

CHAPTER FIVE

Real Solutions

Each of us in Hollywood has the opportunity to assume individual responsibility for creating films that elevate, that shed light rather than dwell in darkness, that aim for the highest common denominator, rather than the lowest.

—Jeffrey Katzenberg, DreamWorks

Misperceptions and misunderstandings persist. President George W. Bush has blamed the Arab media for the region's anti-American sentiments. Arab media, he said in January 2006, "often give a false impression of the United States—they don't do our country justice. You can't figure out America when you're looking at some of these [Arab] TV stations... They sometimes put out propaganda that just isn't right, it isn't fair, and it doesn't give people the impression of what we're about."

In Iraq, a well-educated engineer named Sheikh Ahmad Ghazi echoed Bush's concerns. Ghazi, however, pointed at the American media. He accused us of putting out "propaganda," telling an AP reporter that the information the US media transmits about Arabs "isn't right. It isn't fair, and it doesn't do Arab nations justice." Ghazi's other complaint: US commanders in Iraq were getting "many of their [false] ideas about the Arab people from Hollywood."

Georgetown University's Michael Hudson summarizes this dilemma: We Americans continue perceiving "Arabs in a generally simplistic, monochromatic, and unfavorable light," he writes. "And, in the Arab world America's image is distinctly unfavorable and different from what we think it should be." As a result, says

Hudson, "Americans and Arabs are caught in a dangerously reinforcing cycle of stereotypes. Arabs respond in anger to what they perceive as our denigration of their faiths and cultures. To this Arab response Americans react with bewilderment and resentment, provoking a further negative response from Arabs." Given Hudson's telling, concise thesis, how much longer will we continue viewing each other in terms of simplistic and hostile caricatures? Are we spinning out of control inside a movie reel, gapping at one another through cracked prisms, each unable to recognize the true face of the other? If so, what should we do about these reel "cultivated images"?

The greatest civility we can show "to win the war of ideas," writes Thomas Friedman, "is to take them [Arabs] seriously." Hollywood can take Arabs "seriously" by contemplating the fresh solutions proposed here, some of which may help eradicate reel images of demagoguery, bigotry, and hate.

Presence

We can't wait around for the stereotype to fade into the sunset. That's not what stereotypes do. Instead, victims need to hunt the stereotypes down and eradicate them. Other groups—gays, women, Italians—have done it. Remember, not so many years ago Hollywood's evil "others" were Asians, blacks, and Latinos. For decades, movies ridiculed and demeaned Native Americans and African Americans. Few voices spoke out to contest stereotypes that depicted these groups and others as pimps, prostitutes, jive artists, jocks, junkies, and savages. Not any more. Organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and others got together and acted aggressively against discriminatory images, lobbying the industry. Their coordinated efforts prompted filmmakers to cast aside many racial stereotypes.

But it wasn't easy; it took a lot of work and a great deal of time and effort. Eventually, women and minorities began breaking into the industry, becoming a key part of Hollywood's work force. As performers, producers, writers, and directors, they started replacing old stereotypes with more humane, evenhanded images. One example: Beginning in the late 1970s Latino filmmakers, "without

almost any support from the industry," created plenty of hit films. Boasts film historian Chon Noriega: "They managed to make as many feature films about Latinos as the industry made in the previous 70 years." Noting Latino accomplishments, today's producers seek out, employ, and reveal down-to-earth images of most minorities. Though the majority of writers and producers are still white men, today's movies reflect the American rainbow with colorful and diverse portraits of Asians, blacks, Latinos, and other minorities. Now, the studios should enhance their reel radiant rainbow's glow: Include Americans with Arab roots.

In Goethe's words, "Knowing is not enough; we must reply. Willing is not enough; we must do." The fragmented Arab-American community is steadily growing in number and visibility. Yet, Arab Americans need to try harder, and make the necessary moves to activate needed visibility in Hollywood. Individuals and organizations should encourage and support a core of fully prepared and well-qualified Arab Americans in the industry.

Do not expect Hollywood to accommodate any minority. They won't. "If you're a minority group," says director Luis Valdez, "you have to push; you have to fight and climb mountains. You have to be aggressive; you have to be positive and you have to compete." Certainly, Arab-American imagemakers, be they Christians or Muslims, want to compete and contribute to the industry. But, still lacking from the community—individuals and organizations—are the real commitments needed to assist these up-and-coming young people. Lacking, also, are efforts to duplicate the success of reel workshops, like those sponsored by Act One, a Los Angeles program for aspiring Christian screenwriters. During the summer of 2005, Act One held an intensive four-week screenwriting seminar for 34 up-and-coming film students. Afterward, Hollywood studio executives began calling, requesting the participants' top five scripts.

In order for Arab-American organizations to duplicate the success of Act One, which has scores of alumni in various positions within the industry, they need financial support to expand their reach. No one group has sufficient staff to conduct research and take charge of structured media monitoring systems. Nor has any Arab-American organization come to the table with long-term plans

to meet and establish an ongoing dialogue with the nation's top film critics, production companies, and filmmakers. A give-and-take dialogue would alert them to cinema's damaging Arab portraits. They might consider writing about and producing feature films that reveal and contest the stereotypes, just as they did when blacks, Latinos, and others were demonized. But the sad reality is this: As a Hollywood pressure group Arab Americans don't exist.

The majority of organizations are not entirely at fault, but some groups have only themselves to blame. Many American Muslims have found my *Reel Bad Arabs* (RBA) documentary to be useful, educational, inspiring, and a needed catalyst for change. But organizers of the 2007 Islamic Film Festival did not. They refused to screen RBA or make DVDs available for purchase at the 44th Annual Islamic Society of North America's (ISNA) Convention, because of the "sexual and violent scenes." Of course, such scenes are the essence of RBA; its purpose is to expose Hollywood's stereotypical images of Arab Muslims as sexual and violent beings. ISNA's organizers could have screened RBA, alerting participants by placing notices on doors stating that some scenes may be offensive. If important groups such as ISNA turn a blind eye by refusing to reveal and discuss the stereotype, how can it be eradicated? ISNA also failed to screen Anisa Melidi's compelling *National Geographic* documentary, *Inside Mecca* (2003), about three individuals who travel to Mecca to perform the hajj.

To help transform Hollywood, to ensure that stereotypes cease, that depictions reflect the community's true achievements, and that humane portraits begin shaping the hearts and minds of people around the world, activists need to step forward, creating a constructive dialogue with imagemakers. Individuals and community leaders, especially those with deep pockets who consistently criticize the organizations, have mostly themselves to blame for status-quo stereotypes. As actor Heshem Issawi points out, "The community doesn't believe in the powers of the media." Community members should stop complaining and begin providing the groups and young filmmakers with the financial support needed to succeed in the Hollywood arena. If activists remain mum, and if well-established, highly visible, and successful Arab Americans don't care about or look after their own interests, how do they

expect somebody else to do it? They should follow the lead of Shakira, the popular Colombian-Lebanese singer. Soon after 9/11, she was told that her album sales would suffer unless she eliminated all things Arab from her music, especially the Arabic riffs and belly dancing. She refused: "I would have to rip out my heart...in order to please them." She went on to speak out against bigotry, criticizing all the "hate crimes against everything that's Arab, or seems Arab." Which brings to mind an Arab proverb: "Your rights will not be lost, as long as you continue asking for them."

