Jack Shaheen, renowned analyst of images of Arabs and Muslims in Hollywood and other forms of American popular culture and media, was born in the U.S. to Christian Lebanese immigrants and grew up in multi-ethnic, working class Pittsburgh. As if personifying the American dream, Jack was the first Shaheen to go to college, let alone earn a PhD and become a college professor. It was relatively late in his life that he even developed a deliberate sense of his Arab heritage and identity or began to cultivate an interest in the Middle East region:

"So here I am with a PhD, I’m, let’s see, 1975, 40 years of age...I’m as ignorant, I can say that openly, about what’s going on in that region, as most Americans [are]. I simply didn’t know. And people might say, “well, you should have known” but I didn’t know! Why? Because I was exposed to the images and literature and news that told a completely different story. I was a product of my environment. I didn’t have access to American Arabs who were Muslim. I didn’t know any American Arabs who had lived in the region who could counter all of these images that had taken place. So I was very naive, very very naive."

As a professor of mass communications, an advocate for quality children’s television programming and a father himself, Jack and his wife Bernice watched with concern as their children began to notice “bad Arabs” in cartoons. His eyes were forever opened to these images which seemed to appear wherever he looked. Despite parallels he found between Arab images and derogatory images of Jews and African-Americans, his colleagues, publishers and the media branded him negatively as an Arab for the first time and deemed the subject unworthy of academic study. With a hardened resolve, Shaheen, assisted by his wife and family, spent the next 40 years archiving mass media and other materials that contained images of Arabs and Muslims. His hard-won publications demonstrate just how negative those images are: Reel Bad Arabs: Hollywood Villifies a People (which only documents 20th century films and was published in 2001, prior to 9/11), reviews more than 1000 films and finds only a dozen positive and 50 neutral images of Arabs or Muslims--the rest (900+) are negative. In the years since 9/11, we have seen these stereotypical images repeated perhaps even with an increased intensity. This indicates an even greater need to build skills to critique and remake our images of Muslims and Arabs. Shaheen cites an Arabic proverb in his book: “Al tikrar biallem il hmar. By repetition even the donkey learns.” His comprehensive research shows that Hollywood and American media have been using repetition
Dear MEOC Members and Perspectives Readers,

As I write this, I’m at a high school working with successive groups of students, teaching them media literacy, cultural competence and global awareness skills, using the Middle East as the case study. I want to leave them with the skills to recognize and analyze our society’s implicit assumptions about the Middle East, Arabs and Muslims.

My go-to ice-breaker activity for these sessions never fails to start an interesting conversation. I show students the first ten minutes or so of Disney’s Aladdin, and get the kids to yell out stereotypes they see and hear as they show up on the screen while I record them on the board. The stereotypes come fast and furious. Afterward, we discuss in more detail the way that physical characteristics are married with moral/ethical characteristics to create negative portrayals of the “bad guys,” stereotypes of the “Reel Bad Arabs” that students will see again and again in portrayals of the Middle East in entertainment and news media.

Students are inevitably surprised—even shocked—at how many stereotypes are embedded in this short film clip. When we talk about how young they were when they first watched Aladdin, and how many more examples of this kind of “entertaining stereotype” they have seen, they begin to realize how early and how insidious the process of creating stereotypes is.

Activities like this one and Jack Shaheen’s exploration of stereotypes in his books, film and exhibit are critical to helping students decipher not only what the dominant stereotypes of Arabs, Middle Easterners and Muslims are, but perhaps more importantly, how they are created. The most fun is then introducing students to images of these people that defy the stereotypes through music videos, blogs, twitter, new books, and film that shows a different and much more complex reality in the region. Susan Douglass’ piece showcases many such resources.

Consider sharing the activities you use to expose stereotypes and get students thinking more critically about the region’s complexities through the MEOC listserv (left). We will create a feature page on our website that highlights your contributions!

