but even if it had been, that does not mean we [Muslims] are all terrorists any more than violence by members of the Irish Republican Army makes all Catholics dangerous. We've got to defuse this. We're all Americans."<sup>159</sup>

Dr. Ahmad's comments echo the wisdom of Mark Twain: "We built America out of different races and the process made us Americans," said Twain. Ahmad asks that journalists present all peoples fairly, that they depict Muslims and Arabs as they show other Americans. Muslims, too, help their neighbors solve real problems, help heal the sick, lobby for legal services for the poor, champion better schools and shelters for the homeless, work for an improved environment, and strive for an end to domestic violence and crime. Embracing the words freedom, liberty, and justice, our nation's Muslims and Arabs help make democracy a reality.

No single factor leads to stereotyping. Undeniably ignorance, the handmaiden of bigotry, continues to be a contributing factor. Most journalists and image makers do not have the religious, cultural or language background to understand Islam. As Montaigne said, "Nothing is so firmly believed as that which is least known." Unfortunately, "Americans in general have an abysmal understanding of the world, especially the Islamic world." Indeed, they show "little appetite for increasing their understanding," writes political consultant David R. Gergen. Americans know "considerably less basic geography than they knew forty years ago." Thus, there is "no reason to expect public opinion [about the Middle East] to shift," Gergen says.<sup>160</sup> Some reporters, too, are inadequately informed about the region. When I attended the annual "CNN World Report" conference in May, 1993, an editor told me about a new journalist who viewed Iran and Iraq as the same country. Before appearing on camera the reporter asked her, "How do you pronounce it, Ear-an or Ear-ak?"

A Freedom Forum First Amendment survey showed that "some 60% of [America's] religion writers said they had no background in religious studies." And although "expertise about organized faith is the religion writer's strong suit in the newsroom," a 1992 Religion Newswriters Association (RNA) survey disclosed that "not one of RNA's nearly 100 reporters" identified himself or herself as a Muslim.<sup>161</sup>

Nihad Awad, executive director of the CAIR, told *New York Times* reporter James Brooke that the absence of Muslims in news rooms influences stories about Muslims. Because of general ignorance and unfamiliarity, "the Islamic community is judged by the [outlandish actions of] a few. Some journalists make no distinction between Muslim sects and mainstream Muslims."<sup>162</sup>

Journalists Dart and Allen say too many misunderstandings occur between the news media and organized religion. For example, "Muslims justifiably worry that the terrorist activities of groups which call themselves Muslims have colored public opinion strongly against all followers of Islam. The term 'Muslim terrorist' is a non sequitur, they say, because if you are truly Muslim, you could not be a terrorist."<sup>163</sup> Explains Professor Yvonne Haddad, "We don't talk about Christianity as a religion of violence because there's a crazy man in Waco."<sup>164</sup>

Reporters overlook statistics which "demonstrate the universality of terrorism." Violent individuals and fringe groups commit terror throughout the world, in non-Muslim societies such as Israel, Japan, the United States, Sri Lanka, and Great Britain. In its 1994 annual report on global terrorism, the State Department's Office of Counterterrorism reported that Latin America and Europe accounted for the greatest number of international terrorist incidents. Latin America was responsible for 44 anti-US attacks in 1994; the Middle East was responsible for eight, according to a State Department coordinator for counterterrorism. He reported about the same number for 1993. A Department of State document called *Patterns of Global Terrorism* reported "99 international terrorist attacks against U.S. interests [in 1995]. Sixty-two of these attacks took place in Latin America, 21 in Europe, 6 in Asia, 6 in the Middle East, 3 in Africa, and 1 in Eurasia."<sup>165</sup>

A number of scholarly publications, sensitivity-training programs for teachers and students, and courses on Islam are being offered by major universities and theological schools throughout the

country. Yet, to my knowledge, not one university, including those with Middle East and Near East centers, offers courses focusing on Arab and Muslim images in popular culture, and no university actively seeks to recruit faculty members to address these subjects, even though comparable subjects are offered for other ethnic groups. It may take decades of education before misinformation is wiped out. In classroom discussions and research works, all too few scholars are documenting and discussing media images of Arabs and Muslims.

Indolence and oversimplification are other reasons for the clichés. As cartoonist Bill Watterson points out: "Comic strips," like news reports, TV shows and films, "have historically been full of ugly stereotypes, the hallmark of writers too lazy to honestly observe the world."<sup>166</sup> Early in the war in Bosnia, for example, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) referred to Bosnia as a Muslim state even though Muslims made up only 44 percent of the population. Asked about the mistake, the BBC reporter said she streamlined her report, as she had just one minute to describe a complex multi-ethnic state in her story. Later, the BBC used the terms "Muslim-led government" and "Muslim-led army." Believing it was irrelevant to the conflict, the BBC did not label Croats "Catholics" and the Serbians were not labeled "Orthodox Christians."<sup>167</sup>

Instead of stating in its October, 1996, headline that the Taliban army conscripts villagers, the *Associated Press* headline wrote the "Islamic army conscripts villagers." As the story was about an oppressive sect called the Taliban controlling Kabul, the war-torn capital of Afghanistan, the headline should have been "Taliban army conscripts villagers."<sup>168</sup> When Algerian radicals terrorize and kill fellow Algerians, the *Associated Press* describes them not as Algerian militants but as "Islamic terrorists." In December 1996, another misleading *Associated Press* headline appeared: "Officials probing Islamic link to Paris bombing." As the story concerned Algerian suspects, the headline should have been: "Algerian militants linked to Paris bombing."<sup>169</sup>

Inflexibility and indifference impact the stereotyping. A *Washington Post* reporter told me that some journalists "fear being labeled anti-black, anti-Hispanic, anti-Jew, anti-anything, except it would seem, being called anti-Muslim."<sup>170</sup>

Flip Wilson once joked, "I'm a Jehovah's bystander. They asked me to be a witness, but I didn't want to get involved." Like Wilson, many Muslim and Arab leaders, too, are reluctant to become involved. Their lethargy reminds me of a tale described by attorney Alan M. Dershowitz in *Chutzpah* (Boston: Little Brown, 1991), a book about a minority group troubled by discrimination. Dershowitz's passage about the generation of American Jews who never contested bigotry is appropriate here. "A representative story from that generation is about two Russian Jews who were sentenced to death by the Czar. As they stood before the firing squad awaiting their certain execution, they were offered blindfolds. The first Jew bravely turned down the blindfold. The second Jew turned to the first and implored: Please, take the blindfold. Don't make any trouble."