Hollywood, too, shares the blame. TV executives and producers have treated the solutions I put forth for their consideration in my 1984 book *The TV Arab* with yawns of indifference. Over the years, TV's Arab and Arab-American portraits have only become worse. Reel bad Arab TV and movie scenarios that demean Arabs, Arab Americans, and their culture have escalated.

From the start, Hollywood placed Arab-American actors at the back of the bus. Beginning with early silent films and over a span of 50 years, pioneer performers such as John George from Syria and Frank Lackteen from Lebanon were typecast as reel bad Arabs. In more than 100 films, George and Lackteen were relegated to portraying stereotypical Arab villains: sneaky spies, shifty bargainers, even Nazi sympathizers.

Not much has changed. Like George and Lackteen, today's Arab American actors also have a tough time. Unlike other performers, they rarely are given opportunities to play humane, diverse characters, roles that would contest the stereotype. Some directors contend that there's a demand for young Arab-American actors. Sure, a demand to play billionaires, bombers, bundles in black, and belly dancers. Casting directors toss them stereotypical scraps and bones. Explains Judi Brown-Marmel, an executive producer with Levity Productions: "What I find really intriguing is that people aren't quite ready to confront Middle East stereotypes... it's the last stereotype to be broken down." Actor Khalid Abdalla, who has portrayed reel Arab terrorists in films like *United 93*, calls it "an incredibly hurtful stereotype." Sumus up *Munich*'s Karim Saleh: "I'm stuck playing terrorists."

Other actors—Ahmed Ahmed (*Looking for Comedy in the Muslim World*), Jay "Jihad" Harik (*American Dreams*), Nicholas

Kadi (*Soldier of God*), Sayed Badreya (*Soul Plane*), and Lewis Alsamari (*United 93*)—say Arab-American characters are invisible in multicultural films and plays such as *A Chorus Line* (1985), featuring performers portraying Asian, black, Jewish, Puerto Rican, and gay dancers. They are stuck in a stereotypical time warp, they say, one which unfairly profiles them and impacts their personal lives, as well, even when traveling. Look at what happened to Alsamari when he tried to enter the United States. Hollywood had no problem casting him as one of *United*'s four terrorists. But he could not attend the New York premiere of the movie, because the US government refused to grant him a visa.

Bashar Da'as said that he's been offered many villain roles but virtually nothing else. "The only roles open to Arab-American actors are terrorist parts. And, if it's not a terrorist," he said, "then it's a role that dehumanizes us and that's even worse." Da'as told me about one such role: "When I auditioned for a *CSI Miami* segment, they actually liked me," he said. "But the character conspires with the Nazi groups, which is nonsense. I mean an Arab extremist working with Nazis to kidnap schoolchildren? My role in the show was to put a gun to a little boy's head. You can imagine how harmful that image would be to Arab students who study here." Da'as rejected the part, telling me he tried giving "the producers a history lesson, but they didn't really care." In *Driving to Ziggiland* (2006), an independent film needing a distributor, Da'as portrays a Palestinian immigrant intent on becoming a Hollywood actor. But he soon finds out that his dream may not happen; only terrorist roles are available to bearded Arab men with accents, and Da'as refuses "to play a terrorist." One *Ziggiland* scene in particular, stands out: The casting director auditions Da'as for the role of an Islamic villain. "We need to see utter fury," she tells him. "You're a flinch away from beheading this guy with a sword." Da'as overacts, angrily screaming in Arabic. And the casting director is thrilled. "You're the best terrorist we've seen," she says.

Comedian Ahmed Ahmed recalls being discredited and then dismissed by a Hollywood executive who told him: "There's nothing funny about your people." Ahmed went to his agent for help, telling her he wanted to audition for parts other than "terrorist roles." She told him, bluntly: "As long as your name is Ahmed

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Ahmed, you're only going to play evil Arabs." Another actor confided to reporter Ayman Mohyeldin: "My identity hurts me in this industry. Let's face it, politics play a role. There is so much tension between Arabs and Jews; they only want to hire us for stereotypical parts." Other actors tell me they really don't want to portray stereotypical Arabs, but they have to, at least until they "make it big." For the time being, those bad guy parts, they say, "help pay the bills. And that's better than being unemployed." Besides, if we refuse these roles, says Ahmed, casting directors will "employ dark-complexioned actors who look Arab." Finally, one actor who, much to the chagrin of his friends and family members, portrays scores of reel "terrorists," offers this rationale, saying: "Look, regardless of the character I portray, my presence on the set makes a difference. I constantly interact with my directors, asking them to make the Arab villain I play more complex, more humane. I talk to them about real Arabs who are like us," he said, "and our culture and traditions. Sometimes they listen," he said, "and make changes. Other times, not. Still, I keep trying; better to try than do nothing, right?"

To avoid being cast as stereotypical Arabs, some actors have changed their names. One confided, "I scrapped my Arab name for an Anglo one. I have blue eyes and I don't look Arab," he said, "and with my new identity I probably won't be typecast anymore; no one will know my roots. So, please don't say anything about my real name." Another actor who landed a prominent role in a big-studio film changed his name to sound European. The young actor told reporter Ashraf Khalil that he anticipates the day when he won't "feel the need to tell people he's Italian." He worries about "being relegated to playing Arab terrorists, the new Arab ghetto." "I am really proud of who I am," he told Khalil, "but I'm constantly having to lie about it." Such fibs and name changes are not unusual. Actor Jameel Farah changed his name to Jamie Farr; *Syriana's* Siddig El Fadil became Alexander Siddig; and *American Pie's* Shannon Elizabeth Fadal opted for Shannon Elizabeth. Academy Award winner for *Amadeus* (1984) F. Murray Abraham confessed that the "F" in his name stands for Farid. Early on, Abraham knew he had to drop Farid because that would typecast him "as a sour Arab out to kill everyone." Best summarizing the frustrations and feelings of most performers is actor Karim Saleh: "I want to play

parts where I am not killing people," he says. "I want parts that show off qualities that are more normal. I want to play Woody Allen characters—writers and musicians."

Haven't Saleh and his co-performers waited long enough? Shouldn't producers give him and his fellow "Arab actors" a chance to pierce through the stereotype by portraying compassionate, heroic men and women in fresh TV shows and movies? Refreshingly, a few producers cast performers in more complex roles in two 2007 films. In *Extraordinary Rendition*, for example, Moroccan actor Omar Berdouni (*United 93*) gives a brilliant performance as an innocent kidnapped victim. And Palestinian actor Ashraf Barhom (*Paradise Now*) also gives a stunning performance as a heroic Saudi police officer in *The Kingdom* (2007). And in *The Kite Runner* (2007), the lead character of Amir is played by Khalid Abdalla, last seen in the role of a 9/11 hijacker in *United 93*. Abdalla's promotion from terrorist to heroic protagonist may reflect a growing depth in the depictions of Arabs and Muslims. "There does appear to have been a sea-change in more complex depictions of people from the Middle East," said Abdalla to *Variety's* Ali Jaafar. "I definitely think there's more of a willingness to delve into the grey area."

I hope other Hollywood producers will address the industry's sins of omission and begin casting Arab and Muslim-American performers in non-stereotypical roles. In the fall of 2007, the CW TV network launched *Aliens in America*, a timely comedy series that reminds me of the Canadian Broadcasting Company's (CBC) successful 2007 show, *Little Mosque on the Prairie*. *Aliens*, which looks at Americans' post-9/11 fears and prejudices, is off to a good start; the series is mostly about teenagers, not terrorists. The opening segment features an average Wisconsin family, the Tolchucks, preparing to welcome into their home a blond, blue-eyed, Nordic exchange student. Much to their surprise, however, the exchange student turns out to be Raja, an amicable 16-year-old who just happens to be a Pakistani Muslim. Mrs. Tolchuck fears she's invited a potential terrorist into her home; she wants to ship Raja back to Pakistan. But in the end, Raja's kindness and idealism win her over. Explains producer David Guarascio, "We wanted to bring a character who has a sense of his own faith, and who has a strong relationship with God, into this family that really doesn't have

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one." Raja has "a spiritual sense of himself; he emerges as a moral compass and helps the family find their way."

