

MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION

Media Education Foundation | 60 Masonic St. Northampton, MA 01060 | TEL 800.897.0089 | info@mediaed.org | www.mediaed.org

REEL BAD ARABS

HOW HOLLYWOOD VILIFIES A PEOPLE

TRANSCRIPT

Reel Bad Arabs

How Hollywood Vilifies a People

Director: **SUT JHALLY**

Producer: **JEREMY EARP**

Post-Production Supervisor: **ANDREW KILLOY**

Editors: **SUT JHALLY | ANDREW KILLOY | MARY PATIERNO**

Additional Editing: **JEREMY SMITH**

Sound Engineering: **PETER ACKER, ARMADILLO AUDIO GROUP**

Media Research and Collection: **KENYON KING**

Subtitling: **JASON YOUNG**

Arabic Translation: **HUDA YEHIA, THE TRANSLATION CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MASS.**

Graphic Designer: **SHANNON MCKENNA**

DVD Authoring: **ANDREW KILLOY | JEREMY SMITH**

Additional Motion Graphics: **JANET BROCKELHURST**

Production Assistant: **JASON YOUNG**

Additional Footage Provided By: **MARY PATIERNO | THE NEWS MARKET**

Additional Production Assistance: **JANET BROCKELHURST | ANDREW BROOKS | STEVEN COLLETTI**

STEPHANIE CONVERSE | MARY ALICE CRIM | NAJWA DRURY | ISAAC FLEISHER | REN FULLER-

WASSERMAN | AMY HINDLEY | EREZ HOROVITZ | JOHN KEATEN | DANIEL KIM | CAROLYN LITTLE

POONAM MALI | ADAM MAROTTE | DAVID MEEK | DAN MONICO | CHRISTINA NEIL | DIMITRI ORAM

BRIDGET PALARDY | EVA PICCOZZI | LITA ROBINSON | BRIANNA SPOONER | KRYSTAL TUCKER

LEIGH WHITING-JONES

FEATURING JACK SHAHEEN

Reel Bad Arabs

How Hollywood Vilifies a People

JACK SHAHEEN: Arabs are the most maligned group in the history of Hollywood. They're portrayed basically as sub-humans – 'Untermenchen', a term used by Nazis to vilify gypsies and Jews. These images have been with us for more than a century. For thirty years I've looked at how we, particular when I say we, image-makers, have projected Arabs on silver screens. In my latest book, 'Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People', I looked at more than one thousand films - films ranging from the earliest most obscure days of Hollywood to today's biggest blockbusters. And what I tried to do is to make visible what too many of us seem not to see: a dangerously consistent pattern of hateful Arab stereotypes, stereotypes that rob an entire people of their humanity. All aspects of our culture project the Arab as villain. That is a given. There is no deviation. We have taken a few structured images and repeated them over and over again. So now whether one lives in Paducah, Kentucky or Wood River, Illinois, we know basically the same thing.

[CLIP] Voice 1: Listen to the sound...

Voice 2: Jesus!

Voice 1: ... of Allah!

JACK SHAHEEN: We know the mythology: namely, Hollywood's images of Arabs.

THE MYTHS OF ARABLAND

JACK SHAHEEN: We inherited the Arab image primarily from Europeans in the early days, maybe 150 years, 200 years ago. The British and the French who traveled to the Middle East and those who didn't travel to the Middle East conjured up these images of the Arab as the oriental other - the travel writers, the artists who fabricated these images and who were very successful as a matter of fact. And these images were transmitted and inherited by us. We took them, we embellished them and here they are.

[CLIP, "HARUM SCARUM"] Voice 1: When you cross the mountains of the moon into our country, Mr. Turello, you'll be stepping back 2,000 years.

JACK SHAHEEN: We have this fictional setting called Arab Land, a mythical theme park, and in Arab Land, you know, you have the ominous music, you have the desert. We start with the desert, always the desert as a threatening place. We add an oasis, palm trees, a palace that has a torture chamber in the basement. The Pasha sits there on his posh cushions, with harem maidens surrounding him. None of the harem maidens please him so they abduct the blonde heroin from the West who doesn't want to be seduced. When we visit Arab Land we must be aware of the instant Ali Baba kit. What we have, we have the property masters of Hollywood going around and they're cladding the women in see-through pantaloons, belly-dancing outfits, they're giving the Arab villains scimitars – you know, these long, long scimitars. We see people riding around on magic carpets, turban charm-ers programming snakes in and out of baskets. Yesteryear's Arab Land is today's Arab Land.