Although scores of films and television shows denigrating the Arab are purchased, rented, and screened throughout the Muslim world, information officials and media syndicators remain silent and make no attempt to meet with image makers to discuss those images ridiculing them and their neighbors. Perhaps they should bear in mind the wisdom of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In his 1963 letter from a Birmingham jail, King wrote, "More and more, I feel the people of ill will have used time more effectively than have the people of good will." In order to achieve equality, we have to be movers and shakers; we must challenge the "hateful words and actions of bad people," and "break the appalling silence of good people."

Another reason for stereotyping is that "mainstream journalists mostly ignore religion because they don't understand it and because they are worried about misinterpreting it," says Bill Moyers.<sup>171</sup> *Newsweek's* Ken Woodward, a reporter who has covered religion for the magazine for more than 30 years, agrees that by and large the

newsroom atmosphere does not encourage regarding religious issues as news. The relationship between religion and the news media is not likely to improve, he says, until editors rid themselves of ignorance and bias.<sup>172</sup> Woodward's counterpart at *Time*, Richard Ostling, concurs: "Perhaps the unexamined slant of particular reporters," he says, makes religion even more difficult to cover.<sup>173</sup> Affirms Ray Moscowitz, an executive with Nixon newspapers, based in Peru, Indiana: "Most reporters and editors have only a slight interest in it or don't understand it."<sup>174</sup>

Politics and fear are other reasons. When journalists write sympathetically about Arab issues they are often labeled "pro-Arab" and "anti-Israel." Americans and Europeans both seem to assume that Islam is irrational and are convinced that the Western way of life and Western religions are superior. "Even career diplomats living in Islamic countries are often essentially cut off from local people and spend much of their time with other foreigners," says specialist Dr. Scott Ableby.<sup>175</sup> When this writer asked CNN's Peter Arnett whether stereotyping had any impact on United States Middle East policies, he said: "The media elite follow U.S. policy" and those shaping policies are influenced in part by the stereotypical pictures in their heads.<sup>176</sup> Explains historian Carol Gluck of Columbia University, "I think stereotypes have the longest half-life in the history of the globe. They will not go away. So, I think it would be well if we [Americans] realize that we cannot operate internationally or binationally on the basis of those stereotypes."<sup>177</sup>

Following the Oklahoma City bombing some government officials, including Secretary of State Warren Christopher, acted on those stereotypes. Hours after the bombing Christopher had leaped to the wrong conclusion that Arabs were involved, which he revealed by announcing that he had sent Arabic interpreters to Oklahoma to aid federal investigators. Former Representative David McCurdy of Oklahoma appeared on several television networks to say there was "very clear evidence" that "fundamentalist Islamic terrorist groups" were involved. These attitudes were not new. In 1972,

Howard W. Glidden who worked with the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research Division, wrote in the *American Journal of Psychiatry* that Arabs do not consider peace to be high on their scale of values and that they stress conformity. "The inner workings of Arab behavior," he wrote, is based on shame; their prestige is based on the ability to dominate others. Islam makes a virtue of revenge, "only success counts," says Glidden. "The art of subterfuge is highly developed in Arab life as well as in Islam itself." The region, he concludes, is "characterized by anxiety expressed in generalized suspicion and distrust which has been labelled free-floating hostility."<sup>178</sup>

"President (Ronald) Reagan's linking of Qaddafi and Libyan terrorism with a worldwide fundamentalist movement in his announcement of the U.S. bombing of Libya confirmed what many saw as America's monolithic, anti-Islamic approach to the Muslim world," writes John Esposito. "Dan Quayle's address to the graduating class of Annapolis in 1990 linking Nazism, communism, and radical Islamic fundamentalism, demonstrated a similar ill-informed position," points out Esposito.<sup>179</sup> Citing a double standard, Esposito points out that the "American government does not equate the actions of Jewish or Christian extremist leaders or groups with Judaism and Christianity as a whole." Because of such false presumptions, "the U.S. perception of a monolithic 'Islamic threat' often contributes to support of repressive governments in the Muslim world."<sup>180</sup> People have become so accustomed to these caricatures of Arabs and Muslims as "terrorists," "radicals," "militants" and "fanatics," that they take them for granted, as those journalists did who incorrectly reported the Oklahoma City bombers to be "Middle Eastern." As Goya observed, "fantasy, abandoned by reason, produces impossible monsters."