Another good beginning: On March 8, 2007, the Comedy Central network telecast the highly entertaining one-hour *Axis of Evil Comedy Special*—the first program in TV's history to feature American comedians with Middle Eastern roots. Ahmed Ahmed, Dean Obeidallah, Aron Kader, and Maz Jobrani. Since the show was a huge success, other networks should follow Comedy Central's lead and include Arab-American characters in an ongoing comedy series.

Not so long ago critics said an Asian woman could never anchor the nightly news and that a black woman could never be a talk-show host, and along came Connie Chung and Oprah Winfrey. Reviewers also said no one would watch sitcoms about Jews or African Americans, and along came the comedy hits *Seinfeld* and *The Cosby Show*. Other critics insisted no one would ever accept a TV show about a plain-looking Latina girl, and along came *Ugly Betty*, a Golden Globe winner. Now is the time for a TV series like *Everybody Loves Abdullah*. To ensure its success, include the talented comedienne Kathy Najimi and pattern Abdullah after the current hits *Two and a Half Men* and *Everybody Loves Raymond*.

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Networks should begin seeking out and bringing onto studios well-qualified Americans with Arab roots. Together, they could produce box-office hits, such as remakes of *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) and *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), one of my favorite films that would have been even better without its Mexican stereotypes. I recall, still, the original *Seven's* diverse cast of heroes. A Russian-Swiss-Mongolian (Yul Brynner) portrayed the leader; a German (Horst Buchholz) was a Mexican; and a Lithuanian (Charles Bronson) had a half-Mexican, half-Irish role. A Brooklyn Jew (Eli Wallach) played the bandit chief. The new *Magnificent Seven* might star Salma Hayek and feature Saleh, Ahmed, and Badreya as three brave gunfighters who defend the Mexican village from bandits. A *Heat of the Night* remake could focus on an Arab-American detective encountering and contesting bigotry in a small town while investigating a murder. Arab-American actors could also be cast in starring roles in remakes of fine, financially successful films such as *I Remember [Siti] Mama* (1948) and *My Big Fat Arab Wedding* (2002).

Presence propagates power.

Once Hollywood opens its doors, young Arab-American filmmakers will succeed. They have what it takes to write, produce, and direct telling comedies and dramas about themselves. Some are already doing so, creating captivating scenarios that more honestly express them and their heritage. For example, Isa Totah's screenplay *America* has prompted Oscar-winning producer Mark Johnson (*Rain Man*) to make Hollywood's first mainstream film about Arab Americans. "We've had coming-of-age stories about Italian Americans, African Americans, even Vietnamese Americans, but never one from an Arab-American perspective," said Johnson. Young imagemakers will make a difference. Look at what aspiring innovators Sam Choula, Jackie Salloun, and Gemal Seede have accomplished. Seede, the CEO of Mumin Pictures, produced and wrote the short science-fiction film *Alliance* (2005), winner of Best Picture and Best Sci-Fi awards at several film festivals. Salloun's short film *Planet of the Arabs*, which is based on my *Reel Bad Arabs* book, was screened to sold-out houses at Park City's Sundance Film Festival. With almost no budget, Sam Choula took seven actors and within seven days he completed and released commercially his first full-length thriller, *The Trip* (2005).

College students, too, will help expedite change. For decades, I've encouraged Arab-American students to major and excel in media studies. In cooperation with Washington, DC's American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), I have awarded scholarships to young scholars. Others are catching on. Washington, DC's Arab American Institute (AAI) plans to offer similar awards. And, Emmy Award-winning actor Tony Shalhoub of the hit TV series *Monk* sponsored a 2006 filmmaker award competition; the winner received \$20,000 and full access to Hollywood production services. These modest steps are already helping to build a media presence. Two of my scholarship winners, Eyad Zahra and Annemarie Jacir, have produced award-winning short films. Jacir's *Like Twenty Impossible* looks at a film crew in occupied Palestine trying to navigate obstacles by the Israeli military. And her *Satellite Shooters*, a film on movie stereotypes, was telecast on PBS-TV. In 2008, Jacir plans to release her first feature, *Salt of this Sea*, about a young Palestinian-American refugee returning to

Palestine. Zahra's *Distance from the Sun* received the Best Short Film award at Dubai's first (2004) International Festival. Months later, the Directors Guild of America (DGA) invited its Hollywood members to view *Sun* at a special screening. His cousin, Ahmad Zahra, produced the must-see award-winning *On Common Grounds* (2004), a heart-warming documentary about Jews, Christians, and Muslims who construct a home for a poor family in Mexico. The inexperienced builders put aside their religious and political differences to build a house: "A house where all of us can live, this country, this world."

It should only be a matter of time before Zahra, Jacir, and others begin making a difference in Hollywood. Patience and persistence are the cornerstones. Some Arab-American actors have already given fine performances, performing as "regular" Americans in films like *Enough* and *The Final Cut*. Given the opportunity, other actors will expand their reel presence. Like other Americans they'll be just another minority looking back at the time when they couldn't even get an interview for the stockroom. Hollywood insiders Spencer Lewerenz and Barbara Nicolosi remind us of Dr. Seuss's tiny world of Whoville in his classic book *Horton Hears a Who*. Uninformed skeptics who don't believe the people of Whoville exist are about to boil them—alive. Suddenly, "all of the Whos join together and shout: 'we are here, we are here; we are here!'" and are heard just in the nick of time, saving their world." Isn't time for Arab and Muslim Americans to shout—with one unified voice—gently, and firmly?

Fresh Films

"The ultimate achievement for screenwriters wanting to offer fair portrayals," observes critic Robert Greiner, is to present Arabs and Muslims "just like us." Acting on Greiner's advice, here are some just-like-us scenarios for filmmakers to consider.

—Update the classic Charlie Chan films. As a boy, I never missed a Chan movie. He was Hollywood's neatest, wisest, and kindest detective. The remakes will have similar plots but feature not Charlie Chan, but a new super sleuth, Charlie Habib, starring *Monk*'s Tony Shalhoub as Charlie. Assisting detective Habib will be his talented wife Lamia, played by Wendie Malick.

—Revisit Moss Hart's hit *You Can't Take It With You*, which enjoyed a successful run at the Los Angeles Theater Center. Like the stage play, Hart's rewritten film comedy might also feature likeable American-Muslim characters as the quirky folks down the street.

—Check out Lebanese-American playwright S. K. Hershe's timeless, joyous Semic comedy *An Oasis in Manhattan*. Family fireworks ignite when it's discovered that the daughter of a Lebanese Archie Bunker is engaged to marry a Jewish man. The father and mother of the respective newlyweds match stereotype for stereotype. In the mid-1960s, I saw the stage production of *Oasis* in Beverly Hills; it was almost impossible to identify the nationality of either member of the engaged couple, either by their looks or their actions. "Hershe's telling message," said actor Vic Tayback, who starred in the show, "is that it's the kids who are going to take us away from prejudice between Arabs and Jews." Some Spanish and French imagemakers have picked up, somewhat, on Hershe's theme. In the charming Spanish comedy *Only Human*, a TV personality brings her Palestinian fiancé home to meet her Jewish parents. Again, family fireworks dominate the scenario, putting in doubt whether love between Semites will triumph. Finally, an Arab-Jewish couple is featured in the upcoming French comedy *Mauvaise Foi* (2007).