Barbara Petzen
MEOC President
Multiple sorts of stereotyping are operative regarding Arabs and Muslims. First, the two labels are often thought to be synonymous, despite ethnic and geographic diversity among both groups. Only about 13%-15% of all Muslims are Arabs, and more than 10% of Arabs are non-Muslim. Stereotypical physical characteristics have long been used to malign immigrants, such as “swarthy” complexion, hooked nose, dark hair, eyes, and other facial features. These markers have been applied to Jews in anti-Semitic caricatures as depicted in this archival cartoon (1) from the early 20th century.

As the cartoon illustrates, the stereotype of Jewish greed, hoarding, and taking advantage of the general need for financial institutions creates an idea of exploiting mainstream society’s need. Similar implications of exploitation have been combined with attitudes about oil wealth and applied to Arabs and Muslims in general under the false association of oil exporters with people who hate “us,” despite the fact that the US imports oil from many countries, including Canada and Venezuela. The implication that oil, a vital resource, is not legitimately “theirs” overlays the accusation of blanket support for terrorism in this “Blood for Oil” cartoon (below left, 2). In this image, terrorism, physical stereotyping and illegitimate wealth from exploitation are combined.

Another stereotype—the threat of nations being overrun by a detested group—has been applied both to Jews and Arabs/Middle Eastern people. In the archival example (below right, 3), Jews depicted as rodents overrun European countries. In the recent example about Iran (next page, 4), the country is compared to a sewer breeding cockroaches. Such extreme dehumanization is often associated with the atmosphere of war in both cases.

Stereotypes result in part from the frames in which modern nations are cast in the curriculum. At present, Arab and Muslim countries are viewed in terms of a dichotomy between tradition and modernity. Religion is cast as belonging to outdated tradition in this narrative, having no role to play in the civic life of the modernized nation. Little attention is given to civic life at all; the regime is the society. Textbooks generally extol post-colonial leaders such as Ataturk, Nasser, and the Shah of Iran as modernizers struggling against traditional elements in society. That these leaders were authoritarian may be mentioned, but is not questioned. This set of ideas lays the groundwork for current attitudes about the region today, which have been shaken somewhat—though not overturned—by the recent popular uprisings in these countries.

Continued on the next page
The Middle East and its inhabitants are also viewed through the lens of their status as an American foreign policy issue. The region itself appears as a function of US policy conundrums. People’s lives just don’t figure into the picture. This static frame was disturbed by the uprisings in the region, first in Iran in 2009-2010, then in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya and Syria in 2011-2012. The stereotype of Arabs as passive populations living under dictatorships convenient to western foreign policy has been thrown into question by the popular uprisings. This provides an opportunity for teachers to challenge students to see the cultural and civic undercurrents among populations in the region.

For background on the uprisings, or rather signs that foreshadowed these events, two types of sources are helpful as a beginning. The website Children and Youth in History has a set of resources on the Millennium Development Goals (5), one of which shows the percentage of females in basic and post-secondary education, which is approaching parity in Southwest Asia and the Middle East. The Arab Human Development Report chart on the youth bulge indicates the need to provide jobs and opportunities for a rising youthful population, a population with cellphones, the Internet and social media, all important factors in the popular uprisings. This provides an opportunity for teachers to challenge students to see the cultural and civic undercurrents among populations in the region.

Street art, poetry, and music provide the opportunity for students to analyze the demographic nature of the protests and values behind the uprisings. The involvement of youth in contemporary electronic culture helps correct for the view of others as mired in a pre-industrial culture. Several resources for the classroom can serve lessons like these. The first is the rap that helped set off the revolution in Tunisia, “el Général, the voice of Tunisia,” by Hamada ben Aoun, and a video made after the revolution in Tunisia (9). From Egypt, the music video “Sout al-Hurriyeh (the Voice of Freedom)” is useful (10). The lyrics and visuals reflect the values behind the mass uprising. It shows Egyptians young and old, male and female, secular and religious, and of different social classes. Scenes in the video remind of the danger, injury, and hardship the demonstrators confronted all over Egypt during those days. The poem recited in the middle of the song, “Al Midan” (the square, i.e. Tahrir square) by Abdel Rahman al-Abnoudi is translated as follows:

