

## Arab Defamation In The Media: Its Consequences And Solutions

By Casey Kasem

How—and why—are our entertainment media defaming and dehumanizing the Arabs as an entire people? And how does this damage not only Americans of Arab descent but all Americans of every descent?

To begin with, let's get a sense of what information about Arab-bashing you already have. Here are eight questions for you.

1. How many Arabs have you seen portrayed as bad guys on the screen?
2. How many Arabs have you seen portrayed as good guys on the screen?
3. How many Arab terrorists have you seen portrayed?
4. How many Arabs have you seen portrayed as victims of terrorists?
5. Have you heard of the murder of Leon Klinghoffer?
6. Have you heard of the murder of Alex Odeh?
7. If you are of non-Arab descent, is

most of what you know about Arabs taken from the media?

8. If you are of non-Arab descent, have you ever gotten to know an Arab or someone of Arab heritage?

As we go along, I'll be referring to motion pictures and television shows

you may have seen. Please ask yourself how you'd feel if your ethnic group were portrayed this way day after day, year after year.

Here are some of the things we "know" about Arabs from films and TV.

Most of them are rich, right? Not in the real world. Except for a handful of



Casey Kasem

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## About This Issue

"Appalling acts of hatred," was President Bush's description of the rash of incidents against Arab-Americans in the wake of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

In Boston's Charlestown district, for example, Ahmad Taha, 41, heard a voice at midnight outside his apartment telling him to "move out or you'll die." That morning his landlady said she had received several calls from neighbors with friends and relatives in the armed forces demanding his ouster. Taha, a Palestinian American, moved.

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) reports three to four such threats each day, as opposed to one a week prior to the invasion.

The image of the ugly Arab has been manufactured, in large part, by the entertainment industry. NBC's soap opera "Santa Barbara" recently built a story line around a mythical Arab oil-producing kingdom whose inhabitants were depicted as backward, irrational, lustful, deceitful and violent. Following the Iraqi invasion, radio station WDFX in Detroit asked listeners to phone in "bad Iraqi jokes," some of which the station's own general manager acknowledged "crossed the line." And some disc jockeys have been playing pop songs dubbed over with blatant Arab stereotyping.

Which brings us to Casey Kasem, himself a former disc jockey, now celebrating his 21st year on radio as the

cracking voice that is synonymous with radio's musical countdowns. If you don't know him, ask any teenager.

Over the past few years, Casey has done TV spots and specials aimed at combatting alcohol abuse, drunk driving and hunger, as well as a major campaign against smoking for the National Cancer Institute. Several times he has been arrested for his stand against nuclear weapons and homelessness in America. He is a board director of FAIR (Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting) and has helped the Foundation for Mideast Communication hold workshops that bring Arabs, Jews and others together to discuss conflict resolution.

When the anti-Arab incidents broke out in August and September, Casey went on The MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour, CNN, and the Phil Donahue Program to help correct the negative Arab perceptions. When we asked him to do this issue on his personal feelings about the subject, the man who is known as "America's DJ," who was born Kemal Amen Kasem, the son of Lebanese Druze parents, said "Yes" without missing a beat.

Our special holiday gift selections are offered on pages 10-15 under four categories: Middle East Culture, Religion in the Middle East, the Palestine Conflict and U.S.-Israeli Relations.

John F. Mahoney,  
Executive Director

wealthy oil countries, most of the 160 million Arabs in 22 countries earn less than a thousand dollars a year per capita. But they're portrayed as rich in movies like *Protocol*, *Jew of the Nile*, and *Cannonball Run II*. They're sort of crazy billionaires, putting American men, women and children in jeopardy. Or

acting crudely and stupidly, as in "WKRP in Cincinnati," "The Love Boat," "One Day At a Time" and many other series and comedy specials.

Another thing we all "know" about Arabs: most of them are terrorists, right? They're all fanatic maniacs, out to brutalize innocent people. And only

good old American blood-and-guts mayhem can deal with them. As in movies like *Iron Eagle* and *The Delta Force*.

Another thing that Hollywood taught us is that Arab men are womanizers! Isn't that how Italian actor Rudolf Valentino got his big break in 1921? He played *The Sheik*, a fierce Arab chieftain who kidnaps and seduces a young English girl. However, that "Arab sheik" that our leading lady eventually falls in love with turns out to be no Arab at all, but a Scotsman—because what Anglo-Saxon woman could fall in love with an Arab?

By the way, during the 1920s, there were 86 other films in which Arabs were the heavies!

In 1921, a hit song came out with a lyric that goes:

I'm the Sheik of Arab.

Your heart belongs to me.

At night when you're asleep,

Into your tent I'll creep...

Ever since the '20s, American filmmakers have given us the same image of Arabs. Besides creeping into ladies' boudoirs, they're reckless, disorganized, foolish, inconsistent and untrustworthy.

How about cartoons? For decades, from childhood on, we've watched animated Arabs: buffoons, with big swords, chasing cartoon heroes like Bugs Bunny, Porky Pig, Woody Woodpecker and Popeye. And then we've watched live actors, dressed as Arabs with big swords, chase Laurel and Hardy or Abbott and Costello. Bob Hope and Bing Crosby ran from Arabs in *The Road to Morocco*, and 40 years later Dustin Hoffman and Warren Beatty ran from them in *Ishtar*.

As for television, we've seen private eyes and police from "Cannon" and "Charlie's Angels" to "Cagney and Lacey" and "Mancuso"—and too many others to count—who have all heroically foiled bestial, bloodthirsty Arab terrorists and white slavers. Even

Michael Landon, as an angel on "Highway To Heaven," foiled a white slavery ring sending its victims to an Arab country.

A lot of bad Arabs on our screens! But wait a minute: where are the good Arabs? The answer—according to Hollywood—is: there are none. If Jews or blacks, Hispanics or Asians were constantly depicted this way today...would we stand for it? Are you kidding? In this day and age, it would be called "racism" and "bigotry"—and rightly so! But seldom do we hear such criticism of the media when it's Arabs who are being bashed—and that's been going on for 70 years.