[CLIP, "ALADDIN"] Voice 1: *You are late*
Voice 2: *A thousand apologies, oh patient one.*
Voice 1: *You have it then?*
Voice 2: *I had to slit a few throats, but I got it.*

JACK SHAHEEN: Disney's "Aladdin" was seen by millions of children worldwide. It was hailed as one of Disney's finest accomplishments. But the film recycled every old, degrading stereotype from Hollywood's silent, black and white past.

[CLIP, "ALADDIN"] Singing: *Oh, I come from a land, from a far away place where the caravan camels roam; where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face, it's barbaric but, hey, it's home.*

JACK SHAHEEN: "Where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face, it's barbaric but, hey, it's home." Now how could a producer, with a modicum of intelligence, just a modicum of sensitivity let a song such as that open the film. But this moves way beyond one song.

[CLIP, "ALADDIN"] Voice 1 (female): *You must be hungry, here you go.*
Voice 2 (male): *You'd better be able to pay for that.*
Voice 2: *Do you know what the penalty is for stealing?!*
Voice 1: *NO! No, please!*

JACK SHAHEEN: The Arab is a one-dimensional caricature, a cartoon cutout used by film makers as stock villains and as comic relief. And so, over and over, we see Arabs in movies portrayed as buffoons, their only purpose being to deliver cheap laughs. You see this in the Joey Heatherton film "The Happy Hooker Goes to Washington."

[CLIP, "THE HAPPY HOOKER . . ."] Voice 1 (female): *Every night I was forced to perform unspeakable acts with circumcised dogs!*
Voice 2 (male): *Well, dogs are better than sheep. They're cleaner, I know. I've tried both.*

JACK SHAHEEN: And over and over, again, they're portrayed as inept. So, in a movie like "True Lies" not only are the Arabs dangerous, they're also incompetent.

[CLIP, "TRUE LIES"] Voice 1: *I, we, are all prepared to die. One turn of that key, two million of your people will die, instantly!*
Voice 2: *What key?*
Voice 1: *That key! Who's taken the key?!*

JACK SHAHEEN: One actor who excels in his portrayal of Arabs as buffoons is Jamie Farr in "Cannonball Run 2."

[CLIP, "CANNONBALL RUN 2"] Voice 1: *I have a weakness for blondes (kissing noises) and women without mustaches.*

JACK SHAHEEN: All the stereotypes are here: too rich, and stupid, to know the value of money.

[CLIP, CONT.] Voice 1: *Get me 12 suites! Better yet, the entire floor!*

JACK SHAHEEN: And of course he's oversexed, lecherous, uncontrollably obsessed with the American woman.

[CLIP, CONT.] *Voice 1 (male): Here, my desert blossom, keep the change. Have you ever considered joining a harem?*

JACK SHAHEEN: And, so another pattern is the lecherous Arab. In "Jewel of the Nile", Sheik Omar tricks Kathleen Turner. How? He convinces her to come with him to Arab Land, then he imprisons her.

[CLIP, "JEWEL OF THE NILE"] *Voice 1: You stay here, and you write what I tell you to write.*

JACK SHAHEEN: We see the same sort of ominous seduction in "Protocol." The entire plot revolves around an Arab Emir's infatuation with the blonde, blue-eyed Goldie Hawn. In the Bond film "Never Say Never, Again" Kim Basinger is abused by the most sleazy looking Arabs imaginable. She's tied to a pole, stripped to her underwear and auctioned off to primitive looking Bedouin. And in "Sahara" Brooke Shields is also kidnapped and presented to the lecherous Arab sheik for his own perverted pleasure.

[CLIP, "SAHARA"] *Voice 1 (male): (grunting, growling)*
Voice 2 (female): Get away from me you dirty creep!

JACK SHAHEEN: More than 300 movies, nearly 25 percent of all Hollywood movies that in one way or another demean Arabs, contain gratuitous slurs or they portray Arabs as being the butt of a cheap joke.

[CLIP, "THE BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES"] *Voice 1: We were going into Mecca, see, and the plane is full of Arabs, with these animals – goats, sheep, chickens. I mean, they don't go anywhere without their goddamn animals. We had to put plastic in the cabins, you know, they urinate, they defecate.*

JACK SHAHEEN: You have films by Neil Simon like "Chapter Two." The beginning of the film, the protagonist arrives back from London, and his brother says "how was London." And he says "full of Arabs."

[CLIP, "CHAPTER TWO"] *Voice 1: How was London?*
Voice 2: Full of Arabs.