—Thanks to affordable digital-video technology, several set-in-Iraq documentaries have captured the chaos in the country, revealing the war's complexities by probing the lives of ordinary people. Take-haru Watai's compelling *Little Birds* (2004) presents, for the first time, searing images of Iraqi children suffering unthinkable tragedies. Viewers may easily relate to the humane protagonist in Laura Poitras's *My Country, My Country* (2006), a Sunni physician named Riyadh who is a compassionate, educated caregiver. There's Usama Alshabi's *Nice Bombs* (2007), which examines the American occupation of Iraq, and James Longley's gripping Academy Award nominee for Best Documentary, *Iraq in Fragments* (2006), and Haydar Daffar's *The Dreams of Sparrows* (2005), the first Iraqi-made documentary to come out of post-Saddam Baghdad. Sean McAllister's *The Liberation of Baghdad* (2005), focuses on an Iraqi celebrity pianist, Samir Peter. Struck in a Baghdad hotel, Samir can't decide whether to stay home or move abroad. He is pleased to see Saddam

gone, but his children argue that the US "liberation" has brought more destruction and death. Each documentary poses a relevant question: After the fall of Saddam Hussein, how are ordinary Iraqis managing? A March 2007 *USA Today* poll revealed that 50 percent of Iraqis say they are not better off today under the US occupation than they were under Saddam; only "26 percent feel 'safe' in their immediate neighborhoods."

—Daily, since the war began, Iraqi civilians are shot dead or wounded by insurgents, especially those who work with the US government and private companies that are linked with the government. More than 90 Iraqi journalists and 300-plus Iraqi interpreters have been killed, and hundreds have been seriously wounded. The proposed movie could focus on the damaged lives of those brave Iraqis working with us. Show how this war tests the bonds of love and friendship that exist between an Iraqi family and two American soldiers. Does their friendship survive after insurgents kill one of the soldiers? What happens to their relationship after some US soldiers accidentally gun down a family member? What occurs when a family friend, a young Iraqi translator who assists the marines, is shot dead? Finally, what happens when the one surviving GI proposes marriage to the surviving Iraqi daughter; will cultures and religions clash or unite? If the marriage does occur, will the Iraqi bride be able to immigrate to the US?

History shows that we Americans welcome refugees from all nations; only months after the Vietnam War, for example, we accepted more than 130,000 refugees from South Vietnam. Though immigration is as American as apple pie, when it comes to accepting Iraqi refugees, there seems to be a problem; to date, all too few Iraqis, even those who have risked their lives to assist the US government, are being allowed to enter our country.

—Set-in-the-US feature films might expose discriminatory acts against innocent Americans. One movie could focus on a wounded-in-action Arab-American veteran. During a gunfight in Iraq she saves the lives of several soldiers, but sadly her fiancé is shot dead. The disabled veteran returns home in a wheelchair to her small, western Pennsylvania steel town, filled with disgruntled out-of-work laborers. She seeks employment and acceptance, but before she can "settle in," she must cope with overt and subtle prejudices.

—Develop features based on actual events. During the 9/11 attacks, the Hamdani family lost their son Salman, an NYPD cadet, medical student, and part-time ambulance driver. Yet, because Salman failed to return home that tragic morning, the government acted hastily and irresponsibly, tagging him as a possible terrorist. Finally, months later, he was properly redeemed as a "hero," and is cited in the PATRIOT Act.

Salman's case is not unique. After 9/11, untold numbers of innocent people were secretly locked up. The vast majority of these "terror suspects," reports Human Rights Watch, may have violated some minor immigration laws but none were ever linked to terrorism. For example, the FBI arrested eight Arab-American restaurant workers in Evansville, Indiana. Labeled terrorists, the workers were shackled and hauled off to a Chicago detention facility. Eventually, they were let go, but FBI officials never told them why they were detained. How did the FBI's false accusations and their imprisonment affect the Arab Americans? Did their neighbors, young and old, accept them as victims, or view them suspiciously? Were they forced to close their Evansville restaurant, move to another city, leave the country?

—Consider using Danny Hakim's documentary *Shadya* (2005) as the basis for a feature-length film about the charismatic karate world champion Shadya Zoabi, a 17-year-old Arab Muslim living in Israel. Consider also films about young Christians, Jews, and Muslims—children with difficult pasts from the world's troubled spots trying to fit in. They attend summer camps like those hosted by Seeds of Peace, Camp IF, and the "refugee" camp in Clarkston, Georgia, where they try to fit in with strangers in a small town in the American South.

Universal Studios has already purchased the story rights about the Clarkston camp. In their upcoming film I propose that the youngsters, some of whom speak with thick foreign accents, show up at camp with preconceived ideas about each other, fixed stereotypes gleaned from their friends, families, and from reel images of occupation, war, and terrorism. Have some protagonists talk openly about past tragedies, their respective beliefs; others could be frighteningly silent. Frames could focus especially on members of the camp's soccer team, the "Fugees" (short for refugees). The

Clarkston team's real coach is Luma Mufleh, an Arab-American immigrant who grew up in Amman, Jordan. The studio might consider casting Shannon Elizabeth as the Fugee's reel coach. The movie could also reveal how and why Mufleh decided to coach the boys, and her struggles to convince local politicians to provide the youngsters with a safe soccer field in town. Some of Clarkston's longtime residents prefer baseball and football; for them soccer is a sign of unwarranted change, a foreign influence like Muslim girls wearing the hijab around town. Show also how teens and townsfolk interact prior to, during and after soccer practices and games. Viewers would discover whether the youngsters and the locals maintain or unlearn prejudices. As to who wins the match—would it matter?

Prior to seeing my *Reel Bad Arabs* (RBA) documentary, director Oliver Stone told his audience at Dubai's 2007 Operational Culture Bridge panel, that it was "unfair" that I was rebuking Hollywood for its cultural stereotypes of Arabs. Added Stone, anyone "could say the same thing about any minority." Two days later, Stone did a quick turnaround. He announced at a press conference that after watching my film, he came to realize how pervasive the Arab stereotype was. He told the press that Hollywood's imagemakers should make films that help bridge the gap between the two cultures.

Stone's quest for fairness is a needed wake-up call for other skilled directors and producers. In 2002, Francis Ford Coppola told a Moroccan audience that "For years, Hollywood has stereotyped Arabs as bad guys," and that, "You could make beautiful films about [Arab life and culture], but I don't know any [filmmaker] who knows anything about them." We must work to change that.

Shattering the Silence

We cannot remain silent. As Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter." To quash the Arab stereotype we must first identify it as unacceptable and commit to its eradication by speaking out. A good place to start is in the classroom, the crucible in which we have historically challenged and broken many stereotypes before they fossilized.