We see it in the rest of our media as well: books, magazines, newspapers, comic books and advertising. And what is it doing to America? What purpose does it serve? Who benefits? What happens when those images are distorted?

## When Prejudice Hits Home

Let's begin on a personal level. A few years ago, when my son, Mike, was around 12, he came home one day and said to me, "Dad, I hate Arabs."

I said, "What?" I was shocked. I mean, I'm Arab-American. I was born in Detroit, of Lebanese descent—and that makes my son Arab-American, too!

And he knew that, even though it didn't have a lot of meaning for him. Like a lot of second- and third-generation youngsters, he probably just thinks of himself as plain, unflavored "American."

I asked him why he said he hates Arabs. He said he sees what terrible people they are from movies and television.

And that's the point. It all builds up, until it becomes our conditioned reaction.

Ugly scenes like this have happened in thousands of other Arab-American homes.

You know, this is the sort of thing

the Nazis did to the Jews in the 1930s and '40s. Hitler commissioned a propaganda film called *The Wandering Jew*—and one scholar said, "even a Jew, after seeing this picture, would become anti-Semitic."

Imagine the pain Jews felt then. Imagine the pain Arab-Americans feel now including some Arab-Americans that you may know! Like consumer advocate Ralph Nader; heart surgeon, Dr. Michael DeBakey. The founder of MADD—Mothers Against Drunk Driving—Candy Lightner. The football Heisman Trophy winner from Boston College, Doug Flutie; and the race-car winner of the Indy 500 in 1986, Bobby Rahal. Performers like popstars Paula Abdul and Paul Anka, or actor and Oscar-winner for *Amadeus*, F. Murray Abraham. Actress Marlo Thomas and her father, Danny Thomas, comedian, humanitarian and founder of St. Jude's Children's Hospital. Authors like Khalil Gibran of *The Prophet* and Wil-

liam Peter Blatty who wrote *The Exorcist*. Political figures like Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell and White House Chief of Staff John Sununu. And let's not forget the family of the courageous teacher and astronaut who died aboard the *Challenger*—Christa McAuliffe.

I remember very well a man who was born in Lebanon and at the age of 14 worked his way to America. He didn't know a word of English and he couldn't even read or write Arabic. He worked as a peddler in Mexico, then in the railroad freight yards in Pennsylvania, before moving to Detroit to open a small grocery store. He married another Arab-American. They raised two boys, put them through school and taught them responsibility. They set an example for their children by being the hardest-working grocers and most enthusiastic Americans I've ever known: my mother and father.

All these people and many others

# Arab-Americans You May Know

## Writers:

Poet/Philosopher: *"The Prophet"*  
 Novelist: *"The Exorcist"*  
 Playwright: *"Finnian's Rainbow,"*  
*"Blommert Girl"*

## Humanitarians:

Consumer advocate  
 Founder of Mothers Against  
 Drunk Driving  
 Founder of St.  
 Jude's Children's Hospital,  
 (star of radio, film, TV)

## Members of U.S. Congress

Senate Majority Leader (D-Maine)  
 Former Senator from South Dakota  
 Former Senator from South Dakota  
 Congressman from West Virginia  
 Congresswoman from Ohio  
 Former Congressman from California  
 Former Congressman from Texas

## Professional People:

Pioneer heart surgeon  
 Credited with eradicating venereal  
 disease in China  
 Lawyer; won record judgment of \$1  
 billion for Texaco  
 Journalist

## Entertainers:

Top recording star and  
 choreographer  
 Opera star  
 One of first teen idols, singer-  
 songwriter  
 Specialty pop star Herbert Khaury,  
 a.k.a.  
 Mel of TV's *"Alice"*  
 Cpl. Klinger of *"M\*A\*S\*H"*  
 Oscar for Best Actor, *"Amadeus"*  
 Producer: *"Golden Girls"* (Emmy  
 Award), *"Driving Miss Daisy"*  
 (Oscar)

Khalil Gibran  
 William Peter Blatty

Fred Saïdy

Ralph Nader

Candy Lightner

Danny Thomas

George Mitchell  
 James Abourezk  
 James Abdnor  
 Nick Joe Rahall II  
 Mary Rose Oakar  
 George Kasem  
 Abraham Kazen, Jr.

Michael DeBakey, M.D.

George Hatem, M.D.

Joseph D. Jamail  
 Helen Thomas

Paula Abdul  
 Rosalind Elias

Paul Anka

"Tiny Tim"  
 Vic Tayback  
 Jamie Farr  
 F. Murray Abraham

Tony Thomas

## Entertainers (continued):

Star of *"That Girl"* and multi-Emmy  
 winner

Teenage pop star with two No. 1  
 records

TV and movie actor, star of *"Cochise"*

Producer of *"Halloween"* horror film  
 series

Radio host of *"American Dance Traz"*  
 and program director of L.A.'s  
 KPWR

Director: *"Who's the Boss?"*, *"WRKP,"*  
*"Married People"*

Director: *"Facts of Life,"* *"Full House,"*  
 et al

Actor, starred in TV's *"Mad Squad"*

Actor, starring in *"Head of the Class"*

One of radio's most "American"  
 institutions, *"American Top 40,"*  
 was created by:

## White House Officials:

Chief of Staff, former Governor of  
 New Hampshire

Special Presidential envoy

Former Chief of Protocol

## Athletes:

NFL Hall of Fame linebacker for  
 Chicago Bears

Heisman Trophy winner and NFL  
 quarterback

Indy 500 winner and National Race  
 Car Champion

Syracuse University basketball star  
 University of Illinois football star and

Indianapolis Colts quarterback  
 UCLA basketball coach

Baseball outfielder: Red Sox, Braves,  
 Angels, Rangers

World featherweight boxing champ,  
 1936-37

Marlo Thomas

Tiffany  
 Michael Ansara

Moustapha Akkad

Jeff Wyatt

Asaad Kelada

John Bowab  
 Tige Andrews  
 Khrystyne Haje

Casey Kasem &  
 Don Bustany

John Sununu  
 Phillip C. Habib, Ph.D.  
 Selwa Roosevelt

Bill George

Doug Flutie

Bobby Rahal  
 Ron Seikaly

Jeff George  
 Jim Harrick

Joe Lehoud

Petej Sarron

are proud to be Americans—but they also have a right to be proud of their heritage like everyone else.