JACK SHAHEEN: Well, imagine if he had said "full of Blacks", "full of Jews", "full of Hispanics." I mean, that's ridiculous. Why do we do these things? One of the most offensive films with gratuitous images, "Father of the Bride 2." It features Steve Martin selling his house to a Mr. Habib.

[CLIP, "FATHER OF THE BRIDE 2"] *Voice 1 (male, Middle Eastern accent): We like house very much, when you can move out?*
Voice 2 (male): Excuse me?
Voice 3 (female): The Habibs would like to buy the house, George. It's exactly what they've been looking for.
Voice 1: Yes, when you can move? We need house a week from Wednesday, and my wife wants flower dishes in kitchen. You sell, we pay top dollar.

JACK SHAHEEN: When Habib's submissive wife tries to speak, he shouts gibberish at her.

[CLIP, CONT.] Voice 1 (female, soft): (unintelligible)
Voice 2 (male, yelling): (unintelligible ... clears throat)

JACK SHAHEEN: And then he offers Martin a fifteen thousand dollar cash bonus to move out in 10 days. When Martin tells Mr. Habib he doesn't want to sell the house after all, he finds Habib's wrecking crew there, ready to demolish his beautiful home. And in a scene that calls to mind one of the most degrading stereotypes of the Jewish people, Mr. Habib demands an extra one hundred thousand dollars to sell the house that he has owned for just a day, back to Martin.

[CLIP, CONT.] Voice 1 (frantic): You want to take out a loan on something I owned free and clear just 24 hours ago?!
Voice 2: Well, that is up to you George – your path, your fence, your ... memories.

JACK SHAHEEN: Now, if you looked at the other "Father of the Bride" films – Elizabeth Taylor, Spencer Tracey, there were no Arabs or Arab-Americans. So, why does Disney inject these horrific sort of offensive characters in "Father of the Bride" part two. It's the same reason that, in "Gladiator", the slave-traders who kidnap Russell Crowe are Arabs. I mean, this is ridiculous; I mean why does Hollywood inject Arabs, scenes of Arabs and/or slurs demeaning Arabs in movies that have nothing to do with the Middle East. So, you're sitting like I am, for example, watching "Back to the Future" about a mad scientist. And, yet, early on in the film we see these ugly, inept Libyans with machine guns, in a parking lot trying to gun down the protagonists. I mean, why? This movie wasn't about the future. It was the same old stereotyping from the past. And the same goes for Hollywood's view of Arab women. The Arab woman today is bright, intelligent. She's someone who is exceeding in all professions. And yet this reality, still, is being denied us on silver screens. The highly sexualized belly dancer has been with us from the beginning of Hollywood's history. Inspired by early images of the orient, as the place of exoticism, intrigue and passion. But in recent years, this image has dramatically changed. The Arab woman is now projected as a bomber, a terrorist. Added to this image is what I call "bundles in black" – veiled women, in the background, in the shadows - submissive. It seems the more Arab women advance, the more Hollywood keeps them locked in the past.

THE ARAB THREAT: Mideast Politics and Hollywood

JACK SHAHEEN: Politics and Hollywood's images are linked; they reinforce one another. Policy enforces mythical images, mythical images help enforce policy. The Arab image began to change immediately after World War 2. There were three things that impacted the change: The Palestinian/Israeli Conflict, in which the United States is unequivocally supported Israel; the Arab oil embargo in the 70's, which angered Americans when gas prices went through the ceiling; and the Iranian Revolution, which increased Arab-American tensions when Iranian students took American diplomats hostage for more than a year. These three pivotal events brought the Middle East into the living rooms of Americans, and together helped shaped the way movies stereotyped Arabs and the Arab world. One of the primary changes – the image of the sheik. In a movie such "Roll Over" he's out to take over the world with his money, or he's up to no good trying to buy chunks of America.

[CLIP, "ROLL OVER"] Voice 1 (male): Mrs. Winters, I think I should tell you there are those in the family who do not think we should be making this offer at all. I assume if you could have found venture capital of this sort for a company like Winterchem in America, you would not be coming all the way to Arabia looking for it.

JACK SHAHEEN: You see the oily sheik in Spielberg's "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade," you see the money-grubbing sheik who's out to commit all kinds of terrorism and launch a missile in "Earnest in the Army."

[CLIP, "EARNEST IN THE ARMY"] *Voice 1: Gentlemen, behold my special club, the pluton missile. With it I will bring the infidels to their knees and be leader in the Arab world.*

JACK SHAHEEN: One of the myths in the 70's was that the Arabs are coming over, buying up chunks of America, and of course this was reflected in the cinema.