Though I have discussed reel Arab images at more than 100 universities worldwide, not once did I ever come across a college film class focusing specifically on Hollywood's Arabs. Why the exclusion? College catalogues offer a wide range of cinema studies. Hundreds of classes and books deal with many reel racial and ethnic groups. Obviously, fresh courses focusing on the Arab "other" would benefit students, giving them opportunities to receive a more pivotal understanding of the context within which fair-minded people view Hollywood's stereotypes. Class readings could include—to name just a sampling—acclaimed works such as Allen Woll's *Ethnic and Racial Images in American Film and Television*, Harold Isaacs's *Scratches on Our Minds*, Daniel Leab's *From Sambo to Superspade*, Michael Renov's *Hollywood's Wartime Women*, Sam Keen's *Faces of the Enemy*, Gretchen Bataille and Charles Siler's *The Pretend Indians*, Patricia Erens's *The Jew in American Cinema*, my RBA and the present volume.

Documentaries that reveal the history and injurious impact of stereotypes would supplement the reading: on African Americans, *Ethnic Notions* (1986) and *Color Adjustment* (1991); on Asian Americans, *The Slanted Screen* (2006); on gays, *The Celluloid Closet* (1995), which is based on Vito Russo's groundbreaking book of the same name; on Jews, *Jews, Movies and the American Dream* (1998); on Latinos, *The Bronze Screen: 100 Years of the Latino Image in American Cinema* (2002); and on Native Americans, *Images of Indians, Part I: The Great Movie Massacre* (1979) and *How Hollywood Stereotyped the Native American* (2003); on Italian Americans, *World Beyond Wise Guys* (2008); and on Arabs, the 2006 *Reel Bad Arabs* documentary based on my book.

In addition to their role in the classroom, scholars will continue to make important contributions to research in the field. From my experience as an academic and film critic, I know there are superb cinema teachers out there who will begin to teach and write essays, books, and scripts that examine reel Arab characters and themes.

People of influence should speak up about the stereotypes. Diplomats who are committed to fostering peace, civil rights leaders, entertainment critics, and film stars, directors, and producers—as well as columnists and journalists. While stationed

in Baghdad, journalist Ann Marlowe, who is Jewish, overheard her colleagues referring to Iraqis as "fat, sexist Arabs." Instantly, she countered the slurs. Later, Marlowe mused: Such bigoted statements "show an American inability to see Arabs as fully human. If Arabs are fat and sexist, what are they saying about Jews behind my back?" Iraqi men were "pretty cute. Many looked like my own people: They looked like Jews. We [Americans] need to rid ourselves of our perverse myths about Middle Eastern men and women," said Marlowe. Aren't slurs against Arabs "just another form of anti-Semitism?"

Breaking the silence means admitting something is wrong and bearing the embarrassment that comes with that. The effort necessary to change may be difficult for some. When a respected American Film Institute (AFI) historian was asked about reel Arabs, for example, he told my friend, a documentary TV producer, that this "is something a lot of people don't want to be talking about. I personally don't want to talk about it. It's opening up a can of worms." The hesitation is natural: we instinctively resist change. But this "can of worms" is no different than the cans we pried open to uncover other stereotypes. The worms are there. Pretending they don't exist is not the answer. Keep in mind the ancient Chinese proverb, "To know and not to do is not to know." Our work cannot be considered done until other forms of oppression have been challenged and overcome as well, including reel and real discriminatory actions directed against all things Arab.

"Many successful rights movements, the women's movement, gay rights, the American Indian Movement, and the like," points out Professor Chuck Yates, "followed the lead of the civil rights movement and rose to full vigor. Throughout the period of their greatest activity, they all benefited from each other's achievements and each other's examples." I ask you to consider why the rising tide that lifted your boats together seems to have left Arab boats anchored. And, I humbly ask with good cause to help me put an end to this most enduring, egregious social inequity. "We need to learn how to come together to be united," reminds Academy Award-winning actress Halle Berry. "We need to love each other—with all our shades and colors and textures—and know that we're all discriminated against. We're all in the same boat and we [should] take that knowledge and go forward."

Whenever a group moves to debunk stereotypes there are those who deny their existence, defending them as the real deal. Consider this example. Years ago, journalist Jawad Ali and I watched a PBS-TV special about hateful movie stereotypes hosted by the late Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert. We recall how the two critics went down the list, one by one, of Hollywood's racist and sexist offences: Blacks, Italians, women, gays, and so forth. And then, they finally got to the part we had been waiting for—Arabs and Muslims. But, recalls Ali, "Siskel brushed off Hollywood's odious Arab portrayals with a single sentence that went something like this: 'Oh well, as long as Arabs are our enemy and are blowing up innocent people, our movies will show them as terrorists.'" Ebert let the statement slide, and the critics moved on to other topics. "Siskel's hurtful remark stays with me, still," writes Ali. "I felt as if a diversity teacher had called me a sand nigger."

Some critics and screenwriters argue that there are no Arab villains in Hollywood movies. To support their thesis they cite Sean Penn's *The Interpreter* (2004), whose reel terrorists are "Africans from the little-known republic of Marobo," and Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Collateral Damage* (2002). Early drafts of *Dam-age* had Arab terrorists blowing up a US consulate, but writers deleted these scenes. Rick Lyman contends that moviemakers have "been handed the gift of villains in the form of Islamic terrorists, [but] the industry has opted for restraints to avoid the accusation of bias and the danger of offending audience sensibilities in an increasingly multiracial America." Supporting Lyman's views that "Hollywood... has lost its taste for xenophobic... stereotyping" was the *Atlantic Monthly's* Mark Steyn, who writes that "Muslim terrorists have all but disappeared." Author Andrew Klavén has pitched in, as well. He wants Hollywood to "produce more gung-ho, patriotic war movies that celebrate our fight against Islamo-fascism in Afghanistan and Iraq—and in Iran as well, if and when that becomes necessary... We need war movies now, even more than in the 1940s," Klavén says.

Ratcheting up the rhetoric is the *New York Post's* Michael Fumento, who writes: "Just how many Hollywood movies have been made in which the bad guys are Islamist terrorists... If you have to guess, guess 'none.'" Fumento blames "Tinseltown terror

apologists [for] not wanting to stereotype either Arabs or Muslims." As a result, "the moguls in La La Land... are giving us the equivalent of 1943 movies equating FDR with Hitler." Other critics say that pressure groups, censorship, and greed are preventing portrayals of evil Arabs on movie screens. Declares *LA Weekly's* Nikki Finke: The industry "doesn't have the balls to tell the truth [about Arabs and Muslims]. Hollywood has long been loath to portray any Arabs as villains, much less Muslim extremists," she writes, "because its movies make a lot of money in the Middle East." Finke goes on to say that Hollywood is "giving aid and comfort to the enemy," and that they are "getting rich doing it." Screenwriter Barbara Johnson, too, contends that Hollywood has ignored Islamic "terror on screen." She argues that producers have "bowed to the pressure of Muslim activists" and calls Arab and Islamic "special-interest groups... a threat to all that the creative community stands for."

Elaborating on this reel mythology are critics Michael Medved and Robert Sklar: They made a fuss because the bad guys in the 2004 remake of *The Manchurian Candidate* were not Arabs but capitalists. Though Arabs "are the most logical villains," they're not in the movie, says Sklar, because "it's politically incorrect to offend Muslim religious and ethnic responsibilities." Medved writes that the "movie industry has pointedly avoided harsh treatment of... Islamic radicals." Medved is upset because *The Pacifier* (2005) featured Serbians and neo-Nazis as villains, which he finds "completely unrealistic." Medved and Fumento are also distressed about *The Sun of All Fears* (2002). In Tom Clancy's book, the villains are a cadre of American Indians, former East Germans, and Arabs. But the movie's evildoers are German neo-Nazis. Director Phil Alden Robinson explained the switch, telling the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), "I hope you will be reassured that I have no intention of promoting negative images of Muslims or Arabs." "By cooperating with organizations like CAIR," Fumento wrote, "Hollywood kowtows to groups that aid and abet terrorists."