And what about that heritage, that heritage that goes back thousands of years? Let me take a minute to tell you about it. The Arab civilization gave the world a religion, a language, an alphabet—and advances in science

and medicine that inspired great European thinkers like Leonardo da Vinci. In mathematics, Arabs invented algebra and the use of the zero. In astronomy, they used astrolabes for navigation, star maps and celestial globes, and the concept of the center of gravity. In geography, they pioneered the use of latitude and longi-

tude. Arabs invented the water clock, and in music, the lute and the guitar.

Their architecture inspired the Gothic style in Europe. And in agriculture, they introduced oranges, dates, sugar and cotton, and pioneered sophisticated water works and irrigation systems.

Their contributions to medicine

**Business People:**

World's largest retail auto dealer  
Chairman, Carolco Pictures ("*Rambo*,"  
"*Total Recall*")  
Headed the FAA, was CEO of Pan Am  
President of Paramount Pictures'  
Domestic TV  
Manufacturer, famous line of men's  
slacks  
President of Occidental Petroleum,  
chemist and inventor  
Manufacturer, men's and women's  
slacks  
Manufacturers, "Mod-O-Day"  
women's dresses  
Former owner, St. Louis Cardinals  
baseball team  
Former owner, Miami Dolphins  
football team

**Military Officers:**

America's first jet ace, Korean War  
Fought alongside Gen. Patton, World  
War II  
On Gen. Eisenhower's Staff,  
World War II

**Miscellaneous:**

Men's wear designer of 1990 (Council  
of American Fashion Designers)  
School teacher/astronaut, died  
aboard the "*Challenger*"  
1st woman chancellor of a Big Ten  
university (Wisconsin)  
U.S. National Chess Champion,  
1986-87  
President of Wayne State University,  
Detroit

**State Office-Holders:**

Mayor of Takoma Park, Maryland  
(former)  
Mayor of Farmington, Michigan  
(former)

**State Office-Holders (continued):**

Mayor of Olean, New York  
Governor of Oregon (former)  
Mayor of St. Albans, West Virginia  
Secretary of State of Texas  
Mayor of Miami Beach, Florida  
Mayor of Jacksonville, Florida  
Mayor of Colorado Springs, Colorado  
Mayor of Rayville, Louisiana  
Mayor of St. Paul, Minnesota (former)  
Mayor of Central Falls, Rhode Island  
Mayor of Peoria, Illinois  
Mayor of Homer, Louisiana  
Mayor of Hempstead, New York  
(former)  
Mayor of Mankato, Minnesota (former)  
Mayor of Bridgeport, Connecticut  
Mayor of Azusa, California  
Mayor of Oakdale, Louisiana  
Majority Leader, Tennessee legislature  
Mayor of Dothan, Alabama  
Mayor of Hartwell, Georgia  
Mayor of Pomona, California  
Treasurer of Rhode Island  
Attorney General of Kansas

John Ash  
Victor Atiyeh  
Adeeb Bassitt  
George Bayoud  
Alex Daoud  
Tommy Hazouri  
Robert Isaac  
Joseph Khalil  
George Latimer  
Thomas Lazieh  
James Maloof  
Joseph Michael  
George Milhem  
Herb Mocol  
Mary Chapar Moran  
Eugene Moses  
George Mowad  
James Naifeh  
Alfred Saliba  
Joan Saliba  
Donna Hassan Smith  
Anthony Solomon  
Robert Stephan

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Compiled with the cooperation of: American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), Arab American Institute (AAI), Arab American Press Guild of Los Angeles, National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA).

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were especially outstanding. They developed the first teaching hospitals and traveling medical clinics. They performed the first caesarean section—a procedure by which my youngest daughter was delivered recently! The Arabs also discovered the contagious nature of tuberculosis and how disease can be transmitted by

clothing, utensils and personal contact. They diagnosed stomach cancer, measles, smallpox, cholera and bubonic plague—all of this 300 years or more before Louis Pasteur taught us to destroy harmful bacteria by pasteurization! And this wealth of knowledge and civilization pulled the Europeans out of the Dark Ages when

the Arabs came into southern Europe, beginning a Golden Age in Spain that lasted for centuries.

But enough about Arab contributions to civilization. Let's get back to the contemporary Arabs we've been taught to hate.

# How Distorted Images Get There

How do these distorted images get onto our TV and movie screens?

Well, everything starts with a writer, who's probably fighting a deadline. Most writers are. The producers who hire them want the script yesterday. Under this pressure, it's tempting to save time with a shortcut—using an old stereotype.

Even though it may have nothing to do with the main plot, they drag in a nasty Arab villain or two. They did it in *Oh God! Number 3, St. Elmo's Fire*, and many, many more.

Remember *The Black Stallion*? That film was a tremendous hit. My kids loved it, and my daughter, Kerri, dragged us to see it time after time. She's said more than once when she grows up, she wants to marry a horse! In the opening sequence, aboard the ship, we see a nasty Arab cruelly whipping the horse—and later stealing the little boy's life jacket when the ship begins to sink. In novelist Walter Farley's original, that nasty Arab character did not exist. He was added to the film.

Come to think of it, my son, Mike, must have seen that picture—and that scene—at least six times.