[CLIP, "NETWORK"] *Voice 1 (yelling): The Arabs have taken billions of dollars out of this country and now they must put it back!*

JACK SHAHEEN: One of my favorite movies of all time, racist though it may be, is "Network", about commercial television.

[CLIP, CONT.] *Voice 1: Ladies and Gentlemen, let's hear it: How do you feel?*
Audience: We're mad as hell, and we're not gonna take it anymore!

JACK SHAHEEN: "Network" features the TV anchor, rising to super stardom. How? He unleashes wild rants against the system on the air, but he directs the angriest of all his rants at Arabs, who he says are buying up America.

[CLIP, CONT.] *Voice 1: They're buying it for the Saudi Arabian Investment Corporation. They're buying it for the Arabs.*

JACK SHAHEEN: The anchor, Howard Beal, calls on the American people to rise up and stop the Arab buyout of his T.V. network.

[CLIP, CONT.] *Voice 1: Listen to me, goddamnit! The Arabs are simply buying us. There's only one thing that can stop them: YOU!*

JACK SHAHEEN: The rage of Americans in response became one of the most famous scenes in movie history.

[CLIP, CONT.] *Voice 1: I want you to get up out of your chairs, I want you to get up right now and write a telegram to President Ford saying, "I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not gonna take this anymore."*
Crowd of voices (repeating, yelling): I'm as mad as hell, and I'm not gonna take this anymore!

JACK SHAHEEN: This kind of anger, the anger born of fear, all of it in response to a perceived conspiracy and threat by a specific group of people – well, we've seen and heard this before.

[CLIP] *(Fanfare and cheering)*

JACK SHAHEEN: If we look at the anti-Semitic propaganda of the Nazis, at its core is an identical type of economic threat. This economic myth even made its way into children's books. Sadly the popular image of Jews in Nazi propaganda resembles the popular image of Arabs in some of our

most beloved Hollywood movies, the only difference being that the Arab usually wears a robe and headdress.

TERROR, INC.: Demonizing Palestinians and Muslims

JACK SHAHEEN: Another way we can look at the connection between politics and entertainment, Washington and Hollywood, is the manner in which, historically, cinema has projected the Palestinian people. Since the founding of the state of Israel in 1948 our support has never wavered. Every American administration has made it clear whose side we are on. In contrast, Washington's policy makers have failed to support the millions of Palestinians who have been made refugees and who have lived lives of poverty and squalor as a result. While policies impact opinions, so equally unjust is how Hollywood has presented the conflict. Movies repeatedly depict Palestinians as terrorists, making it seem that all Palestinians are evil.

[CLIP, "DEATH BEFORE DISHONOR"] *Voice 1: Made in America, colonel.*

JACK SHAHEEN: That image has been perpetuated by Hollywood films beginning with the film "Exodus." It dealt with the very early conflict. Here, Palestinians are either invisible or they are linked with Nazi's, perpetrators of horrific acts. The 1966 movie, "Cast a Giant Shadow," is another early film presenting Israelis as innocent victims of Palestinian violence. Kurt Douglas is an American military specialist, and he goes to assist the Israelis. Some of the dialogue in this film reads like it came straight from the Public Relations department of the Israeli government.

[CLIP, "CAST A GIANT SHADOW"] *Voice 1: Here is a country surrounded by five Arab nations ready to shove them into the Mediterranean. No guns, no tanks, no friends, nothing. People fighting with their bare hands for a little piece of desert.*

JACK SHAHEEN: The Palestinians in this movie are the lowest of the low. We see them solely as vicious gunmen, wide-eyed maniacs. They will kill anyone, anywhere, anytime, for any reason. There is one brutal image in particular of a burnt out bus with a dead Jewish woman tied to its side with the Star of David carved into her back. And when the Palestinians finally speak, they mock and psychologically terrorize another woman trapped in a bus. Well, if we jump forward another decade to the film "Black Sunday," the Palestinian terrorist is now a woman.