The world's yearning for American entertainment seems insatiable. By the end of this decade, "the American film and television industry will probably produce annual revenues of \$200 billion--at least half of which will come from abroad."<sup>181</sup> Motion pictures vilify-



ing the Arab Muslim generate profits. For example, *Iron Eagle*, *True Lies*, *Father of the Bride, Part II*, *Executive Decision*, and others make plenty of money. The *Chicago Sun-Times* reported [February 13, 1986] that *Eagle* "had sold 12 million in tickets in two weeks and had finished in the top 10 every week since it opened nationally in January 17." Fox's *Lies* took in \$148 million in the United States, \$216 million abroad. For weeks *Bride II* was listed among the ten top money-makers. For 10 days, *Executive Decision* was the second highest grossing film.<sup>182</sup> Explains Georgetown University's Yvonne Haddad, "Islamic terrorism sells." Perhaps, she says, this is why the Muslim "fundamentalist" image is so popular. "There are some newspapers [and movies] that do it more carefully than others, but it keeps being used."<sup>183</sup> As long as readers and viewers continue to support publications and motion pictures which denigrate Arabs and Muslims, the stereotypes will not go away.

In spite of many noteworthy accomplishments, American Arabs and Muslims do not yet have sufficient political clout to effect fundamental change. Efforts initiated by various groups, such as the American Muslim Public Affairs Council, the Council On American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), an organization with 25,000 members and 75 campus and city chapters, however, have had some influence. Some of their efforts have produced at least limited apologies.

ABC-TV's James Baerg, for example, called me to ask whether a line would be "acceptable" to use in a sit-com. When someone asks the series star, portrayed by Jamie Lee Curtis, whether her friend really intends to mail greeting cards celebrating her anniversary "as a divorcee," Curtis quips, "That's as likely as seeing Snoopy running up a mosque's minaret during Ramadan." I told Baerg it was as acceptable as a line that goes, "That's as likely as seeing Snoopy running up the side of a synagogue during Yom Kipper." The line was not used.<sup>184</sup>

The ADC successfully challenged a Kraft Foods TV commercial in which an American man in a Moroccan souk is accosted by a

stereotypical Arab, complete with heavy accent, who hands him a jar of Miracle Whip, while eyeing the tourist's female companion. The Arab then emits a "loud, sinister laugh," and the female companion disappears. He searches for her, in vain; the Arab has abducted the American maiden for his harem.

Alerted by members, the ADC promptly launched a letter and phone-writing campaign directed at Kraft headquarters. Almost immediately, Kraft pulled the ad. Said the director of corporate affairs, the ad "was not effectively communicating with our consumers," and "we regret that any of your members were offended."<sup>185</sup>

When Disney's *Bride II* and *Kazaam* were released, ADC members again sent out numerous letters to the Disney company, requesting the studio to edit the offensive scenes from the video version of *Bride II*. Concurrently, ADC mailed several "Action Alert" bulletins, summoning members and others to condemn *Bride II* and *Kazaam*'s stereotypes and to appeal to Disney executives to cease denigrating people and to meet with Arab-Americans. ADC activists both called and wrote to Disney officials, but not one letter was answered or phone call returned. Also, the July 1996 issue of *Disney Adventures*, a monthly "Fun for Kids" magazine, featured this commentary: "Wanna greet somebody Arab-style? Grab a friend and blow into his face at the same time he blows into yours. Just don't turn your head to avoid your buddy's breath." When the ADC asked the New York editors to print an apology for the offensive remark, they refused. For whatever reason, Disney has continued to vilify America's Muslims and Arabs, a practice that would draw deafening protests and cries of bigotry were any other group targeted.

CAIR officials in Washington, D.C., were notified when two Muslim women, one from Texas, the other from Connecticut, lost their jobs because they refused to remove their *hijabs* (head scarfs) when they worked, because wearing the hijabs violated the "company dress code." Immediately, CAIR officials contacted the corporate offices of both firms to explain to the personnel directors why women

wear *hijabs*. Within weeks, both companies offered the women their jobs back.<sup>186</sup>

In spite of these and other modest accomplishments, Arab and Muslim associations are not sufficiently coordinated to bring about change. Until now, not one successful economic boycott has been launched, nor have any organizations put forth for consideration long overdue blueprints for change. No organization has proposed a plan of action that regularly involves other activists or a strategy that calls for more than simply reacting to events.

One way to defuse the stereotyping would be for the industry to produce films showing Muslims as heroic victims. Scenarios could include the enslavement of Muslims. In 1731, for example, slave traders brought to our country Muslims such as Ben Ali, a Moor, and John Scott of European Arab heritage [they were called Turks]. During the Revolutionary War, the two men befriended Thomas Sumpter, a South Carolina plantation owner. "Ben Ali became a scout and John Scott his [Sumpter's] bugler in the struggle for independence," writes Adele Younis.<sup>187</sup> Producers could also make a film comparable to the 1962 motion picture, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, a film about a white Southern lawyer who defies public opinion and defends a black man against the false charge of rape. If executives contend that audiences are not ready to see a mainstream film about a Muslim Arab as victim one might remind them that similar comments were made when *Mockingbird* first appeared.

Journalist Edward R. Murrow often remarked that what we do not see is often as important, if not more important, than what we do see.<sup>188</sup> As Hollywood's films defame Arabs and their culture, perhaps American audiences should have more access to Arab films. Attending the 1996 Arab film festival in New York City's Lincoln Center, reporter Katherine Roth saw dozens of films that were rich in historical and political context. Afterwards, she wrote: "Seeing the Arab world through Arab eyes is a refreshing alternative to the stereotypes."<sup>189</sup>

Unless pro-active programs are constructed and implemented, and unless those associations charged with contesting the stereotype begin working together nothing will change. Instead of confronting negative images, publishers, image makers, and journalists are silent. They might well recall what Mrs. Rabin said when her husband was killed, "The silent majority remained silent too long."<sup>190</sup> In May 1996 a *New York Times* editorial addressed the violence directed at America's churches and synagogues, but lamentably forgot the eight mosques from California to Georgia that were vandalized or burned to the ground in 1995-96 alone.<sup>191</sup> On June 10, 1996, a Public Broadcasting System (PBS) program called *Straight Talk* broadcast a one-hour special on racism in America, narrated by Washington, D.C.'s, talk-radio host Derek McGinty. Appearing to discuss the dangers of discriminatory images were African-Americans and Jews, but no Arab or Muslim voices were heard. Arab and Muslim-Americans are also virtually unrepresented among journalists, performers, executives and producers of the popular media. Images would be more accurate if more individuals with clout were Arab Americans.