Like Fumento, Medved believes *Fear's* bad guys most certainly should have been only Arab Muslims. "Our enemies," he preaches, "are Islamic and fascist." And, he argues, Hollywood's failure to

focus on these "evil people...has become dangerous for our culture and for the strength of our republic."

Such shallow criticism bring to mind the intelligence of Stephen Hawking, who called the greatest threat to knowledge "not ignorance," but "the illusion of knowledge." Evidently Hollywood's defamnation of Arabs in more than 1,150 feature films isn't enough. *Cineaste's* editors, though, suggested that film critics who "resort to name-calling or chastising filmmakers for 'meddling' in political issues merely... demonstrate the poverty of their own arguments. This sort of vituperation, in fact, reveals far more about the commentator than either the filmmaker or the film being attacked." The insights offered by *Cineaste's* editors are refreshingly welcome. Actor Ben Affleck, who portrayed Jack Ryan in *Fears*, applauded the producer's decision not to project Arabs as villains, and for good reason. "The Arab terrorist thing has been done a million times in the movies," he said.

I am encouraged by the fact that, unlike so many things in life, Arab caricatures in Hollywood movies are entirely within our control. Eradicating this stereotype should no longer be an insurmountable barrier. Some notables—such as critics Deborah Young (*Variety*), Howard Rosenberg (*Los Angeles Times*), and author Norman Solomon—have already taken a stand. They recognize, as does director Sally Potter, that besides the "history of conflict, there is also the history of multicultural friendship." Performers such as Puerto Rican singer Ricky Martin, actors Anna Thomson and Joshua Jackson, and Adam Yauch of the Beastie Boys have also spoken out. "Most Middle East people are not terrorists," said Yauch during the 1998 nationally telecast MTV awards. "Racism that comes from the US toward Muslim people and Arab people, that's something that has to stop. The United States has to start respecting the people from the Middle East in order to find the solution to the problem that's been building up over many years," Yauch said to applause from the audience.

Speaking at Morocco's 2002 International Film Festival, actress Anna Thomson echoed Yauch's concerns, telling reporters that the US media continue to project "ghastly lies about Arab people that are just not true." At the 25th annual Arab Children's Conference in Amman, Jordan (July 2005), Ricky Martin went out of his way

to meet with a group of Arab teenagers. The youths were polite but despondent, complaining that Western media always projected them as "terrorists." Martin, a past victim of Latino-bashing, understood their concerns. He told the youngsters he would help them change Westerners' negative perceptions of Arabs: "I promise I will become a spokesperson if you allow me to," he said. "I will defend you and try to get rid of any stereotypes." The youths cheered. Speaking at Dubai's 2006 International Film Festival, Joshua Jackson (*Bobby*, 2006) told a nationally televised audience: "Every time I travel to any country, be it considered slightly foreign or very foreign, I am always struck by massive similarities rather than massive differences. We Americans and you Arabs," he said, "have many more things in common than we have differences."

American Arab Entertainment Summit

One of the problems the United States has in the Middle East is "its failure to effectively communicate with the Arab people," writes Graham Fuller, a former CIA analyst. "I have never felt such an extraordinary gap between two worlds. Clearly, in a region where we desperately need friends and supporters, their number is dwindling, and we are increasingly on the defensive." Many in the region, contends Fuller, mistakenly believe that the US war on terrorism is merely a cover for a war on Islam. President Bush, too, has addressed the war against Islam myth. Speaking before the United Nations General Assembly in September 2006, the president spoke directly to peoples of the Middle East, saying: "Extremists in your midst spread propaganda claiming that the West is engaged in a war against Islam. This propaganda is false. We respect Islam."

In order to change the Arab world's opinion of the United States, and vice versa, the government should act now to narrow this "extraordinary gap." Unfortunately, new commercial films released by our allies are bashing Americans and widening this gap. Look at Turkey, a country of nearly 70 million Muslims living in a secular state. For decades Turkey has been our committed partner, first in the Korean War and in confronting the Soviet Union, then in fighting terrorism. Yet, Istanbul's teenagers flocked to see, again and again, a not-so-flattering view of Americans in *Valley of*

the Wolves (2006). One reason the teens enjoyed watching Turkey's \$10-million Rambo-like box-office hit is that *Wolves* is based on a real event about our soldiers abusing Turkish troops. On July 4, 2003, some American GIs in Iraq made a grave mistake. Thinking eleven Turkish officers were insurgents, the GIs arrested and handcuffed them and pulled hoods over their heads. The film's opening frames dramatize this mistake. *Wolves* goes on to present damaging scenes and caricatures such as a stereotypical US commander "Sam" and his bible-thumping "trigger-happy" marines. Viewers witness coalition soldiers firebombing a mosque, abusing Abu Ghraib prisoners, and killing scores of Iraqi civilians, even children. The film also shows a US army surgeon taking organs from dead Iraqi prisoners and shipping them off to buyers in New York and Tel Aviv.

Wolves' success is due, in part, to Turkey's anti-American feelings. "On the Turkish street public opinion of America has been steadily declining," reports the *New York Times*. "Favorable views of America plummeted from 52 percent of Turks in 2000, to 15 percent in 2003." When questioned whether *Wolves* would hurt Turkish-American relations, specialist Egemen Bagis told *Times* reporter Sebnem Arsu: "Our alliance with the United States has very strong roots. One movie cannot destroy it."

The Turks are not alone. Egypt, another Washington ally, has also seen recent stereotypical Americans on movie screens. Egypt released a highly entertaining but wildly anti-American farce, *The Night That Baghdad Fell* (2005). The film's reel Egyptians describe Americans as "bullies, rapists and killers." They fear US troops will invade their country and destroy Cairo. And in *Night*, fantasy sex scenes demean a real US government official. In the film, a belly-dancing Egyptian actress—a "look-alike for Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice"—performs a strip tease. Reports Daniel Williams of the *Washington Post*: Before 9/11, such negative images in Egyptian cinema were rare. In the past, "Americans, if portrayed at all [in Egyptian cinema], were cast as unwitting victims of crafty Egyptian tour guides." Even contemporary Bolivian movies now "depict Americans as various sorts of demons." James McEnteer points out that films such as *Los Andes No Green en Dios* (2005), *American Visa* (2006), and *Quien Mato a la Llamania Blanca?* (2006)

show Americans as reel "violent, gun-toting spaghetti-western thugs, heartless bureaucrats stonewalling visa seekers and drug traffickers."

These films from South America to the Middle East share a common theme: They offer "heavy-handed portrayals of Americans [that] reflect a long-term cultural distrust of US motives." Will Bolivia, Turkey, Egypt, and perhaps other countries continue this new trend, projecting Americans as diabolical villains?

What about us? Will we continue projecting Arabs as villains? To help us improve cultural relations and win the war on terror, says David Abshire, president of the Center for the Presidency, we should take "a fresh look at our communications strategy, at what we communicate, how we communicate, and to which audiences." Abshire contends that media misperceptions lead to mutual misunderstandings, which in turn "impede dialogue and cooperation between the West and much of the Arab world." He emphasizes: "Perception" is the linchpin; "perception is as important as reality." Yet, their perceptions of us and our perceptions of them remain garbled. The 9/11 Commission's final report gave US diplomacy a "D" for its failed Middle East diplomacy efforts. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld affirmed the "D" grade.