That's just one example of gratuitous Arab-bashing in a movie. Now let me give you one from television.

Irwin Shaw's novel, *Evening In Byzantium*, was made into a four-hour special. The original, touching story—about an older man in love with a younger woman—suddenly included an Arab group of nuclear terrorists, plus three rich oil sheiks asking the hero to make an anti-Israeli movie. The novel had made no mention of Arabs at all.

Finally, let me give you three more quick examples of stereotyping; the notion of American cities and neighborhoods under attack by Arab terrorists.

Take *Back To The Future*—the original: Libyan terrorists come out of

nowhere and are suddenly driving around the parking lot of an American shopping center at night, shooting at the heroes, and still dressed as though they were in the Middle East!

*Black Sunday*: more terrorists. This time they're planning to murder spectators at the Super Bowl in Miami—including the President of the United States—by hijacking and arming the Goodyear blimp.

Or NBC-TV's *Under Siege*. Anyone who's seen it won't forget the image of the terrorist's rockets striking the dome of our Capitol Building and exploding. Pure, unadulterated fiction. They confused Iranians with Arabs—making people watching the film think those were Arab terrorists. Also, there has never been a square inch of America attacked by Arabs, or Americans of Arab heritage, ever—except on our films.

Where do writers, producers and directors get this stuff?

You know, there are foreign films—some made by Israelis—that show Arabs in a better light.

But now, some say that the many Jewish-Americans who work in Hollywood promote the negative image of Arabs on screen. Well, I have Jewish friends in the business—many are executives—and if anyone is sensitive about stereotyping, they certainly are. Still, we're all products of our upbringing. If you're raised in a family where attitudes about Arabs are very negative, reinforced with what we've been talking about, you tend to have such attitudes. But such attitudes can change.

Veteran filmmaker Ted Flicker, who is Jewish and a lifelong Zionist, is the co-creator of the hit TV comedy series "Barney Miller." He participated in one of our Arab-Jewish dialogue workshops in conflict resolution.

And after discovering that Arabs were no different than anyone else,

and that they were now being defamed and dehumanized as Jews had been for hundreds of years, he did something about it.

He spoke out against it, before the Board of Directors of both the Writers Guild and the Directors Guild, and his speech—titled, "Billionaires, Bombers and Belly Dancers"—was published in the newsletters of both guilds for the general memberships.

Here's part of what he said. Quote: "For those of us who remember what it was like to be Jewish in the '30s and '40s, stereotypes were part of the process that separated us from the rest of the American community. They were the cause of schoolyard fights and psychological scars that many of us carry today.

"I think honor requires that we, the makers of our nation's myths, consider the plight of these people..."

"My fellow writers. Help. Get rid of the Arab stereotypes." End quote.

Thanks to Ted Flicker, that action inspired me to give a similar speech before the Boards of the Screen Actors Guild and the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. And it, too, was published for the memberships.

Now, let me make a point here: Hollywood didn't start the whole idea of Arabs as the bad guy. That was born from a long tradition of competition between European and Middle Eastern societies over trade routes, colonies and religious differences—from the days of the Greeks and Romans, through the Crusades, to modern times. So we inherited those Arab stereotypes from Europe.

Some stereotypes have small grains of truth in them somewhere, but then they get blown out of proportion and are slapped on everybody.

We've come a long way since the days when American films commonly depicted: black people as stupid, cowardly or shiftless; American Indians as bloodthirsty savages; Latinos as lazy, untrustworthy, or as evil, wild-eyed bandits; and Asians as sinister and treacherous. Today the image of those groups has been balanced by good guys and heroes among them. But not yet for the Arabs.

There are those who will say, "But,

Casey, if you've followed the news for the past 40 years, how could you not have a rotten view of Arabs? Example: OPEC raises oil prices, and we're lined up at the gas stations." I remember that, but I also know that, at the time of that oil crisis, we were importing only 6 percent of our oil from Arab countries. And that price hike was initiated by a non-Arab country, Iran, when America's friend, the Shah, was in power. But the stereotype remains alive today.

Acts of ugly Arab terrorism have been dramatized again and again. But where's the balance? Arabs have also been victims of terrorism. In the history of man's inhumanity to man, few nations are without blood on their hands: Turks killed Armenians; the U.S. Army shot down Sioux men, women and children at Wounded Knee; the Germans gassed the Jews; the Romans threw Christians to the lions; and the Khmer Rouge marched fellow Cambodians into the "killing fields." The leaders who set those policies and ordered those actions were obviously bad guys. But that doesn't mean all their fellow countrymen are bad guys, too. Every nation, every religion, every ethnic group has a mixture of good and bad.

But, when it comes to Arabs in the Arab-Israeli conflict, for example, in the make-believe world of Hollywood—even in Technicolor—everything is black or white; the Arab side always has the bad guys, the other side always has the good guys. No

balance.

In the real world, in their ignorance, frustration, fear, anger, hate and thirst for vengeance on each other, misguided individuals on all sides have done horrible things—and innocent individuals on all sides have been victims.

But that's not the story Hollywood tells.

And to compound things, filmmakers who keep presenting a negative, dehumanizing image of all Arabs in fiction are subtly encouraging not only hate but real-life acts of violence against Arabs. And there's been a lot of it—from beatings to rape—to murder.

Let me give you a not-very-publicized example—the murder of Alex Odeh in 1985, caused by a pipe bomb planted in his office. He was an Arab-American from Palestine, a poet and the local head of a branch of the ADC, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee.

You want to make movies about violence in America? Here was violence in America. But the Arab was the victim, not the killer. There hasn't been a movie about the killing of Alex Odeh. Of course, it was overshadowed by the tragic events on the Italian cruise ship, the *Achille Lauro*, a few days earlier. And I don't have to tell you about the shocking murder of Leon Klinghoffer, a Jewish-American tourist in a wheelchair, that occurred there. There have already been hundreds of column inches in newspa-

pers and magazines about it, as well as two TV movies. It was dramatic, yes. But Alex Odeh was an American citizen, too, murdered here in America.