Disney chairman Michael Eisner told *New Yorker* critic Ken Auletta, "I think our company is very responsible," adding, "I would never make a movie that I would not allow my 10-year-old son to go to."<sup>192</sup> Image makers such as Eisner should be measured by the impact their portraits have on other people's lives. How would he feel about taking his 10-year-old son to Disney movies such as *Bride II*, *Kazaam*, *Jafar*, and *Aladdin* only to view their heritage being vilified?

The few Arab-Americans working in these professions have not had an easy time of it either. When Academy Award winner for *Amadeus* F. Murray Abraham was asked what the "F" in F. Murray Abraham stood for, he said: "F stands for Farid. When I first began in this business I realized I couldn't use Farid because that would typecast me as a sour Arab out to kill everyone. As Farid Murray Abraham, I was doomed to minor roles."<sup>193</sup>

Apparently, there is a certain mind-set on who Arab-Americans are and what roles they can best play. Two American Muslim actors, Sayed Bayedra and Majed Ibrahim, appeared as terrorists in the 1996 box office hit, *Executive Decision*. They say that "upon their advice," *Decision* director Stuart Baird removed several objectionable anti-Muslim pieces even before the final editing. Baird was "sympathetic to the concerns raised by Muslims," say the actors. The original script contained a rape scene, and advanced the Muslims-hate-Jews myth, showing the Jews as main victims of the hijacking.<sup>194</sup>

Another significant cut was a passage from the Qur'an. Nagi, the villain, was to say [in Arabic], as he murdered innocents: "Think not of those who are killed in the way of Allah as dead; nay, they are alive with their provisions." Ibrahim, who also worked in *True Lies*, *Stargate*, and *Independence Day* said "all he tried to do was damage control." He feels "bad" that all too many scenes in *Decision* show Islam in "a disgraceful manner," but at least some offensive scenes were cut. Ibrahim is distressed that "the American film industry's choice villains are Arabs," but contends that "ignorance rather than mischief is the main reason."<sup>195</sup> Said Ibrahim, "My dream is to some day make a movie that shows Arabs and Muslims as hard-working, educated and good-hearted people, unlike what most Americans know about them." Actor Nicholas Kadi agrees: "I'd like to think that some day there would be an Arab role out there for me that would be an honest portrayal."<sup>196</sup>

Presence in front of the cameras as well as behind the scenes could encourage image makers to offer more accurate and diverse portraits, presenting Muslims and Arabs as others are projected, no worse, no better. For example, to ensure that no objectionable material would appear in the Disney hit, *Pocahontas* (1995), the studio went to great lengths to seek out and employ Native Americans both as actors and as consultants. The Native American actress Irene Bedard was the voice of Pocahontas, and Russell Means, the voice of Pocahontas' father, Chief Powhatan. "Looking at it as an American Indian," said Means, "I cannot find anything wrong with this movie.

I love the treatment of everything, because it's all done with respect."<sup>197</sup>

America's Arabs are not yet able to define themselves since none belong to America's "media elite." Inclusion in the industry will be arduous until they get into ownership. There are no Muslim communication giants comparable to Disney's Michael Eisner, Fox's Rupert Murdoch, or Time-Warner's Ted Turner. Few work as broadcasters, reporters or image makers. Until Arabs and Muslims achieve some influence, their voices will not be heard. As producer Gilbert Cates says: "It's axiomatic. The more power you have, the louder your voice is heard."<sup>198</sup>

In the meantime, the accumulation of stereotypical statements, reports, and pictures in the minds of America's Arabs and Muslims takes its toll. During the May, 1994, ADC conference in Washington, D.C., an Arab-American girl asked the guest speaker, ABC's Sam Donaldson, "Why do you hate us?" Some firmly believe that image makers not only hate them, but despise their religion and heritage.

## IV

### CONTESTING THE STEREOTYPING

Too often we hold fast to the cliches of our forebears.

—John Fitzgerald Kennedy

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Arabs and Muslims recognize that openness to change is an American tradition. As Benjamin Franklin advised, "To get the bad Customs of a Country chang'd and new ones, though better introduc'd, it is necessary first to remove the Prejudices of the People, enlighten their ignorance and convince them that their Interest will be promoted by the propos'd Changes; and this *is not the work of a Day.*"<sup>199</sup>

Any vilification of any race or religion is wrong. There are numerous ways to humanize the Arab Muslim. Concerned individuals and organizations should coordinate their efforts and meet and establish working relationships with perpetrators of the stereotyping. Consider the case of *The New Yorker* cover [July 26, 1993]. Entitled "Castles in the Sand," the illustration showed three American children building sand castles on a beach. In the right corner is a fourth child, wearing sunglasses and a burnoose and looking crazed. The youth epitomizes the cultural Other, an Arab-American. With shovel in hand, the boy is leaping, feet first, toward a sand replica of the World Trade Center bent on demolishing it.

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) and several ADC staff members attempted to arrange a meeting with Tina Brown, the *New Yorker's* editor-in-chief, to object to the cover. Initially, Brown and her colleagues refused to discuss the illustration, saying it was not their policy to meet with any group to review such issues. But three months after the Arab-child-as-terrorist picture appeared, Ms. Brown, executive editor Hendrick Hertzberg and two other *New Yorker* staffers agreed to meet with ADC President Albert Mokhiber, ADC staffers, this writer, and a FAIR journalist. On October 27 they met in a *New Yorker* conference room. In the course of the meeting, Brown and her colleagues were asked whether they would approve a cover displaying, for instance, a Jewish child wearing a yarmulke, or a Hispanic child with a sombrero, or an American Indian child with war paint and tomahawk about to crush the Trade Center?