During Rumsfeld's March 2006 visit to the Army War College he said: "We probably deserve a D or D- as a country as to how well we're doing in the battle of ideas." Iraq, especially, continues to be problematic. To try to influence Iraqi opinion, in 2004 our government began broadcasting the Arabic-language program *Alhurra* (Arabic for "The Free One"). But, according to President Bush and a Zogby International poll, it turned out to be a multi-million-dollar failure; less than 1 percent of viewers in five Arab countries watched it. We shelled out millions for TV and billboard advertisements. We employed Iraqi Sunni religious scholars to help us launch information campaigns. We contributed money to several Iraqi newspapers so that they would print positive articles written by US soldiers.

Journalists like Alan Riding are critical of our failed PR campaigns. "It is too much to expect 'public diplomacy,' today's euphemism for cultural propaganda," writes Riding, "to provide a quick fix." To bridge this cultural divide, "new tactics are needed—innovative solutions to address new realities." Early on, in her

February 2003 testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Charlotte Beers, undersecretary for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, addressed this "cultural divide." She warned that injurious stereotypes of Americans were impacting behavior on the Arab street: "We are talking about millions of ordinary people, a huge number of whom have gravely distorted, but carefully cultivated images of us—images so negative, so weird, so hostile that I can assure you a young generation of terrorists is being created." Months after Beers's testimony, Ambassador Marc Charles Ginsberg and his colleagues met about 30 young, gifted image-makers, some of whom had won Academy Awards and Emmys. They agreed that "the war in Iraq was not a war against Islam." They also agreed on the desperate need to contest stereotypes, and to develop new entertainment programs that "would be in Arabic with Arab actors, producers, and writers." If we work together to open lines of communication, said Ginsberg, these films will "help convince peace-loving Muslims they are not the target." Sums up 9/11 Commission chairman, Governor Thomas Kean: "We worry about bin Laden and al-Qaeda; we should worry far more about the attitudes of tens of millions of young Arabs, and hundreds of millions of young Muslims."

To alter the attitudes of these young people I propose a major American Arab Entertainment Summit, one which would be candid about differences but would also stress similarities. The summit would be designed to recognize, contest, and correct images of reel evil "others." Participants could also focus on religious commonalities and the Islam-as-the-Green-Menace stereotype. Emphasizing the need for an American-Arab dialogue are Angelina Jolie and Deepak Chopra: "Watching [movies, TV shows, and] the news, one would think that all [Arabs and] Muslims are either wildly fanatic or wildly irrational," Chopra says. "Frankly, I'm tired of seeing [more than] a billion people as one bogeyman.... To begin our process of listening and understanding," the United States should "host an international gathering that will improve communications with the Arab world." Affirms Jolie: "We're at a time in our lives where there is so much fear and there is so much anger; it's crucial 'for people to remain focused [and] to calm down enough to have a dialogue about finding solutions.'"

Two decades ago we set a masterful precedent for contesting Russian stereotypes, the successful 1986–87 Cold War “Entertainment Summit,” sponsored by Mark Gerzon’s Mediators Foundation. This summit came about because Gerzon was unsettled about reel Japanese images, the “Yellow Menace,” as well as 1980s anxieties about reel Communists, the “Red Menace.” Hollywood’s 1980s films such as *Red Dawn*, *Invasion USA* and others were projecting reel “evil Soviet communists” invading the United States, killing Americans. Gerzon was equally concerned that Soviet films were stereotyping Americans as ruthless, heartless capitalists. Intent on “ending the Cold War on the big screen,” Gerzon and his global bridge-building colleagues brought together at his summit, for the first time, delegations from both the Soviet and American film industries. Gerzon arranged for Hollywood producers to meet with Soviet imagemakers in four major cities: Los Angeles, New York, Moscow, and Tbilisi. For weeks, participants pondered how to best go about eradicating offensive American and Soviet images. Co-productions, they agreed, would be one way to help create deeper understanding and respect between the peoples of both nations. In the end, the major studios and entertainment guilds on both sides of the Iron Curtain moved forward, forming a partnership that helped foster more accurate portrayals.

Gerzon’s successful summit helped bring about an abrupt halt to many reel depictions of Soviet Communists as bogeymen, and it also helped foster co-productions. Today, Andy Bird, president of Walt Disney International, calls Russia “a priority country”—more than 50 Russians are working in Disney’s Moscow office. Disney isn’t alone in tapping the market for Russian-made films. Twentieth Century Fox Film’s teen comedy *Waiting for a Miracle* (2007) was “produced by a joint venture half-owned by Sony.” Explains Marina Jigalova-Ozkan, managing director of Mickey & Company’s Russian operation: “We want Russian families to go to the cinema to watch a Disney movie, but this movie need not be produced in Hollywood.” Gerzon believes that what’s happened with Russia illustrates that “when film producers, directors, and movie stars of a culture move beyond stereotypes of the ‘other,’ mainstream populations soon follow.”

One opening summit program might be the screening and discussion of a non-Arab film, CBS-TV’s *Misunderstanding China* (1972). This single documentary helped pave the way for improved Chinese–American relations. *China* shows how politics and entertainment are intentionally intertwined, and CBS moguls and political leaders used this film to eradicate fixed Chinese stereotypes and to advance the US government’s foreign policies. The historic *China* was already being written, filmed, and edited months before CBS telecast the show—on the evening of President Richard Nixon’s surprise trip to China. Narrated by Charles Kuralt, the documentary revealed, for the first time ever, America’s long-held prejudicial attitudes toward this Communist country and its people. China’s reel message supported President Nixon’s real fresh policies: “Dirty commie” stereotypes in US popular culture should cease; we should see more accurate images of the Chinese and their culture; the Chinese, especially their ping-pong players, are pretty much just like us.

As *New Republic* columnist Joseph Braunde pointed out: “When it comes to the struggle for hearts and minds in the Middle East, motion pictures [and TV shows] may well be a better ambassador of goodwill to Arab audiences than Washington’s public diplomacy campaigns.” To achieve greater mutual understanding, summit participants might include political, religious, and entertainment leaders from the US and the Arab world. Attending might be the president’s public diplomacy staff, Hollywood’s Guild members, MPAA executives, media moguls, and filmmakers and actors who’ve shown an interest in the issue, such as directors Mira Nair and Oliver Stone and actors Michael Douglas and Gary Sinise. Douglas works with Global Nomads Group, which helps children from across the world gain a better understanding of humanity’s cultures and religions. One Global Nomads program gave “American students the chance to... understand more clearly Iraqis as human beings.” Sinise co-founded Operation Iraqi Children (OIC), a grassroots program that collects and ships school supplies and toys to Iraq for distribution by US troops to Iraq’s children.

Arab-American imagemakers would be important participants: In addition to those I’ve already mentioned in this chapter,

Sanaa Hamri, Hollywood's first Moroccan film director *Something New* (2006); actresses Selma Hayek and Touriya Haddad (*Five Fingers*); the young Omar Naim, who wrote and directed the science-fiction thriller *The Final Cut* (2004); Ruba Nadda, the Canadian-Arab director whose romantic feature about a Canadian-Muslim woman in love with a non-Muslim, *Sabah* (2005), delighted audiences; and Jehane Noujaim, whose award-winning documentary *Control Room* captured the 2006 TED Prize. Noujaim was also awarded \$100,000 to help support her one world-changing wish: "To bring the world together for one day a year through the power of film."