[CLIP, "BLACK SUNDAY"] *Voice 1: Striking where it hurts the most. Where they feel most at home.*

JACK SHAHEEN: She flies the Goodyear blimp into a Miami stadium and tries to wipe-out 80,000 Americans at the Super Bowl. She cold-bloodedly eliminates anyone in her path. The movies that we see basically follow Washington's policy. Its reflected in the cinema over and over again, particularly during the 1980's and the 90's where you had perhaps 30 films which showed Palestinians as a people who were intent on injuring all Americans. One of the most despicable portrayals of Arabs and Palestinians occurs in the 1987 film, "Death Before Dishonor." First they murder a guard and then slaughter an Israeli family. They kidnap and torture an American marine, and in cold blood, execute another. And they burn the American flag, right in front of the American embassy and then dispatch a suicide bomber to blow it up. One reason we have not been allowed to empathize with any Palestinian on the silver screen is due to two Israeli producers, Menachem Golan and Yoram

Globus. These two filmmakers created an American company called Canon. And they released in a period of 20 years at least 30 films, which vilify all things Arab, particularly Palestinians. They even came out with a film called "Hell Squad" showing Vegas show girls trouncing Arabs in the middle of the desert. I think the most affective film they have ever done, one of the most popular, and more racist is "The Delta Force." Here Palestinians hijack a plane and terrorize the passengers, especially the Jewish ones.

[CLIP, "THE DELTA FORCE"] *Voice 1: Pick out the passports with Jewish names.*

JACK SHAHEEN: There is no form of communication more powerful than film in creating propaganda and Golan and Globus took it to another level. Certainly American producers play a role in vilifying Palestinians. Perhaps the most anti-Palestinian film is "True Lies."

[CLIP, "TRUE LIES"] *Voice 1: It's apparently the same group that has just detonated a nuclear bomb in the Florida keys.*

Voice 2: Crimson Jihad will reign fire on one major US city each week until our demands are met.

JACK SHAHEEN: This film is shown on television almost every week, over and over again. It is part of our visual heritage.

[CLIP, CONT.] *Voice 1: Give me the key, come on child you don't want to die do you? Give me the key and you wont get hurt. I give you my word.*

Voice 2: No way you wacko!

JACK SHAHEEN: We never see Palestinians who suffer under occupation, Palestinians in refugee camps, Palestinians who are victimized, who are killed - innocent Palestinians. These images are denied us. Why are they denied us? Is there an unwritten code in Hollywood saying we cannot and will not humanize Palestinians? And why can't we humanize Palestinians in the same manner in which we humanize Israelis? Is not the life of a Palestinian child, media-wise, Hollywood-wise, politically-wise as important, as humane, as valuable as the life of an Israeli child? And if the answer to that is yes, why can't we see that on silver screens?

THE ONLY GOOD ARAB

JACK SHAHEEN: To solidify Washington's connection with Hollywood simply look at the films produced in cooperation with the Department of Defense showing our men and women in the armed forces killing Arabs at random. Like "Iron Eagle" where a teenager goes over and bombs up an Arab country. You know he just learns how to fly a jet over night. And then of course "Navy Seals," where Charlie Sheen goes over to Lebanon and obliterates scores of Arabs.

[CLIP, "NAVY SEALS"] *Voice 1: Alright Chief, lets go tag 'em and bag 'em.*

JACK SHAHEEN: Of all the Department of Defense films the one that will stand the test of time as being the most racist is "Rules of Engagement." The film was written by former Secretary of the Navy, James Webb. The action takes place in Yemen, a real country in the Middle East. There are violent demonstrations at the American embassy and the marines, led by Samuel L. Jackson. They're

called in to evacuate the American employees. And as they try to do, the marines open fire on the crowd and kill scores of Yemeni, including women and children. And in the investigation that follows, Tommy Lee Jones, the lawyer who represents the Samuel L. Jackson character, goes to Yemen to investigate. The movie leads us to believe what seems obvious, that the marines committed this atrocity.

[CLIP, "RULES OF ENGAGEMENT"] *Voice 1: Arm the American marines. They were shooting at these people. They were just trying to defend themselves.*

JACK SHAHEEN: During his investigation, Jones' character sees a little girl with only one leg. He follows her, comes upon a hospital ward full of civilian victims. He finds an audiotape by the bed of one of the victims, and when the tape gets translated in court, we immediately begin changing our minds about who is responsible for this massacre.

[CLIP, CONT.] *Voice 1: To kill Americans and their allies both civil and military is duty of every Muslim who is able.*

JACK SHAHEEN: We discover that the Yemeni civilians aren't so innocent after all. It turns out they fired on the marines first. And in a moment that will live in Hollywood infamy, we suddenly learn that the little girl we've been sympathizing with, the very girl whose humanity and innocence may have broken down our stereotypes, well, she's no better than those other Yemeni terrorists.

[CLIP, CONT.] *(Yemeni girl fires a shot at U.S. troops)*

JACK SHAHEEN: As a result, when Samuel L. Jackson delivers the key line, "Waste the motherfuckers," we're now on his side.