Brown reiterated what she had previously written to attentive readers that "the intent of our cover was not to make fun of Arab-Americans, or to stereotype them." Argued a staff illustrator and Brown, the burnoused boy "is clearly not a Middle Eastern child. He has red hair, pale skin, and freckles"—which is to say the artist has taken pains to depict him as "not being of Middle East origin." At this point, Mokhiber explained that like other people, Arabs and Muslims come in different shapes and sizes. He directed Brown's attention to two ADC staffers in the room, both Arab-Americans with red hair and freckles. Mokhiber added that, regardless of the cartoonist's intentions not to "hurt or harm anyone," the cover "deeply wounds the community."

At this point, editor Hertzberg asked for suggestions he might consider to atone for the cover. We mentioned an exposé of Arab-Muslim bashing, or a story revealing commonalities of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, or a story about Jewish extremism, or a feature on the death of Alex Odeh, a Palestinian-American killed by Jewish radicals in October, 1985. Brown said she would seriously consider these proposals. True to her word, on March 7, 1994, the *New*



*Yorker* ran "An Unholy Rage" by Robert L. Friedman, an essay on militants such as Dr. Baruch Goldstein, responsible for killing Palestinian innocents.<sup>200</sup>

The *New Yorker's* editors and journalists are no doubt decent and responsive professionals who do not deliberately pander to stereotypes that nurture collective hatreds. They know that when they paint people with a diabolic brush, they do themselves and their readers a disservice.

Also, to help bring about needed balance, image makers could reveal in television shows, documentaries, and motion pictures the telling effects of hate crimes brought about by stereotyping. They could show the impact of such prejudices on children, especially how some are taunted during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, begins with the sighting of the new moon. It is a time of purification and abstention. Although Ramadan has "a special meaning for Muslim children, their fasting makes them stand out in school," writes AP's Katherine Roth. Some children are distressed, saying "they often have to contend with anti-Muslim slurs."<sup>201</sup>

Voltaire believed Christianity and Islam contained the core values prevalent in all religions, declaring: All men are brothers, "from Siam to California."<sup>202</sup> To debunk myths such as Moon-god worshiping, image makers could compare Ramadan with the Christian Easter, and show what Muslims have in common with other religions, including fasting. Ramadan "is filled with fasting, prayer and public recitation of all 6,236 verses of the Holy Koran," writes Richard Scheinin, religion and ethics editor of the *San Jose Mercury News*. "The entire community or umma, is lifted by the spirit of the fast, the individual's connection to God is enhanced." During the month-long fast, Muslims do not eat or drink from dawn to sunset. Christians fast during Lent; Orthodox Christians fast before Christmas and on other occasions as well. "Jews fast on Yom Kipper, the annual Day of Atonement; Buddhists and Hindus

follow elaborate fasting regimens to discipline the soul and quiet the mind."<sup>203</sup>

Journalists could also point out that Muslims believe in and practice integration, regardless of race or status. At the conclusion of a Southern California prayer service on "Make A Difference Day" [October 26, 1996], "Chinese, black and white Muslim men" prayed together. Also, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and Protestants came together in Aurora, Illinois, stating that the three faiths share much in common: belief in liberty, social welfare, the pursuit of happiness, and human rights.<sup>204</sup>

Obviously accurate stories about Arabs and Muslims make the injustices more visible. In Dart and Allen's thorough 1993 study, *Bridging the Gap: Religion and the News Media*, the journalists proposed that informal meetings be held on a regular basis between local Muslim leaders and writers, executives, and others. They recommended that "the difficulties that American Muslims have had with Islam's depiction in the news media deserve a separate, full-scale report." They also recommended that media organizations review their guidelines concerning the use of terms and images considered to be pejorative or inflammatory. A concise "Islam" style guide should be written and made available to screen producers and editors.<sup>205</sup>

Western Illinois University Professor Mohammed A. Siddiqi concurs, saying the most disturbing mistakes made by journalists occur when words are misused. Siddiqi cites the haphazard use of "fundamentalist" for any dedicated Muslim, and the failure to distinguish between regional cultural practices and Muslim doctrine. To illustrate, Siddiqi refers to a January 11, 1993, *New York Times* story about a Gambian woman jailed for mutilating the genitals of two baby daughters. The news article said that female circumcision was "an age-old Muslim ritual" that was used "to control women." In a published letter to the *Times* editor, two Princeton University anthropologists wrote, "Nothing in the sacred scriptures

of Islam justifies this brutal operation, nor do most Muslims practice it. It is found in parts of sub-Saharan Africa where Islam is combined with local custom, as well as in non-Muslim societies elsewhere.<sup>11206</sup>

Nancy Nielsen of the *New York Times*, maintains that although "religious leaders and media executives are mutually responsible for improving communication and understanding between their two worlds, religious leaders need to get their messages into the secular press. Nielsen, too, believes they should take the initiative and begin developing honest and open relationships with reporters. For their part, journalists should become better educated about religion. Religion, says Nielsen, weaves its way through all aspects of life, from art to government to war. Thus, improved religion reporting is essential.

