

WIKIPEDIA EDIT

Roula Seikaly

TO: Wikipedia Collaborators

FROM: Roula Seikaly

DATE: April 19, 2024

SUBJECT: Overview of edit to "Stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in the United States"

Summary:

This packet includes a memo that describes edits I applied to the Wikipedia article "Stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in the United States," the revised article, and a copy of the original article.

Edits were made across the entry's three sections, and are intended to improve the article's overall clarity, concision, and citation accuracy.

Link to article:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotypes_of_Arabs_and_Muslims_in_the_United_States#cite_note-4

Reducing Passive Voice:

Passive voice was present throughout the article, but it was most concentrated in the brief introduction. I rewrote sentences in the active voice throughout to make the article both more concise and more readable.

Concision:

I removed extraneous articles, modals, prepositions, conjunctions, and relative pronouns in order to make the article more grammatically correct. The revised draft has shorter sentences, which aids readability. Some longer sentences were retained in order to honor the author's voice.

Contextual content:

I added bracketed text to provide context, ease transitions between sentences, and clarify the author's ideas or meaning.

Hyperlinks:

I severed unnecessary hyperlinks to other Wikipedia articles in order to streamline reading. Many of the links led to content that adds little to no useful context.

Citations:

I left a note about updating one of the dead citation links. I didn't look at every citation, but I suspect a dedicated review might reveal additional links that need to be updated.

Note for Subject Matter Experts:

Subject Matter Experts may want to review applicable contemporary scholarship about how Arabs and Muslims are culturally stereotyped. Work by the late author Jack Shaheen is foundational to the analysis of this topic, but it is dated.

Please let me know if you have any questions about this project. Thank you!

Revised Version

Stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in the United States

Stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in the United States have been presented in various formats by **American mass media**. Stereotypical representations of **Arabs** are often manifested in a society's **media, literature, and theater**. Historically and predominantly negative representations have adverse repercussions for Arab Americans and Muslims in their daily interactions with others, as evidenced in current events. Similar inaccurate stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims are found in American textbooks, which theoretically should be less-creative expressions.

“Billionaires, bombers, and belly dancers”^[edit]

A report titled *100 Years of Anti-Arab and Anti-Muslim Stereotyping* by **Mazin B. Qumsiyeh**, director of media relations for the **American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee**, describes what some in the Arab American community call “the three B syndrome”: “Arabs in TV and movies are portrayed as either **bombers, belly dancers**, or **billionaires**”, a reference to Arab men being portrayed as either terrorists or wealthy oilmen, and Arab women as sex objects. The report also **notes the** cartoons **[that Arabs and Muslims find insulting, US-based Arabs and Muslims]** are the most affected by these stereotypes, which **cause** psychological harm **and feed Arab and Muslim** dehumanization that can lead to physical attacks. According to Mazin B. Qumsiyeh:

Thomas Edison made a short film in **1897** for his patented **Kinetoscope** in which “Arab” women with enticing clothes dance to seduce a male audience. The short clip was called *Fatima Dances*. The trend shifted over the years and was dominated by the “billionaires” for a short while, especially during the oil crises of the seventies. However, in the last 30 years, the predominant stereotype by far has been “Arab bombers.”^[3]

In a **Los Angeles Times** piece published on July 28, 1997, **Laila Lalami** offers a 12-step guide to making a successful Arab-bashing movie, including such items as “the villains must all have beards”, “they must all wear **keffieh**”, “they must all have names like Ali, Abdul or Mustapha” and **[they must]** “threaten to blow something up.”^{[4][5]}

After the **September 11th terrorist attacks**, Arab American actors have found themselves more likely typecast as terrorists.^[6]

Jack Shaheen, Professor Emeritus of Mass Communications at **Southern Illinois University**, documented these trends in his book *The TV Arab* (ISBN 0-87972-309-2), which identifies more than 21 major movies released over ten years that show the **US** military killing Arabs, with Arabs depicted as terrorists or enemies of the United States. These include:

- **Iron Eagle** (1986)
- **Navy SEALs** (1990)
- **Patriot Games** (1992)
- **Executive Decision** (1996)

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In *Reel Bad Arabs* (ISBN 1-84437-019-4), Shaheen writes that "television's image of the Arab is omnipresent [and] is becoming a part of American folklore." He also writes that Arabs have "consistently appeared in American popular culture as billionaires, bombers, and belly dancers."^[7] **[In a 2009 interview with Patrick Harrington, Shaheen elaborates further.]** "Arab Muslims are fanatics who believe in a different god, who don't value human life as much as we do, they are intent on destroying us (the west) with their oil or with their terrorism; the men seek to abduct and brutally seduce our women; they are without family and reside in a primitive place (the desert) and behave like primitive beings. The women are subservient — resembling black crows — or we see them portrayed as mute, somewhat exotic harem maidens."^[8]

The movies Shaheen identifies as the five worst in terms of negative **portrayal of Arabs in modern films** are:

- *Rules of Engagement* (2000); "a film which "justifies" US Marines killing Arab women and children."^[9]
- *The Delta Force* (1986)
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- *True Lies* (1994); "Arnold S. INC." shoots dead Palestinians like clay pigeons"
- *Wanted: Dead or Alive* (1987); "Arab thugs... plan to ignite Los Angeles... Killing millions."

