

# The hollywood effect of the reel bad arabs media essay



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Watching Dr. Jack Shaheen documentary ' Reel bad Arabs', in which he discusses almost a 1000 Hollywood films featuring an Arab and concludes that the vast majority of which portray Arabs in a distorting manner, I found myself really fond of the idea of the power of media in positioning people's minds in favor of a secret agenda and so forth, I found that I deeply agree with Dr. Shaheen's claim that the Hollywood movie industry, almost always portrays Arabs as bad since it is influenced by the US foreign policy agenda.'

## **How Media Affects Public Opinion**

In the last 50 years the media influence has grown exponentially with the advance of technology. We now live in a society that depends on information and communication to keep moving in the right direction. The media has a huge impact on society and also in public opinion. It can shape the public opinion in different ways depending of what is the objective.

## **Repetition Effect**

Al tikrar biallem il hemar -By repetition even the donkey learns-, this Arab proverb encapsulates how effective repetition can be when it comes to education: how we learn by repeating an exercise over and over again until we can respond almost reflexively. For more than a century now, Hollywood, too, has used repetition as a teaching tool, tutoring movie audiences by repeating over and over, in film after film, insidious images of the Arab people. From earlier times to the present day consider how these images have affected honest discourse and public policy.

## **Building Stereotypes**

Stereotyping has existed with us since the beginning of time in our day to day life . With these repetitive patterns going over and over in front of our eyes, as audience, we start building our own images about others based on these patterns, breeding them into our minds and revitalizing them whenever stuck in a situation . Bottom-line, instead of getting to know the truth, we tend to resort to our preconceived notions rather than judging things as they are, which involuntarily, builds stereotypes in our minds.

## **Manipulating Public Opinion**

Normally, stereotypes are fast and fairly effective because not everyone can be able to travel to every nation and verify the true state of affairs, thus techniques of misinformation and name calling are used by media outlets in attempt to convince the public to belief generalities made about a particular group, in this case Arabs, to be true in areas such as religion or politics. For example, after the attacks of 9/11 the media gave a huge coverage of the event and exposed Osama guilty for the attack as they were told by the authorities. This shaped the public opinion to support the war on terrorism, the same happened with the war on Iraq. The problem is that if media received inaccurate information then the public opinion supported a wrong cause, and this is the power of public opinion influence.

## **Hollywood As A Source Of Knowledge And Influence – A Positioning Weapon**

Hollywood movies have been around now for more than century and have and will continue to impact us and future generations. Nowadays,

Hollywood's motion pictures reach nearly everyone.

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## **How Arabs Are Portrayed In Hollywood**

“ Seen through Hollywood’s distorted lenses, Arabs look different and threatening. Projected along racial and religious lines, the stereotypes are deeply ingrained in American cinema.”

According to Dr. Shaheen words, “ What is an Arab? In countless films, Hollywood alleges the answer: Arabs are brute murderers, sleazy rapists, religious fanatics, oil-rich dimwits, and abusers of women. “ They [the Arabs] all look alike to me,” quips the American heroine in the movie *The Sheik Steps Out* (1937). “ All Arabs look alike to me,” admits the protagonist in *Commando* (1968). Decades later, nothing had changed. Quips the U. S. Ambassador in *Hostage* (1986), “ I can’t tell one [Arab] from another. Wrapped in those bed sheets they all look the same to me.” In Hollywood’s films, they certainly do – black beard, headdress, dark sunglasses, in the background-a limousine, harem maidens, oil wells, camels.

Beginning with *Imar the Servitor* (1914), up to and including *The Mummy Returns* (2001), a synergy of images equates Arabs from Syria to the Sudan with quintessential evil. In hundreds of movies “ evil” Arabs stalk the screen. We see them assaulting just about every imaginable foe-Americans, Europeans, Israelis, legionnaires, Africans, fellow Arabs, even-for heaven’s sake-Hercules and Samson. Dr Shaheen believes that such Arab images serves not only for dehumanation, but mainly for increasing abhorrence towards that group of people in an attempt to back up the U. S foreign policies and agendas.

The findings of a recent study suggest that Hollywood films influence viewers' perceptions and attitudes towards Arabs extensively. Similar approaches to Dr. Shaheen's were taken and mostly rendered the same conclusions such as Jamie C. Fries's, which pointed out that Hollywood's representation of the Middle East ' ebbed and flowed with the foreign policy realities of the United States across time underlying the belief in the presence of a link between U. S. diplomacy and popular film's portrayal of Arabs.

## **Possible Reasons Behind Hollywood Portrayal**

### **Complement American Foreign Policy**

The interpretations of Hollywood's representation of Arabs involve different, often contradictory, types of image. They also suggest that the intensification of the Arabs' stereotypical image over the last century from ' comic villains' to ' foreign devils' did not occur in a vacuum but, certainly, with the intertwinement of both political and cultural interests in the region. It is believed that this was motivated indirectly by U. S imperial objectives.

### **Justify War In Palestine, Iraq And Afghanistan**

Arabs are politically characterized as ' soldiers of Allah' with no mercy and who do terrible things; they are not just villains but also dangerous and they need to be politically and militarily contained. The concept shows how the situation in the region is badly in need of help Western, and in particular American. Just the needed situation that can fairly justify wars in Afghanistan and in Iraq and work as a great cover of the real intentions behind such wars,

which is clearly economic-oil-. Moreover; keeping the international world silent about the ongoing Palestinians killings.

## **We -Arabs- Fail To Fix Our Image**

To bring about fundamental changes in how motion pictures project Arabs, a systematic lobbying effort is needed. Though the Arab-American and Muslim-American presence is steadily growing in number and visibility in the United States, Regrettably, only a few Arab-Americans meet with and discuss the stereotype with filmmakers. Though when dialogue does occur, some discriminatory portraits are altered.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I would like to re-insist on the fact that Hollywood movies- as a media outlet- can influence public opinion extensively on the way Arabs are perceived and that they can actually serve, in one way or another, as a tool of manipulation or oven be manipulated themselves in order to enforce different governmental policies. Both the American authorities and corporate media helped to outline the Middle East within an ideological bias that shapes the public understanding of the region. Such a cultural discourse has stressed an epic struggle between the civilized, democratic, modern West and the brutalized, barbaric, primitive East. This manipulation should be processed to maintain the notion that these nations need, and will continue to need, American protection not just from their enemy but from themselves as well.