[CLIP, CONT.] *(gun shots and crying)*

JACK SHAHEEN: Why does this matter? Because in the end, the massacre of even women and children has been justified and applauded. It's a slaughter, yes, but it's a righteous slaughter.

[CLIP, CONT.] *Voice 1: Sgt. Mack.*

Voice 2: Sir.

Voice 1: Contact all stations. Mission complete.

JACK SHAHEEN: The humanity is not there. And if we cannot see the Arab humanity, what's left? If we feel nothing, if we feel that Arabs are not like us or not like anyone else, let's kill them all. Then they deserve to die, right? What's the outcome? What do Arabs think of us that see these movies? Because these movies are rented 25 cents American in Egypt. Movies showing us killing them, what do they walk away with? Does this bring us closer together? Does this advance peace or does it separate us?

[CLIP, "TRUE LIES"] *Voice 1: You're fired. (Terrorist is strapped to a missile, then fired at a helicopter, screaming)*

ISLAMAPHOBIA

JACK SHAHEEN: Islamophobia now is a part of our psyche. Words such as Arab and Muslim are perceived as threatening words, and if the words are threatening, what about the images that we see in the cinema and on our television screens? We are at war with Iraq. We went to war in March of 2003, but didn't our entrance to war, wasn't that made a lot easier primarily because for more than a century we had been vilifying all things Arab? And now, given what happened with 9-11, the tragic events that took place on that day where 19 Arab-Muslim terrorists were responsible for the deaths of nearly 3000 people. Now instead of saying, that's the lunatic fringe, we say no no no no, the actions reflect the actions of 1.3 billion people. Now that's dangerous. We don't say that the actions of Ku Klux Klan members who are Christians represent Christianity, do we? Look at Oklahoma City, Timothy McVeigh, a good Irish-Catholic boy. Do we say all Irish-Catholics are terrorists? No one knew McVeigh's religious beliefs, where he went to church or his ethnic background. It was not part of the story. Yet of course had that been an American with Arab roots or an American-Muslim, it would have been a part of the story. Remember that when news of the bombing broke, reporters and politicians, nearly everybody, rushed to judgment without any proof whatsoever.

[CLIP, MEDIA COVERAGE] *Voice 1: The US government source told CBS news that it has Middle East terrorism written all over it.*

[CLIP, MEDIA COVERAGE] *Voice 1: The attack in Oklahoma City appears to have a familiar mark. Voice 2: This was done with the intent to inflict as many casualties as possible. That is a Middle Eastern trait.*

[CLIP, MEDIA COVERAGE] *The fact that it was such a powerful bomb in Oklahoma City immediately drew investigators to consider deadly parallels that all have roots in the Middle East.*

[CLIP, MEDIA COVERAGE] *ABC News has learned that the FBI has asked the US military to provide up to ten Arabic speakers to help in the investigation.*

JACK SHAHEEN: The stereotype has become so widespread that it's become invisible to people, and the reason being is that we've all grown up with these images. Just look at television. We now have TV shows telling us that, in addition to the Arab terrorists over there, American Arabs over here are also terrorists. Then there's Showtime's "Sleeper Cell." Here a sinister network of Islamic groups operates on American street corners. Any homeless man could be part of this network. Even Western looking Arabs are part of this anti-American conspiracy.

[CLIP, "SLEEPER CELL"] *Voice 1: We're at war with America, period. And we're going to win that war by convincing enough Americans through the spread of fear, insecurity, and terror to change their ways, and the best way to teach that lesson is by attacking them where they live, work, and play.*

JACK SHAHEEN: And this paranoia runs deep. Just take a moment and flip through some of our most popular religious channels.

[CLIP] *Voice 1: Islam, a religion of two billion members, that's growing by fifteen million people annually. Nearly every major terrorist network in the world is led by Islamic fundamentalists.*

Voice 2: Islam is, as we have seen, a religion that teaches the violent subjugation of all non-Muslims. It promises paradise to terrorists, and makes the violence deed a thing of beauty in the eyes of Allah.

JACK SHAHEEN: So when innocent Arabs are killed, when they're bombed, maimed, wounded, when they're tortured in places like Abu Ghraib, is it really any surprise that we don't feel any compassion? Or worse, make light of it?

[CLIP, "THE RUSH LIMBAUGH SHOW"] *Voice 1: This is no different than what happens at the Skull and Bones initiation and we're gonna ruin people's lives over it and we're gonna hamper our military effort. Have you ever heard of emotional release? You ever heard of needing to blow some steam off?*

Voice 2: Well, sort of like hazing, a fraternity prank, sort of like that kind of fun, but the point is...