To help bridge the chasm of misunderstanding that exists between the press and religious leaders, Nielsen suggests that journalists at least "identify the differences between the mainstream Sunnis and minority Shi'a," explain why those differences are important and illustrate how Islam's historical split is relevant to current events. By seeking common ground between Sunnis and Shi'a, they could "discuss why specific commonalities are important and how they could be used in building blocks for peace."<sup>11207</sup>

Certainly, discussions with political leaders would help improve religion coverage. International Studies Professor Arthur I. Lowrie says that the "U.S. government should energetically promote dialogue with Islamic intellectuals throughout the entire Muslim world" [and in the United States, as well]. Lowrie cites Irish journalist Patrick Comerford: "At the height of the Cold War, the West invested considerable energy in trying to understand the communist system and Marxist thought. But similar efforts are not being made to understand or come to grips with Islam." Adds Comerford, "Without dialogue, there can only be confrontation."<sup>11208</sup>

Opportunities for more exact coverage certainly exist, provided a set standard of reporting is applied to all faiths. The improper labeling of Muslims, indeed all religions, should cease. Instead, cooperation, persistence, tolerance, fairness, and sensitivity should prevail. The more often Muslim religious leaders, politicians, journalists and image makers interact, the more likely it will be that coverage is accurate.

## V

### CONCLUSION

There are good people and bad people in every community. . . .  
no human race is superior; no religious faith is inferior.

—Holocaust survivor and Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel

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Although some professionals are exposing, not ignoring, all these injustices, harmful caricatures will not disappear soon. Those professionals engaged in righting wrongs do, however, merit recognition. Syndicated columnist Howard Kleinberg has written an essay on the injurious effects of stereotyping, describing an episode when a group of Muslim students at the University of Miami tried to purchase a vacant Moorish-style house to use as a mosque. The neighbors objected, arguing that a mosque would ruin the neighborhood; the zoning board denied the variance. "What were the neighbors and zoning board apprehensive about?," asked Kleinberg. "Perception. To many Americans, embracing the Islamic faith—cousin to Judaism and Christianity—is tantamount to the certification of terrorism. Probably no religious minority in this nation is treated with such suspicion as are Muslims."<sup>1209</sup>

Not a single member of the U.S. House of Representatives or the Senate is a Muslim, he points out, and we non-Muslims are ignorant of the religion. "It makes no sense that a decaying house alongside an

expressway is less ruinous to a neighborhood than a mosque. Something has to be done about the perception of the Islamic faith," Kleinberg wrote. We should try "to understand that the Muslim faith is one of the three great Western religions and should be judged on its tenets rather than by the fanaticism of a relative few."<sup>1210</sup>

When the *New York Times* published the headline, "Islamic Weapons Cache Reported Found," News Editor William Borders responded to this writer's letter of concern, "You are absolutely right; we shouldn't mix the religious and the political that way. It was sloppy, and I am circulating your letter among my colleagues in the hope that we can avoid doing it again."<sup>1211</sup>

During Jay Leno's appearance on CNN's "Larry King Live," a woman caller from Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, complimented the *Tonight* show host, saying he is "love[d] and respect[ed] by many Saudis." She asked whether he "ever apologized to anyone, a person or someone" he "had made fun of." Leno told her, "You know, yes, I did. I said something about Iran or something. And I said instead of chopping the arm off, they were doing it surgically, or something [like that] now, to criminals. I did some jokes about it and I heard from some Arab-Americans. And I called them up and I apologized." "Arab-Americans sometimes get a bad rap," he said. "When you are wrong, you do apologize. And in that case I was wrong. And I have no problem with that." Though Leno mistakenly assumes Iran to be an Arab country, his insights and candor are valuable.<sup>1212</sup>

Filmmaker George Lucas "takes seriously the notion that entertainers have an obligation to promote positive moral values in their works. He talked earnestly with *Time* magazine's Bruce Handy ["The Force is Back," February 10, 1997, p. 73] "about what artists 'teach' with their creations." Lucas even "criticizes himself for the scene played for laughs in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) where Indiana Jones drops his bullwhip and casually guns down an Arab assassin."

Some care about the social consequences of what they do, and have done their best to eliminate stereotypes. Today, writers seldom mention the Russian Communist culprit; the Mafioso component among the Italian-Americans has been reduced to the occasional gangster and harmless buffoon. "Greasers," "Mammy/Uncle Mose," and "Chink" images have been relegated to a screen Valhalla. Says Jeffrey Wells of "Entertainment Weekly," "most screenwriters I know feel that towel-head villains are a tired cliché."<sup>13</sup> In the summer of 1994 screenwriter J.F. Lawton told Wells that "the wild eyed Arab villains in *True Lies* felt like a joke. They'd already been the villains in *Hot Shots*. The whole thing has gotten stale." Says Wells, "Finding workable, hissable villains has been a tough chore since the fall of Communism."<sup>14</sup>

Screenwriter Jack Saltzberg also believes efforts to sensitize Hollywood executives are beginning to take hold. Saltzberg contends it "simply is not true" that Hollywood is racist towards Arabs and Muslims. In a letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, he writes, "Prior to selling my action script to a major studio, the single and most consistent criticism from producers and studios alike was 'the terrorists are Arabs,' insinuating it may be offensive to the Arab community." Finally, "at the urging of many producers and studio executives and for the benefit of the sale," says Saltzberg, "we changed the ethnicity of our terrorist. We made him an American—that was OK!"<sup>15</sup>

Although most image makers are nowhere near as sensitive to the stereotyping as they should be, some documentary producers are altering misperceptions. For example, the informative 1991 90-minute documentary, *Islam: A Civilization and Its Art*, focused on Islamic civilization, art and culture. In the 1992 documentary series *Legacy*, host Michael Wood points out that Islam is "the true basis of our culture." "The West's rediscovery of its ancient science and the knowledge of Italian Renaissance was indebted to the Muslims." The camera shows mosques, Muslims praying, exquisite mosaics and calligraphy. Wood says that "when Europe was still in the dark ages, the Fertile Crescent entered another glorious phase of its culture. Here,

in the universities and libraries of Baghdad, Babylonian astronomy, Hindu mathematics, Chinese science and technology were passed on by Arabs. The triumph of the modern West was made possible by a flood of ancient learning and science from Islam."