- Dark Egyptian hands against discrimination
- Rise outstretched amid roars of might, destroying the frames (the pictures of Mubarak)
- It brought out the noble youth and turned its fall into spring
- Awakening the murdered by a miracle achieved
- Kill me, but murdering me won’t retrieve your power
- With the ink of my blood I write a new life for the future of my country
- Is that my blood or the spring? Both are in green
- Do I smile from happiness or grief?

The article “The People Want” (11) in the special issue of the Middle East Report on The Art and Culture of the Arab Revolts discusses the content and spirit behind the slogan—just three words that express the longing for a voice—to be a citizen and not a subject. Other articles in the issue are also valuable. “Art and the Arab Awakening” (12) offers many links to murals, graffiti, performance art and other media like the Tunisian mural shown on the next page. Another source of the street art scene is the blog from Cairo, Suzee in the City, featuring stunning murals like the one on blocked-off Sheikh Rihan Street (next page, 13). Institutions have taken notice of the extraordinary street art movement, like the Casa Árabe photo exhibit Las Pintadas de la Revolución in Madrid, which features the now-removed image of the tank vs. a bread delivery bicycle (next page, 14). See also the Al-Monitor slideshow on Egyptian Street art (15).

As the Arab uprisings transitioned into the period of post-revolution elections and the disaster unfolding in Syria, and with the recent U.S. election, the foreign policy focus has returned, with talk of how the U.S. should somehow be shaping events, deciding outcomes and avoiding the rise of “Islamists.” For educators, the problem is to help students understand that the blanket term “Islamist” is applied to a myriad of different movements and parties in each country,
and they are not synonymous with extremists or militants or terrorists. The situation in Libya brings this problem into focus. An excellent book for teacher reading and excerpting for classes is Peter Mandaville’s 2007 book Global Political Islam, which raises many questions about these movements and their history, but also has striking chapters that illustrate the uniqueness of each country and those groups who express their politics in Islamic terms.

SOURCES AND FOR FURTHER READING:

1. www.holocaustresearchproject.org/holoprelude/dersturmgal/Anti%20Jewish%20Propaganda.html
9. Hamada ben Aoun, “El Général, the voice of Tunisia,” www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeGIJ7OouR0, and http://vimeo.com/20704029
10. “Sout al-Hurriyeh (the Voice of Freedom)” www.youtube.com/watch?v=PAEt6QJJi-c
13. Suzee in the City at http://suzeeinthecity.wordpress.com/2012/03/25/street-art-on-mohamed-mahmoud-photos/
Shaheen, Continued from p. 1

As a teaching tool to instill fear and hatred of the perceived “others” of today’s America--Arabs and Muslims, and anyone who looks like them.

As educators, teaching our students how to read and understand an ever-complex web of media--let alone recognize stereotypes and prejudice in it--is a task of enormous importance. In the process of cataloging, preserving, and mining Shaheen’s archive at NYU, I am convinced of the collection’s value in helping us do that hard work. The lessons explored through Jack’s collection and the resources we have culled from his life’s work teach not only recognition of the stereotypical negative, but also direct us to new media that present more realistic and empathetic depictions of Arabs and Muslims. Far from sugar-coating “the truth” as critics might have us believe, Shaheen’s ideal image would present Arabs and Muslims as human beings who, like other groups, engage in a full range of good, bad, and simply ordinary activities.

Just as Jack’s eyes were opened in the mid-70s to these powerful stereotypes, first we must train our own eyes to recognize these images. Only then can we pass the critical thinking skills required to read and critique the media along to our students.