Robert Inger, Disney's chief executive, and Michael Lynton, CEO of Sony Pictures Entertainment, should also participate. Lynton and Inger are innovators who are creating and expanding local-language film production businesses. Sony is currently working with "directors and actors in China, India, Mexico, Spain, and Russia to make movies for release in each of those markets and, on occasion, internationally as well." Inger has linked Disney with film companies and producers in China, India, Latin America, South Korea, and Russia. Up-and-coming Arab filmmakers, from Jordan to Dubai, should participate, to discuss with Inger, Lynton, and other executives possible co-productions in Arab nations as well. Director Nadine Labaki should attend; Lebanese audiences have applauded her heart-warming feature *Caramel* (2007). Set in present-day Beirut, the movie shows the humanity of five women, Muslim and Christian, young and old, working side by side in a beauty salon. There's Nayla Khaja, Dubai's first female producer, whose 2004 documentary, *Unveiling Dubai*, illustrates that in Dubai "women are as likely as men to be driving late-model Jaguars; and blue jeans are as common in shopping malls as the black abayas." And Jordan's Randa Ayoubi, whose new cross-cultural animated TV cartoon series, *Ben & Izzy*, follows the adventures of two 11-year-old boys, Izzy from Jordan and Ben from the US. Others attending might be American and Arab film scholars, emerging writers and directors who are interested in developing scenarios that reflect the region's cultural richness and diversity. Recently, Jordan's students, for example, began participating in writing workshops offered by the Sundance Institute, and

thanks to Steven Spielberg, some are enrolled in degree programs at USC's School of Cinematic Arts. Three of Hollywood's upcoming Iraq-themed movies, *Battle for Haditha*, *Redacted*, and *The Hurt Locker*, were filmed in Jordan. Saudi Arabia's Prince al-Waleed Bin Talal could also participate. He hopes to develop a creative, independent Arab cinema, having financed the Kingdom's first feature film, *Keif al-Hal?* [How are you?]. In the works are several other films, to be shot in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and Tunisia.

Finally, Iraqi filmmakers such as Mohamed al-Daradji and Ismael Ferroukhi should attend. Ferroukhi's loving French film *Le Grand Voyage* (2004) shows the evolving relationship between a devout father and his not-so-religious son as they travel 3,000 miles by car from their French home to Saudi Arabia, where the father makes his pilgrimage in Mecca. Memorable frames show the father at prayer, interacting with pilgrims, and though he has barely enough money for bread and eggs, he humbly assists those less fortunate than himself. In April 2007, Baghdad hosted al-Daradji's homegrown feature *Ahlam*, about local Iraqis caught up in warfare. Produced in the face of physical dangers and government intervention, it's one of a few features to come out of Iraq since the US invasion, reports *Variety's* Ali Jafar. While filming on the streets of Baghdad, al-Daradji often wielded "a camera in one hand and an AK-47 in the other; he was kidnapped twice and shot at by both insurgents and US troops." He and his colleagues believe Arabs should tell stories about themselves. "Iraqi filmmakers," he says, "must stay here and make our films even with all the dangers... We must show the Iraqi point of view." Algerian-French filmmaker Rachid Bouchareb concurs: "We have only been in the audience while the West gave us [its version]. We need to change that. Why is the cameraman always pointing in one direction?" he asks. "We have to show the other side."

Summit sessions could take place in Hollywood, New York City, Beirut, and Cairo; they could be telecast and viewed by audiences throughout the world. Viewers could see Arab and American imagemakers engaged in purposeful dialogue, challenging and ultimately modifying clichéd views of each other. One summit session could consider the question: How can we make Arab movies more readily available to American viewers? Like

most foreign movies, Arab-produced films do not reach most viewers via mainstream US movie theaters or TV or cable outlets. Instead, the films receive limited screenings, mainly at Arab film festivals in Santa Fe, Chicago, Minneapolis, Seattle, San Francisco, and Washington, DC. "Though audiences at these festivals," says film specialist John Sinno, are able to see Arab experiences that are narrated by Arabs, "it's still a limited group. But that's all right; attendance is growing so it's a kind of a win-win situation."

Throughout the summit, critics, government officials, and academics should play pivotal roles in maintaining a constructive dialogue, one which enhances the quest for peace and harmony. "Dialogue," reminds Diana Eck, professor of comparative religion at Harvard, "enables each of us—Christians, Jews, Muslims, and others—to find a means to understand ourselves, our faith, and our culture more deeply, enabling us to become instruments of creative change." Religion teacher Jamie Hamilton, for example, takes his Phillips Exeter Academy students to observe Friday prayers held on campus. One participating student wrote in his final paper, "While attending Muslim prayers, I underwent a great paradigmatic shift, discovering something that watching CNN (where Muslims are portrayed as terrorists first, humans second) for nearly my whole life had shielded from my eyes; Islam is not something to be scared of...." The student's words offer a potent reminder that by confronting our ignorance—and by working to overcome it—we have the ability to live in a pluralistic society with respect for each other.

Israeli filmmakers might also participate in an open, meaningful conversation with their Arab "cousins." Their presence could help debunk status-quo prejudices, leading to new co-productions similar to *Encounter Point* (2006), a memorable documentary that shows ordinary Israelis and Palestinians working together in Israel to achieve peace. Israel's Robi Darniel, whose son was killed in the conflict, speaks for all the film's non-violent protagonists when she says: "It's necessary to see each other as human to stop the cycle of violence." For those readers who question an Israeli presence, consider this July 22, 2006 letter from 36 Israeli filmmakers to Palestinian and Lebanese filmmakers who were attending a film festival in Paris. The letter was

written when Israel was attacking Lebanon: "Allow us to tell you that your films, which we try to see and circulate among us, are extremely important in our eyes. They enable us to know and understand you better. Thanks to these films, the men, women, and children who suffer in Gaza, Beirut, and everywhere else our army exercises its violence, have names and faces. We would like to thank you and encourage you to keep on filming, despite the difficulties."

Granted, an American Arab Summit similar to Gerzon's successful Iron Curtain gathering alone can not be expected to fix all the region's problems. Public diplomacy can only be effective if it becomes a part of and helps reinforce fresh, substantive policies that can eventually bring about a just Middle East peace. In his acclaimed book *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East: 1776 to the Present*, Michael Oren points out that American popular culture has impacted the region and its peoples. Oren goes on to say that peace is possible, provided the United States replace fantasies with realities. Replacing our fantasies, however, may be difficult, especially if Oren's concluding thought is true: "And producers of films about the mysterious, menacing Orient," he writes, "will never lack for audiences." David Rollock, a former State Department diplomat who studies Arab attitudes toward the US, points out that there are limitations to any public diplomacy campaign. "We cannot turn the picture upside down and make America loveable," says Rollock. "There are real differences, and no amount of fluff or clever programming will be able to change that." Still, the summit would certainly help reduce the region's increasingly negative attitudes about the United States, and vice versa. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice says, "We are facing a generational struggle against a new and deadly ideology... We need to do much more to dispel dangerous myths [about the United States] and get out the truth. Our interaction with the rest of the world must be a conversation, not a monologue."

Together, our voices form a global chorus, one which may curtail the stereotype's damaging impact. As Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel reminds us, "Intolerance is the enemy of progress, the enemy of humanity." Let us resolve mutual myths by moving forward, addressing dangerous, fixed misperceptions of Islam,

Arabs, and Americans. By setting into motion a long overdue and vital dialogue, the summit could help bring about a necessary and major rethinking of how we project them and how they project us. And it might even raise the failed diplomacy D grade to a solid B.