In ABC-TV's May 4, 1995, *Nightline* segment, "Muslims in America," host Ted Koppel remarked that "Muslims are the stereotyped religion in the United States" and that Muslims are "often the first we think of when there's a terrorist incident." Koppel displayed news clips from the Oklahoma City bombing containing the speculative statements made by several network correspondents about the connection to Middle East terrorism. His interviews and footage humanized the Muslim: like other Arabs and Muslims, he reported, those living in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, "home of the oldest mosque in America," were "made to feel like aliens when the bomb went off in Oklahoma City." All this in spite of the fact that Muslims are "as American as apple pie."

Independent documentary producer Michal Goldman's 1996 film on singer Umm Kulthum, one of the most important figures in Arab popular culture, is a welcome exception to caricatures of women in Hollywood features. *Umm Kulthum: The Voice of Egypt* was enthusiastically received during New York City's Film Festival at Lincoln Center on October 9, 1996.

To their credit, Disney producers responsible for the weekly TV series based on *Aladdin* have shown almost no injurious stereotypes. And although the studio did not employ any American-Arabs or Muslims to write, animate, or do voice-overs for their 1996 home video, *Aladdin and the King of Thieves*, the Disney TV staff did consult with Arab-American specialists about the teleplay. *Thieves* is an entertaining home movie for children, devoid of damaging caricatures.<sup>216</sup>

Party Picture's 1995 *Party Girl* represents a first: Mustafa, a Muslim Lebanese school teacher, is the romantic lead. Selling *falafel*



to earn his way through college, Mustafa wins the American heroine's heart, and helps her become a responsible person.

Fox's 1996 *Independence Day*, a movie depicting earthlings about to be exterminated by space aliens, shows the world's armies, including Israeli and Arab combat units, preparing to repel an alien attack. Following a quick shot of scrambling Israeli soldiers, and the Israeli flag, actor Sayed Bayedra appears as an Arab pilot, who, speaking Arabic, rushes to his plane to stop the invaders. Coincidentally, during the summer of 1980, when I was interviewing executives and producers for my book *The TV Arab*, writer Jack Guss told me that perhaps the best way to contest the stereotype would be to show outer-space aliens attacking earth. This way, said Guss, even Arabs and Israelis could be together, fighting off the invaders.<sup>217</sup>

Two other 1996 features, Paramount's *Escape From L. A.* and New Line's *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, briefly display Muslim Arabs as victims of prejudice. The films may solicit mild sympathy for Arabs and Muslims, and though not yet an established trend, the images mark the beginning of a much needed change. In *Goodnight*, renegade C.I.A. agents push the President to restore funding to their counter-terrorist unit by staging phony terrorist attacks throughout the United States and blaming the blasts on Arabs and Muslims. As a renegade agent prepares to blow up scores of innocents, he says, "We'll blame it on the Muslims, naturally." Seeing the agents place the frozen corpse of a dead Arab Muslim at the detonation site, Geena Davis, the film's protagonist, says: "So you plant this poor Arab to take the fall?"

*Escape*, a film set in the year 2013, features the heroics of actor Kurt Russell. To retrieve a powerful energy weapon, Russell is dispatched to the post-earthquake isle of Los Angeles, where the U.S. government is relocating "undesirables." Here Russell befriends a dark-complected, intelligent, and attractive Arab named Tasmina. Astonished to discover her on the island, Russell asks, "Why have you been sentenced to this place, with all the trash?" Says the exiled

Tasmina, before she is shot dead, "I was a Muslim in South Dakota. All of a sudden, they made it a crime."

On November 18, 1996, *Daily Variety* reported that actor Patrick Swayze has the lead role in a new film called *The White Sheik*. The story concerns an "American boy adopted by an Arab couple" who rose to become a prominent sheikh.

*Guelwaar*, a 1992 Senegalese-French film set in Senegal, was telecast on U.S. cable systems. It shows government bureaucrats trying to manipulate anti-Muslim prejudices. Thanks to devout Christians and Muslims, they fail. The script concerns a Christian corpse mistakenly buried in a Muslim cemetery. Honoring the wishes of the dead man's wife, the imam Biram digs up his grave and returns the body to the Christians. Acknowledging the imam's compassion, the Christian leader says, "Biram, your behavior honors all men."

Former Disney Chairman Jeffrey Katzenberg has said, "Each of us in Hollywood has the opportunity to assume individual responsibility for creating films that elevate rather than denigrate, that shed light rather than dwell in darkness, that aim for the common highest denominator rather than the lowest."<sup>1218</sup> On December 6, 1996, Katzenberg, who is now one of the three executives in charge of DreamWorks entertainment, solicited opinions from Arab and Muslim American specialists about DreamWorks' upcoming animated feature, the *Prince of Egypt*. The four-hour session included a presentation of the *Prince of Egypt*, in progress, a viewing of the film's art work, followed by a candid question and answer session.

Actress Halle Berry, too, encourages image makers to build bridges. "We need to learn how to come together and be united," declares Berry. Professionals should "love us with all our shades . . . and colors and textures. We need to love each other for all that we bring to the table and know that we're all discriminated against. We're all in the same boat and we [should] take that knowledge and go forward and fight, and not fight each other."<sup>1219</sup>

Affirmed Senator Bob Dole during his address to image makers at Twentieth Century Fox Studios [July 30, 1996], "You have the power to alter moral sensibilities, to shape attitudes, outlooks, and habits of mind and heart." Choose "excellence over exploitation. Quiet virtue over gratuitous violence, and character over pointless cruelty." There is a yearning for better things, for "movies that *help* us raise our families instead of hurting us, movies that raise our vision of life instead of dragging us down."