This issue of Perspectives introduces new resources culled from Jack’s collection designed to engage audiences in understanding the history and development of Arab and Muslim stereotypes in American popular culture. Specifically, scholars at NYU have developed an affordable and versatile portable exhibit, A is for Arab, that is effective particularly when paired with media critique such as Shaheen’s documentary Reel Bad Arabs or by taking a historical look at Hollywood in the proposed Reel Arabs vs. Real Arabs film program (p. 8). We also point you to other classroom tools to counter stereotypes through a resource list (p. 7) and classroom ideas inspired by the 2011-2012 uprisings compiled by Susan Douglass (p. 3).

The lessons we learn through these activities of course extend beyond their applicaiton for Arabs and Muslims. Indeed, comparative analyses of other groups are present in the material and simple to connect with (Native Americans, Africans and African-Americans, Asians and Asian-Americans and many other groups). As we increasingly claim ownership of and seek to understand our prejudices as a society, we come closer to the ideal we preach in the American nation--liberty and justice for all.

Powerful, accessible and compelling, A is for Arab, which features images from the Jack G. Shaheen Archive, reveals and critiques the stereotypical portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in U.S. popular culture. Providing historical context about these images, which range from film stills to comic books to editorial cartoons, this traveling exhibition aims to educate and stimulate discussion about the impact of stereotypes on both individual perceptions and national policy.

Dimensions: The exhibition is comprised of 8 retractable banners, each measuring 36”w x 84”h. The bases of the banner stands are each 8” deep. With all banners positioned side by side, the exhibition measures a total of 24” in length, and for ideal viewing, should have a clearance of 12” on each side. To accommodate smaller spaces, several alternative arrangements are possible (it works especially well in hallways, for example).

Loan fee for non-profit, educational institutions is $250 plus one-way shipping. 100% of loan fee is applied towards the cost of processing and making the Jack G. Shaheen Archive accessible to the public. Individuals who wish to pay the loan fee on behalf of a non-profit can make the payment as a tax-deductible donation to NYU. Please contact apa.archives@nyu.edu for further information about how to host the exhibit.
Supplementary materials: Accompanying the exhibition for loan is a DVD copy of the award-winning documentary *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* and a DVD of oral history clips featuring Dr. Shaheen. Accompanying informational brochures and a list of other relevant resources are below.

**Race & Hollywood: Arab Images on Film**
[www.tcm.com/this-month/article/411149%7C0/Race-Hollywood-Arab-Images-on-Film.html](http://www.tcm.com/this-month/article/411149%7C0/Race-Hollywood-Arab-Images-on-Film.html)

**NYPD and “The Third Jihad”**
WNYC’s Brian Lehrer Show investigates the controversial NYPD use of the problematic documentary film *The Third Jihad* in training its police officers.

**All-American Muslim**
[http://tlc.howstuffworks.com/tv/all-american-muslim](http://tlc.howstuffworks.com/tv/all-american-muslim)
A TLC reality show following the ordinary lives of Muslim families in the U.S.

**Middle Eastern-American Resources Online**
[www.mearo.org](http://www.mearo.org)
Instruction modules include 1) the early immigration of Arabs to the United States from the 1880s to 1930s, 2) post-1965 immigration of Middle Easterners to America and post-9/11 discrimination, and 3) *Voices from the Heartland: Young Yemeni Americans Speak* (English and Language Arts). Classroom-appropriate documentaries point to the diversity of the Middle Eastern American community and its place in the cultural mosaic of the United States.
Reel Arabs v. Real Arabs

Historicizing/Critiquing/Remaking the Arab Image in Popular Culture

Help your students separate the reel from reality. Take a 100-year historical tour of representations of Arabs and Muslims on film (and discover how Hollywood really began with Orientalist Arab stereotypes) by creating your own film program. Paired with the A is for Arab exhibition, these films make for a comprehensive classroom or even school-wide activity. On a smaller scale, after watching Reel Bad Arabs together, have students write a review of one of the following films (or any other film with relevant content) to analyze how each film’s Arab and/or Muslim characters are portrayed. Make the activity comparative if you wish by using films focused on other groups.