JACK SHAHEEN: We don't care about them. We've been preconditioned to think that those innocent civilians, clones of Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein are one in the same and do not merit our sympathy, our understanding, and that's very dangerous.

[CLIP, MEDIA COVERAGE] *Voice 1: According to the FBI, hate crimes in America targeting Muslims or people who just appear to be Middle Eastern surged in the aftermath of 9/11.*

JACK SHAHEEN: Since 9/11, if you are an Arab-American or a Muslim-American, and you go to an airport, you're automatically profiled. Numerous thousands of Muslim Americans were rounded up and detained without due process. Many people, particularly immigrants, lost their jobs.

[CLIP, MEDIA COVERAGE] *Reporter: This college student who asked not to be identified says a recent meeting with police left him feeling like a criminal.*

Student: I was just very scared, anxious, nervous, and I just wanted to get it over with.

Reporter: He was one of several thousand men of mostly Arab dissent who were interviewed.

JACK SHAHEEN: So there is this cloud with the hate crimes, with the profiling, with being rounded up. Again, I think this illustrates the power of film. That in spite of the reality, in spite of the material that we know to be true, we still embrace the mythology. The mythology is still a part of our psyches. Stereotypes take a long time to wither away. And for many of us, we're comfortable with our prejudices. We don't want to change. We've grown accustomed to this face.

GETTING REAL

JACK SHAHEEN: When we think of Arabs, what do we see? What images come to mind? Do we see actual people? People who despite real cultural or geographical differences do pretty much the same things that we do. When we think of Arab women, what images come to mind? Do we see women who laugh and play and who adore their children? Women who work in the home as well as outside? Would it come as a surprise to know that in many Arab countries, a majority of college students are actually women. Arab men? What's our media image? Do we see loving fathers, men who want to provide for their families? What about Arab teenagers? Do we see them the way you would think about teenagers in other parts of the world? Then there's religion in the Arab world. Do we see it as all encompassing dominating everything else? Do we know that even though faith plays a huge role in the Arab world, just as it does here in the United States, that it's also true that

much of the Arab world is quite secular? When we think of Arabs and religion, does Christianity come to mind? Do we remember that there are over twenty million Christians in the region, who have lived side by side in harmony with Muslims for centuries? To their credit, some filmmakers have shown Arabs and American-Arabs in all their complexities. An excellent way to shatter a stereotype is through laughter, through comedy. So we have comedians. Comedians have done this historically. Black comedians, Jewish comedians. So we see Arab comedians doing this, and this is one way to release the tension.

[CLIP, "FAHRENHEIT 9/11" - DVD] *Voice 1: True story, guy behind the counter picked up my credit card, sees the Allah part, looks at me all weird and is like, 'hey buddy, what kind of name is that?' (laughter) It's an Arabic name. He goes, 'what does this mean?' So I'm like, translated to English, it means peaceful, friendly Arab? (laughter) But he's not happy. He goes, 'what Arab country is your family from?' So I try to think of the most peaceful, proper one that he would like, so I'm like, 'we're from the same Arab country that Aladdin is from.' (laughter)*

JACK SHAHEEN: To his credit, Michael Moore in Fahrenheit 9/11 in the DVD includes a scene with this comedy.

[CLIP, CONT] *Voice 2: My name really is Ahmed Ahmed, and I can't fly anywhere. All you white people have it easy. You guys get to the airport like an hour, two hours before your flight. It takes me a month and a half. Security's gotten so bad now I just show up to the airport in a G-string, and I'm like 'how you guys doing?'*

[CLIP, CONT.] *Voice 2: The character I read for was Terrorist Number 4. Not number 1, not number 2, number 4. And I was already well into my comedy career at this point so I didn't take it that serious, and I read my lines way over the top. I was like, 'Sit down, you will obey or I will kill you in the name of Allah.' And the director went nuts and he was like, 'that was brilliant, Ahmed. Let me see you do it again. This time with more Arab, you know how your people are very,' you know, he's trying to say the word angry, and I was just like okay angry, is that what you want? 'Yes, yes.' So I did it one more time, and I got a call the next morning that they want to use me in this movie. And I started laughing on the phone because I was making fun of the role. I wasn't trying to be like, that's what they want though.*

JACK SHAHEEN: Once we begin to humanize Arabs and Muslims, to project them as we project other people. No better, no worse, then the stereotype gradually diminishes. In movies such as "A Perfect Murder," we see an Arab-American detective befriend the heroine. Then there is "Three Kings," a movie I served as a consultant on. The action occurs during the first Gulf War in 1991. The film is notable for revealing the complexities of the Iraqi people, focusing on decent Iraqis that Saddam Hussein wants to kill.