Is it less a tragedy when an Arab is murdered than when anyone else is murdered?

Now, let's take a 60-second look at how this one-sided coverage translates into our political policy. Some Americans exposed to Arab-bashing grow up to be our leaders—leaders who turn their *learned* prejudices into foreign policy that can be costly in terms of American lives, our tax dollars, and our reputation as an ethical people.

We want lawmakers and diplomats to be mature, and fair-minded, addressing all sides of an issue before committing our country to a course of action. How likely is that if they react automatically every time the word "Arab" comes up? I suspect that Ronald Reagan may have thought of the Arabs as "those guys" that tried to kill Paul Newman in *Exodus*, and Kirk Douglas in *Cast a Giant Shadow*, and Jimmy Stewart in *Flight of the Phoenix*.

If a legislator is uninformed when it comes time to vote on an issue, he probably falls back on a special-interest lobby or a lifetime of impressions he's picked up from the media. For example, on August 30th this year, in the Omaha *World-Herald*, Senator J.J. Exon, Democrat of Nebraska, said, "In the Arab world, life is not as important as in the non-Arab world."

## Stereotyping Remedies

Now that we know what the problem is, what's the answer? What can we do about negative stereotyping? First, let's talk about what the industry can do—and then what you can do.

The producers who hire the writers, the actors who read the lines, and the directors who shoot the pictures can stop it in its tracks before it gets started! All it takes is one of those people,

somewhere along the line, to have the courage to say: "No, I won't do it. It's wrong. What can we do to make it right?"

A few years ago, I was doing one of the voices in the TV cartoon series, "Transformers." One week, the script featured an evil character named Abdul, King of Carbombia. He was like all the other cartoon Arabs. I asked

the director, "Are there any good Arabs in this script for balance?" We looked. There was one other—but he was no different than Abdul. So, I told the show's director that, in good conscience, I couldn't be a part of that show. And I wrote a letter to the President and Chief Executive Officer of Marvel Productions, Margaret Ann Loesch.

Here is her reply, in part: "Dear Casey: I received your letter regarding the negative stereotyping that has been occurring on television in the portrayal of Arabs and Arab-Americans. I share your concerns.

"Your letter has been distributed to our writing staff and our voice directors in the hopes that they can be more sensitive to this issue and therefore more responsive to the problem."

Writing letters really works! And when broadcasters call our attention to stereotyping, it's important to show our appreciation. This note was from Arthur Lord, director of Special News Operations at NBC News:

"Dear Casey: Thanks for your kind letter concerning our 'Today' (show) report on Arab-bashing in the movies... The report generated quite a bit of mail—some of it quite positive. This response is gratifying, because perhaps people are beginning to be sensitized to the stereotyping of Arabs in the media and the lengthy process of ending that kind of abuse will have begun."

There's an example of someone in the industry initiating a positive action. Mail encourages more of the same.

Now what can the people who make those films do?

For starters, it means giving us some Arab men or women as central characters, heroes and heroines for balance. Some Arab-American families raising their children and helping their neighbors. Some stories with Arab sidekicks. Or, here's an easy suggestion—even the simple use of ordinary characters with Arab first names and surnames: doctors, lawyers, grocers and schoolteachers. How about some characters modeled after real-life Arab-Americans, like those I mentioned earlier, like a Ralph Nader type or a Dr. DeBakey, just to mention a couple?

And what about balance? When an Arab is the villain, how about seeing some other Arabs in the same story who are good guys? Remember, for every Abu Nidal—who's a renegade terrorist even to his own people—there are millions and millions of other Arabs, as decent as anybody in this

room.

A few films—unfortunately, only a very few—have given us examples of a more even-handed approach to Arabs on screen.

Now, you're saying, "Casey, I don't write movies, or direct in them, or act in them, and I'm not a television executive." Okay! But what if you catch an instance of Arab-bashing or any other ethnic-bashing in the media? You can still have a tremendous impact on the industry.

If it's a film, write that letter—even a postcard—to the filmmakers and the stars of the film, expressing your anger, disappointment and concern.

If the offense is on radio or television, phone or write the station manager or program director, or the production company that made the show—and especially the advertisers! Remind them there are viewers out there for whom attacks on heritage are painful and offensive.

Please, don't underestimate the power of your letter!

At the network level, each piece of mail is taken to represent a thousand people who didn't bother to write. Can you imagine the impact you and some of your fields could have? And take advantage of word-of-mouth: talking to just one person plants a seed. And a seed becomes a forest!

It was anthropologist Margaret Mead who said: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. In fact, that's the only way it's ever happened."

As you know, these abuses are not confined just to Hollywood. If a news item or any printed material seems biased or inaccurate to you...question it! Challenge it!

Talk about an article, here's one—and I'll make it my last example. In *Omni* Magazine, in a piece titled "The Importance of Hugging," Howard Bloom asserted that Arabs never show affection openly toward their children. He took one survey of primitive cultures, applied it to the entire Islamic cultures, and concluded that they, quote, "treat their children harshly. They despise open displays of affection. The result—violent adults."

Further in the article, Bloom wrote:

"Could the denial of warmth lie behind Arab brutality? Could these keepers of the Islamic flame be suffering from a lack of hugging? Could that deprivation help explain their thirst for blood?" Notice? He never comes right out and says, "It does this." He just asks "Could it...?" and leaves it unanswered.

His closing lines? "The Arab adult, stripped of intimacy and thrust into a life of cold isolation, has become a walking time bomb. An entire people may have turned barbaric for the simple lack of a hug." By the way, all this is from his book, *The Lucifer Principle: A Scientific Expedition Into the Forces of History*.