These stereotypes are the main focus of **[writer/director Nicole Ballivian's 2006 film *Driving to Ziggiland*. In a semi-autobiographical role, actor Bashar Daas is a taxi driver who is invariably typecast as an Arab Muslim extremist in US film auditions.]**^{[9][10][11]}

Another stereotypical character is **Jeff Dunham's Achmed The Dead Terrorist**, which **mockingly riffs Ahmed, the Prophet Muhammad's middle name**. **There has been no action or reaction from the American public or human rights and religious group [in protest] of this, and other stereotypical characters in [Dunham's] show.**^[12]

Airport racial profiling after 9/11^[edit]

Main article: [Airport racial profiling in the United States](#)

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, in which 15 of the 19 hijackers were **Saudi Arabian and all Muslim**, Arabs and Muslims complained of increased scrutiny and racial profiling at airports. In a **poll** conducted by the *Boston Globe*, 71 percent of blacks and 57 percent of whites believed that "Arabs and Arab Americans should undergo special, more intensive security checks before boarding airplanes."^[13] Some Muslims and Arabs complained of being held without explanation and subjected to hours of questioning and arrest without cause. Such cases have **led the American Civil Liberties Union [to file lawsuits on behalf of Arab and Muslim clients]**^[14] Fox News radio host **Mike Gallagher** suggested that airports have a "Muslims Only" line in the wake of the 9/11 attacks stating, "It's time to have a Muslims check-point line in America's airports and have Muslims be scrutinized. You better believe it, it's time."^[15] In Queens, New York, Muslims and Arabs complained that the NYPD unfairly targets Muslim communities in **raids** tied to the alleged **2009 [Najibullah] Zazi** terror plot **[to bomb the New York City subway]**.^{[16][unreliable source?]}

Stereotypes in film and their effects^[edit]

Western stereotypes of the Middle East have made their way into the film industry, including that Muslims are terrorists, that all Muslims and Arabs look alike, and that the women are oppressed and

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abused, are only housewives and don't work.^[17] The TV series *Homeland* portrays a Palestinian as a terrorist. In the show, Arabs are shown as "backward, violent, and uncivilized".^{[18][unreliable source?]}

When impressionable American children, who may not have much experience with Muslims or Arabs, see negative depictions of Arabs they may think that these portrayals are accurate. Children who have had some exposure to Muslims, or were familiar with Islam, viewed Arabs and Muslims more positively than less knowledgeable children.^[19]

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Original

Stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in the United States

Stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in the United States have been presented in various forms by the [mass media](#) in the [American](#) culture. Stereotypical representations of [Arabs](#) are often manifested in a society's [media](#), [literature](#), [theater](#) and other creative expressions. These representations, which have been historically and predominantly negative, have adverse repercussions for [Arab Americans](#) and [Muslims](#) in daily interactions and in [current events](#). In American textbooks, which theoretically should be less-creative expressions, similar negative and inaccurate stereotypes are also found for Arabs^[1] and Muslims.^[2]

“Billionaires, bombers, and belly dancers”^[edit]

A report titled *100 Years of Anti-Arab and Anti-Muslim stereotyping* by [Mazin B. Qumsiyeh](#), director of media relations for the [American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee](#), describes what some in the Arab-American community call "the three B syndrome": "Arabs in TV and movies are portrayed as either [bombers](#), [belly dancers](#), or [billionaires](#)" a reference to Arab men being portrayed as either terrorists or wealthy oilmen, and Arab women as sex objects. The report also says that cartoons have been insulting to Arab and Muslims, and people who live in the US are the most affected by these stereotypes, which don't only cause psychological harm but also help feed into dehumanization that can lead to physically attacks. According to Mazin B. Qumsiyeh:

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When impressionable children in the US who may not have much experience with Muslims or Arabs see negative depictions of Arabs they come to believe that this is reality. Children who had had some exposure to Muslims or were familiar with Islam viewed Arab Muslims more positively than less knowledgeable children.^[19]

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