[CLIP, "THREE KINGS"] *Voice 1: "How's your little girl?"*

Voice 2: "She's safe for now."

Voice 1: "Outstanding. Excellent. How can we help you?"

JACK SHAHEEN: There's mutual respect in this film, and there's also Iraqis who are loyal to Saddam Hussein. It's not a sugarcoated film. It's a very realistic film. It's an outstanding film in my opinion. "Kingdom of Heaven," which focuses on the Crusades, was a tremendous hit overseas; not here in the United States. And when the film was shown in Beirut, particularly at the end when Saladin takes over Jerusalem, there's peace between Muslim and Christian. He enters a church, and there is

an icon on the floor. Saladin sees the icon, respectfully picks it up and places it back on the altar. When audiences in Beirut saw that, they rose to their feet and applauded. We're talking about Muslims, as well as Christians, applauding the act of a Muslim who embraces religious tolerance. There is this need of Arab audiences to embrace American films that show them in a respectful, honest, fair manner. And with the release of George Clooney's "Syriana," I have hope that Hollywood may be listening. The film has some unflattering, yet honest, depictions of Arabs, but it also presents an Arab prince as one of the film's few decent human beings. The British educated prince wants to bring democracy to his country, and his ideals get him and his family murdered.

[CLIP, "SYRIANA"] *Voice 1: I want to create a Parliament. I want to give women the right to vote. I want an independent judiciary. I want to start a petroleum exchange in the Middle East, cut the speculators out of the business. Why are the major oil exchanges in London and New York anyway? I'll put all of our energy up for competitive bidding. Our own pipe through Iran to Europe, like you proposed. I'll ship to China. Anything that achieves efficiency and maximizes profit, profit which I will then use to rebuild my country.*

Voice 2: Great. That's exactly what you should do.

Voice 1: Exactly. Except your president rings my father and says, 'I've got unemployment in Texas, Kansas, Washington State. One phone call later, we're stealing out of our social programs in order to buy overpriced airplanes.

JACK SHAHEEN: Another example of this kind of humanity and respect is found in "Hideous Kinky," a film about an English woman played by Kate Winslet and her two daughters in Morocco. Winslet's relationship with her Moroccan lover is beautifully and lovingly displayed. And when she doesn't have the money to return home to England with her daughters, he makes hard sacrifices to make it happen. There is a tender and moving scene at the end. The Moroccan catches up with the train they're on to say goodbye, to wish them well. We see the warmth and love that exists between them. And nowhere is this kind of humanity more visible than in the film "Paradise Now," written and directed by Hany Abu-Assad. Two Palestinian friends get recruited to carry out a suicide bombing on Tel Aviv. At first they accept their mission solemnly, but they're intercepted at the Israeli border and separated from their handlers. Then a young woman realizes their plan and forces them to question their actions.

[CLIP, "PARADISE NOW"] *Voice 1 (female): Why are you doing this?*

Voice 2 (male): If we can't live as equals, than at least we'll die as equals.

Voice 1: If you can kill and die for equality, you should be able to find a way to be equal in life.

Voice 2: How? Through your human rights group?

Voice 1: For example. Then at least the Israelis don't have an alibi to keep on killing.

Voice 2: Don't be naïve. There can be no freedom without struggle. As long as there is injustice, someone must make a sacrifice.

Voice 1: That's no sacrifice, that's revenge! If you kill there's no difference between victim and occupier.

Voice 2: If we had airplanes, we wouldn't need martyrs. That's the difference.

Voice 1: The difference is that the Israeli army is still stronger.

JACK SHAHEEN: These three young Palestinians are different from each other. They're not just crazed terrorists. And they're not just freedom fighters. They're human beings, with all the faults, successes, ideals, and pain of human being. I'm an optimist, and I believe in the future, particularly in young filmmakers. The stereotype will change. It will change because young men and women who are entering the profession will see that there has been a grave injustice committed, and they'll make attempts to correct it. It's only a matter of time as to when this will happen. But it will take place. Look, we've unlearned many of our prejudices against blacks, Native Americans, Jews, other groups. Why can't we

unlearn our prejudices against Arabs and Muslims? What matters is not to remain silent. I think whenever we see anyone being vilified on a regular basis, we have to speak up, whether we're image-makers or not. We have to take a stand and say this is morally and ethically wrong to demonize a people.