As an Arab-American who has discussed this with other Arab-Americans, I can tell you that Arab parents—mothers and fathers alike—are at least as affectionate with our kids as any people anywhere, sometimes to a fault—no different than you are with your kids.

When you catch something like that article, send a letter to the editor of the newspaper or magazine, and to the author. Do that regularly—and I send copies to my friends to keep them posted. And they send letters, too. That's the idea. The important thing is to speak up. It's been said that to ignore a wrong is to condone it.

In conclusion, I want to say please—join me. Join me in working for the day when the attitudes created by Hollywood never again will cause any child to despise his or her heritage.

The time for ignorance, fear and hate—for throwing names and throwing bombs—is long over.

The time for equal respect for all people everywhere is now. Call it "democracy," "perestroika," whatever. Ron Kovic, the author of *Born of the Fourth of July*, said it best: "Let's all step into a new age—the Age of Reason."

He's right. We are in a new age, and it's our responsibility to make it work. If not me, who? If not now, when?



# Tips On Writing To The Media

By Jay Goldsworthy

1. Write not only when you see something wrong but also (hopefully) when you see something right about ethnic portrayals. The idea is to encourage people to do the right thing.

2. *Call.* In the musical-chairs world of the entertainment industry, people change positions frequently. Call the TV network, production company, news bureau or whatever; ask for "Information," "Publicity," or the specific person's office you want. Ask the secretary who answers for the correct name, spelling, title and mailing address. Taking a little extra time to get these details right can make a difference in how seriously the recipient takes your message.

3. Be civilized. Most people in the industry are under pressure to deliver the goods, and much stereotyping occurs out of laziness or thoughtlessness. Still, that's no excuse for letting it continue. Be firm in your criticism; you have every right to be. Take the high road; show yourself, by your language, to be an understanding but justifiably outraged viewer, standing up for a morally and socially acceptable ideal.

4. The targets are the old, simplistic stereotypes, as well as newer, more vicious caricatures based on current politics and headlines. Describe the offensive material clearly, and what's wrong with it, in your view. Specifics carry more weight than generalities.

5. The goals are fairness, justice and balance. No one ethnic group has to be portrayed as good guys all the time, to right the wrong of stereotyp-

ing. But the offense is portraying them as bad guys all the time. That practice should end—now.

6. Sometimes you'll receive an apology from the other party about the offensive material. Sometimes the reply will offer an excuse or excuses in defense of it. And sometimes you may not get a reply at all. It doesn't matter. *Write!* Let the executives and others in charge of making the shows know how you feel. The letters *do* get read, and enough of them *can* make a difference.

7. Get others to write, too. Let each writer express his or her feelings in their own words. A lot of letters all looking and sounding the same seem too "engineered." The media people want to hear from the general public, not just one lobby group. Viewers represent ratings, and ratings mean profits—or losses.

8. Be realistic. Some things won't change overnight. It takes continued, persistent effort to change long-standing attitudes, especially when news headlines and current events don't help matters any. But that's just the time to dig in and persist! If other ethnic groups have seen improvement in their treatment by the media, so can yours. Stick with it!

## Whom To Write To?

A storyline involving Arabs ran earlier this year on the NBC-TV daytime series, "Santa Barbara." Its portrayals of Arabs left a lot to be desired, sparking numerous letters of complaint.

Letters went out not only to the Chairman of NBC Entertainment, but also to the President of NBC Entertainment, the Vice President of Program Standards and Community Relations, the Executive Producer of "Santa Barbara" at NBC-TV in Burbank, California, the President of New World Productions (the production company), and even the two writers for the show at NBC-TV in Burbank who had scripted that storyline. And that was just Casey's correspondence.

By the time a theatrical movie hits the screens, it's too late to change what's in it. But you can still complain to a TV network that runs it if it offends you.

As for news programs, both radio and TV news shows have producers and directors, besides the newscasters who write and/or deliver the news. The local stations that air them have their executives, too.

Performers (actors, radio disc jockeys, TV personalities, etc.) have more power than you think. No one wants to be unpopular or be seen as immoral. They can't take back what was said in an insulting remark or unfair ethnic portrayal—but they can certainly feel uncomfortable about saying it again, after reading your letter.

Most important, do a little research and write to the sponsor(s) of an offending show! You could write to the ad agency representing the sponsor, or the sponsor's own marketing department—but bypass the middlemen and go straight to the top. Write to the President of the sponsoring firm(s). Viewers not only represent ratings, they represent *customers*—and that means *you*.

*Jay Goldsworthy, a colleague of Casey Kasem, is President of Ideas & Imagination, North Hollywood, CA.*

# Casey Kasem: A Case Study In Sensitivity

On his weekly radio and TV shows, Casey takes great care in choosing his words, because words can hurt. He learned this for himself at an early age.

The first stage show he ever did was at the Annex Theatre in Detroit at the age of 16. It was a talent show, and Casey felt he was a sure winner. But one of his routines, though meant to be comic, included an imitation of actor Peter Lorre committing a gruesome act. Kids loved it; adults thought differently. He came in last.

"That taught me a lesson," he recalls even now. "Never do anything onstage you wouldn't do in front of your mother."

In later years, his ethical standards were tested when he began doing commercials. Certain his voice could sell, he had quit smoking in 1964 after the Surgeon General's warning came out. And his first commercial audition in 1968—was for a cigarette spot! He went back to his agent and told him never to send him out for any more cigarette spots.

When Casey turned vegetarian, it meant giving up lucrative fast-food

commercials. This carried over to his voice work in TV cartoon shows. Today, as Shaggy on "Scooby-Doo," he asks that his character eat veggies, not hot dogs—and the production company, Hanna-Barbera, respects his wishes.

As the voice of NBC promos for upcoming programs, he called attention to any copy he thought might be offensive or in poor taste. And the writers changed it.