Perhaps the insights of Dole, Berry, and Katzenberg will prompt others to strive for the "highest common denominator." Perhaps instead of presenting unrelenting portraits of good Americans vilifying bad Arabs, honest-to-goodness, true-to-life Arabs and Muslims will appear. Robin Williams in the August 3, 1996, issue of *TV Guide*, said that all he cared about were films that enable one "to sit back and watch with your children." That's all America's Arabs and Muslims care about, too, to attend the movies and watch television programs with their children without fear of hatreds polluting their minds.

When this happens, the Arabs and Muslim will appear as neither saint nor devil, but as fellow human beings. Magdoline Asfahani, an American-Arab Muslim student at the University of Texas, reminds us that "it is our collective differences that unite us and make us unique as a nation. It's what determines our present and our future."<sup>220</sup>

The remarks of some government and religious leaders indicate change is feasible. At the inauguration of Washington, D.C.'s Islamic Center on June 28, 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower said, "Our country has long enjoyed a strong bond of friendship with Islamic nations . . . . Civilization owes the Islamic world some of its most important tools and achievements. From the fundamental discoveries in medicine to the highest planes of astronomy, Muslim genius has added much to the culture of all peoples. As I stand beneath these graceful arches . . . friends from far and near . . . our common goals are right and promising."<sup>221</sup> In 1964, following Vatican Council II, Pope Paul VI declared in *Ecclesiam Suam*, "We do well to admire

these people [of the Muslim religion] for all that is good and true in their worship of God.<sup>11222</sup>

To mark the end of the holy month of Ramadan, President Jimmy Carter extended greetings to Muslims, saying: "Your prayers and fasting have strengthened your faith and expanded its positive influence as a force for good in modern life."<sup>11223</sup>

In April 1990, the mayor and the city council of Savannah, Georgia, issued a proclamation recognizing Islam as "a vital part of the development of the United States of America and the city of Savannah." Because "many of the African slaves brought to our country were followers of the religion Al Islam," Savannah's mayor proclaimed that "the Religion of Al Islam be given equal acknowledgment and recognition as other religious bodies of our great city."<sup>11224</sup> Governor Mario Cuomo of New York and former Mayor David Dinkins of New York City have publicly denounced defamation of Muslims.<sup>225</sup> In 1996, California Senator Art Torres worked with Kuwaiti-born Jihan Hamdan to contest discrimination and revise public school texts dealing with Muslims. Torres says that Hamdan approached him about the caricatures in school books, showing him a photograph of "people in Arab garb with a camel nearby." Torres, aware of similar depictions of Mexican-Americans, testified before the State Board of Education's textbook committee about the need to make changes.<sup>226</sup> Established in November 1996, the Department of State's Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad also includes Muslim scholars.

Hillary Rodham Clinton is a student of religions, including Islam. In March 1996, for the first time in American history, the First Lady hosted a celebration of an Islamic holiday, the end of Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, at the White House. "It was long overdue," writes Mrs. Clinton, "As I shared this historic celebration of joy, love and family life, I couldn't help thinking of how we as a society too often mischaracterize Islam and those who adhere to its teachings."<sup>11227</sup> She

pointed out that many "news stories about Muslims often focus on extremists," saying it was "not fair to apply such a negative stereotype to all Muslims." "The reality is that the vast majority of . . . Muslims in the United States are loyal citizens, whose daily lives revolve around work, family and community. People who found spiritual guidance and sustenance in Islam represent all walks of life" ranging from Chaplain Abdul-Rasheed Muhammad, the first Islamic chaplain in the U.S. Army, to "children like Marwa Al-Khairo, a Girl Scout and aspiring doctor."<sup>1228</sup>

Standing on the dais in the Treaty Room of the Old Executive Office Building, Ms. Al-Khairo responded, "Only in America can people from different parts of the world come together and become one community," she said. "I am proud to be an American. And I am proud to be an American Muslim." Concluded Mrs. Clinton, "Marwa's life is no different than that of other American sixth-graders. But listening to her, I thought how hopeful it is for our country that children here can grow up like Marwa. . . . Now, I hope, Marwa and other Muslim children will also feel that their religion has a place in their President's house."<sup>1229</sup>

Following the White House gathering, Mrs. Clinton and daughter Chelsea took a trip during which they met with religious leaders and visited Muslim sites in Turkey. When they returned, they attended a meeting in Los Angeles sponsored by the city's Muslim Women's League and Muslim Public Affairs Council. Mrs. Clinton told attentive Americans that "an understanding of Islam is long overdue" and pointed out that Islam is "a guide and pillar of stability for many of our people."<sup>1230</sup> "I only recently began to gain a fuller appreciation of Islam. When I was growing up in the suburbs of Chicago, there were no courses of Islamic history or religion in school. There were little opportunities, if any, for me to encounter or visit with American Muslims." She said, "That has changed; it has changed because those of you who are Muslim-Americans have begun to reach out and share your experiences with us."<sup>1231</sup>

Mrs. Clinton, as well as other political and religious leaders, journalists, and image makers are beginning to gain a fuller appreciation of Islam. In so doing, they are following the advice of the Lebanese poet, Kahlil Gibran: By respecting others, writes Gibran, we learn to respect ourselves. "You are my brother (sister)," he writes, "and I love you. I love you worshipping in your church, kneeling in your temple, or praying in your mosque. You and I and all our children are of one religion, for the varied paths of religion are but fingers of the loving hand of the supreme being, extended to all, offering completeness of spirit to all, anxious to receive it."

To those contemplating the future of images of Arabs and Muslims in American popular culture, Gibran's words are something to think about and perhaps to act on.

## VI

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