In his acting career, he remembers one episode of the successful TV series, "Police Story," with some regret. It was created by Los Angeles police officer and author Joseph Wambaugh. Wambaugh had gone into partnership with a Lebanese haberdasher—after nearly arresting him. The haberdasher had been selling fine suits from his car, telling customers they were stolen. Naturally, the police, suspicions aroused, raided the man's apartment. "They're not stolen," the haberdasher explained. "I just tell people that to make them buy." Wambaugh, the investigating officer, later used the event on "Police Story." And Casey got the role of the haberdasher.

When asked if the clothes were stolen, Casey's character's explanation ("I just tell people they're stolen to make them buy") included the remark, "It's an old Lebanese custom." "It's an old American custom, too," replied the cop.

If it was meant as a joke, it failed—with Casey. As a Lebanese-American, his conscience was telling him not to say the line, but he followed the script. "And in doing that, I branded a whole ethnic group," he sighs. Of course, the cop's line branded Americans, too, but that's beside the point.

There may be people who buy more eagerly if they think an item was stolen—and is therefore going at a cheaper price. But that line could have been said *without* throwing in the remark about the Lebanese—or the Americans, for that matter.

Something to think about when future dialogue is written.

And a reminder why Casey Kasem looks over his scripts very carefully these days to see if anyone might be hurt by what he's about to say.

*By Jay Goldsworthy*

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### Middle East Culture

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8" x 10" illustrated collection of 250 recipes adapted for the American kitchen. 1990 limited edition. List: \$16.95; AMEU: \$12.95.



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John Hayes, ed.

6 1/2" x 9 1/2", 260 pp., tinted b&w plates. Classical Arab world, handsomely illustrated. M.I.T. Press, 1983. List paper: \$13.95; AMEU: \$11.50.

**ARAB FOLKTALES**

*I. Bushnaq*

Arab traditions reflected in 130 lively folktales. Pantheon Books, 1986, 386 pp. List pbpbk: \$19.95; AMEU: \$10.95.



**THE T.V. ARAB**

*Jack G. Shaheen*

How TV, movies, cartoons and documentaries stereotype Middle Eastern People. Bowling Green Univ. Press, 1984, 146 pp. List pbpbk: \$6.95; AMEU: \$4.95.



**VEILED SENTIMENTS: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society**

*L. AbuLughod*

Study of Bedouin women through their poetry. Univ. of Cal. Press, 1986, 317 pp. List pbpbk: \$10.95; AMEU: \$7.95.



**DISTANT VIEW OF A MINARET AND OTHER STORIES**

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Explores universal themes through eyes of a traditional Muslim woman. Heinemann Books, 1985, 238 pp. List pbpbk: \$7.50; AMEU: \$5.75.



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Good chapters on Iraq's political history, economy, military and opposition movements. Zed Press, 1989, 266 pp. List pbpbk: \$15.00; AMEU: \$11.95.



**JERUSALEM IN HISTORY**

*K.J. Asali, ed.*

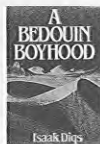
Covers nine periods in history of Jerusalem, from 3000 BC to 1987 AD. Olive Branch Press, 1990, 295 pp. List cloth: \$16.95; AMEU: \$11.95.



**BEFORE THE FLAMES: A Quest for the History of Arab Americans**

*G. Orfalea*

Author traces his roots through a century of Arab-American history. Univ. of Texas Press, 1988, 354 pp. List cloth: \$22.50; AMEU: \$13.75.



**A BEDOUIN BOYHOOD**

*I. Digs*

Vivid portrait of Bedouin culture by a gifted storyteller. Universe Books, 1983, 176 pp. List cloth: \$10.40; AMEU: \$4.75.

# Religion in the Middle East

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The Anglican Canon of St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem writes of the theology of the Palestinian Uprising. Orbis Books, 1989, 227 pp. List pbk: \$9.95; AMEU: \$6.95.



☐ **A GUIDE TO CHRISTIAN CHURCHES IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

*Norman A. Horner*

Includes church histories, present status of Mideast Christians, photos, maps and statistics. Mission Focus Pub., 1989, 128 pp. List pbk: \$5.00; AMEU: \$4.50.



☐ **TOWARD A JEWISH THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION: The Uprising and the Future**

*Marc H. Ellis*

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Video documentary, Part 1, on the Christian Palestinians of the Holy Land, who are struggling to maintain a Christian witness in Occupied Palestine. Bernadette Productions, 1988, 30 minutes, color. List: \$29.95; AMEU: \$25.95.



*The Forgotten Faithful Truth, Justice and Peace*

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A Palestinian priest, whose village was destroyed by Israeli soldiers on Christmas 1951, tells of his quest for peace between Palestinians and Jews. Chosen Books, 1984, 224 pp. List pbk: \$6.95; AMEU: \$4.95.

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*George E. Irani*

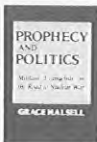
First major study of subject. Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1986, 218 pp. List pbk: \$10.55; AMEU: \$7.50.



☐ **GOD IS ONE: The Way of Islam**

*R. Marston Speight*

Excellent introduction to Islam, with maps, illustrations, photos. Friendship Press, 1989, 139 pp. List pbk: \$5.95; AMEU: \$4.75.



☐ **THE ISLAMIC IMPACT**

*Y. Haddad, et al., eds.*

Ten noted authors analyze role of Islam in fashioning Islamic civilization. Syracuse Univ. Press, 1984, 264 pp. List pbk: \$12.95; AMEU: \$5.95.

☐ **PROPHECY AND POLITICS: Militant Evangelists on the Road to Nuclear War**

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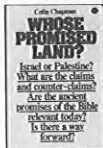
*L. Pinneo & G. Conklin, producers*

Video documentary, Part 2, on Christian Palestinians, focuses on their suffering during the Palestinian Uprising. Bernadette Productions, 30 minutes, color. List: \$29.95; AMEU: \$25.95.

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**SACRED RAGE: The Crusade of Militant Islam**

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Good introduction to political resurgence of militant Islam in Middle East. Touchstone, 1986, 336 pp. List pbk: \$7.95; AMEU: \$5.75.

## The Palestine Conflict

**LETTER FROM PALESTINE**

*Produced by York Assoc. & WGBH Ed. Foundation*

Video documentary of Palestinian medical team coping with Israeli occupation; not shown on many PBS stations. 28 minutes. List: \$30.00; AMEU: \$25.00.



**THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF ZIONISM**

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Prominent U.S. peace activist traces Zionism from its inception through the Uprising. Veritas Press, 1988, 150 pp. List pbk: \$7.95; AMEU: \$6.50.



**FACTS AND FABLES: The Arab-Israeli Conflict**

*Clifford Wright*

Answers to most often asked questions; appendix gives original documents and relevant maps. Kegan Paul, 1989, 239 pp. List cloth: \$35.95; AMEU: \$8.95.

**THE ZIONIST CONNECTION: What Price Peace?**

*Alfred Lilienthal*

Landmark work on the Arab-Israeli conflict; well-documented and indexed. Dodd, Mead, 1978, 872 pp. List cloth: \$19.95; AMEU: \$6.95.

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Careful, dispassionate account of the conflict and the various peace plans to resolve it. Univ. of Cal. Press, 1989, 322 pp. List cloth: \$24.95; AMEU: \$8.95.

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Palestinian diplomat tells of his negotiations with the British Mandate authorities. Essential for understanding Palestinian history from 1876-1949. I.G.T. Co., 1988, 800 pp. List cloth: \$45.00; AMEU: \$22.25.



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*Richard H. Curtiss*

Lists the 145 pro-Israeli political action committees run by AIPAC, which politicians they supported, and how much they gave. AET, 1990, 176 pp. List pbpbk: \$9.95; AMEU: \$6.75.



☐ **THE PALESTINIAN CATASTROPHE**

*Michael Palumbo*

Author uncovers new evidence that official Zionist policy in 1948 was to expel the Arabs and take their place. Faber & Faber, 1987, 233 pp. List pbpbk: \$19.95; AMEU: \$12.25.



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The Story Behind the Vanunu Revelation

*Mark Gaffney*

Riveting account of Israel's nuclear arms history. AMANA Press, 1989, 236 pp. List pbpbk: \$12.50; AMEU: \$7.95.

☐ **FROM BEIRUT TO JERUSALEM:** A Woman Surgeon with the Palestinians

*Dr. Sovee Chai Ang*

A witness at Israel's Kahan Commission Inquest on Sabra and Shatila and the Palestinian Uprising; not available in U.S. bookstores. Collins Pub., 1989, 302 pp. List pbpbk: \$12.00; AMEU: \$4.75.



☐ **INTIFADA:** The Palestine Uprising Against Israeli Occupation

*Z. Lockman & J. Beinun, eds.*

Insights into the Uprising and Israeli/U.S. peace movement. MERIP Books, 1989, 423 pp. List pbpbk: \$15.00; AMEU: \$10.95.



## U.S.-Israeli Relations

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Documents Kahane's ties to terrorist acts in the U.S. and to leading Americans. Lawrence Hill, 1990, 282 pp. List cloth: \$19.95; AMEU: \$11.75.



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Poignant account of author's first year in the Holy Land. Good gift to give to someone approaching the conflict for the first time. Macmillan, 1982, 193 pp. List pbpbk: \$7.95; AMEU: \$2.95.

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Covert U.S.-Israel relations from 1948-1967; new information on Israel's assault on the USS Liberty. Amana Books, 1987, 370 pp. List pbpbk: \$9.95; AMEU: \$6.75.

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*H. Bookbinder & J. Abourezk*

Two prominent Americans debate whether U.S. policy is in America's best interest. Adler & Adler, 1987, 312 pp. List cloth: \$18.95; AMEU: \$8.95.

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The book Israel tried to kill; now a bestseller. Reveals Israel's spy network in the U.S. and worldwide. St. Martin's Press, 1990, 371 pp. List cloth: \$22.95; AMEU: \$14.75.



**FROM BEIRUT TO JERUSALEM**

*Thomas L. Friedman*

Disillusionment of a Jewish-American newsman in the Middle East. U.S. National Book Award. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1989, 525 pp. List cloth: \$22.95; AMEU: \$13.50.

**AMERICAN JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS AND ISRAEL**

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Profile of major Jewish establishment organizations in the U.S. Inst. of Pal. Studies, 1986, 238 pp. List pbpbk: \$12.95; AMEU: \$7.50.



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Sharp critique of U.S. Mideast policy and double standards. Amana Books, 1986, 174 pp. List pbpbk: \$8.95; AMEU: \$4.75.

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One of America's leading journalists explores social, political and religious forces that have conditioned Israel to turn its back on peace negotiations. Harper & Row, 1987, 328 pp. List hdbk: \$19.95; AMEU: \$11.75.



**THEY DARE TO SPEAK OUT: People and Institutions Confront Israel's Lobby**

*Paul Findley*

Former U.S. Congressman documents how pro-Israeli forces in U.S. suppress public debate on Middle East issues. Lawrence Hill, 1985, 362 pp. List pbpbk: \$8.95; AMEU: \$5.95.

**THE ARMAGEDDON NETWORK**

*Mike Saba*

Author traces unauthorized dissemination of classified Pentagon documents to Israeli officials. Amana Books, 1984, 288 pp. List pbpbk: \$9.95; AMEU: \$5.95.



**JUST RELEASED.** Thomas A. Kolsky, **JEWS AGAINST ZIONISM: The American Council for Judaism, 1942-1948**, Temple University Press, 1990, 269 pp. First full-scale history of only organized American Jewish opposition to Zionism. "...absorbing and challenging"—*New York Times*. List (hdbk): \$39.95; AMEU: \$25.95.

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