Introduce the following films with these online clips featuring Jack Shaheen: http://neareaststudies.as.nyu.edu/object/kc.media.jackshaheen

REEL BAD ARABS: HOW HOLLYWOOD VILIFIES A PEOPLE (2006, 50 min)
This documentary dissects a slanderous aspect of cinematic history that has run virtually unchallenged from the earliest days of silent film to today’s biggest Hollywood blockbusters. It explores a long line of degrading images of Arabs—from Bedouin bandits and submissive maidens to sinister sheikhs and gun-wielding “terrorists”—along the way offering devastating insights into the origin of these stereotypic images, their development at key points in US history, and why they matter so much today. Shaheen shows how the persistence of these images over time has served to naturalize prejudicial attitudes toward Arabs and Arab culture. By inspiring critical thinking about the social, political, and basic human consequences of leaving these Hollywood caricatures unexamined, the film challenges viewers to recognize the urgent need for counter-narratives that do justice to the diversity and humanity of Arab people and the reality and richness of Arab history and culture. Find a study guide at www.mediaed.org/assets/products/412/studyguide_412.pdf

THE SHEIK (1921, 80 min, silent)
“When an Arab sees a woman he wants, he takes her.” The Sheik introduces this stereotype still prevalent today (for example, Taken, 2008, starring Liam Neeson) One of the first “desert soaps,” this film also launched the trend of revealing the Arab hero as really being a European. The Sheik (played by Rudolf Valentino) abducts a fair-skinned beauty and holds her in his luxurious desert tent-palace. Eventually the heroine falls in love with her captor.

THE MUMMY (1932, 73 min)
Boris Karloff’s representation of the “Mummy” is just one--if the most classic--creation in a long line of mummy films culminating most recently with Sommer’s Mummy Trilogy starring Brendan Fraser. This film is set in 1921 as a team of British archaeologists led by Sir Joseph Whemple uncovers the 3700-year-old mummy of Imhotep, inadvertently bringing him to life. Unknown to
them, the Mummy masquerades as the mysterious Egyptian Ardath Bay, who helps the expedition uncover the tomb of his ancient love. He then uses his mystic powers to mesmerize the reincarnation of his lost love in the form of Helen Grosvenor—the trademark European heroine that recurs so commonly in Hollywood’s “mummy” films.

**ADVENTURE IN IRAQ**
(1943, 65 min)
Five Allied soldiers in an airplane flying to Egypt crash-land in Iraq. Taken in by a local “sheik,” they soon begin to suspect that he may not be quite as friendly as he appears to be. This film references in a very damaging way nearly every stereotype of Arabs and Muslims ever seen in Hollywood to date.

**LION OF THE DESERT**
(1981, 173 min)
An epic obscured in the eyes of critics by *Lawrence of Arabia*, this movie film tells the story of Omar Mukhtar, an Arab Muslim rebel who fought against the Italian conquest of Libya in WWI. Portraying Muslim characters, including children, with respect, the film marks one of Hollywood’s first challenges to the stereotypes so prevalent in the previously mentioned films. It gives viewers a glimpse into this little-known region and chapter of history, and exposes the savage means by which the conquering army attempted to subdue the Arabs. Find yourself cheering for the Bedouin!

**PLANET OF THE ARABS**
(2003, 9 min)
Inspired by Shaheen’s work, Jackie Salloum made the short film *Planet of the Arabs* to reveal the systematic racism towards Arabs and Muslims propagated by Hollywood. Salloum was awarded “Best Editor” at the Cinematexas film festival and the film was a 2005 Sundance Film Festival selection.

**SLINGSHOT HIP HOP**
(2008, 83 min)
Also directed by Jackie Salloum, this feature-length documentary braids together the stories of young Palestinians living in Gaza, the West Bank and inside Israel as they discover Hip Hop and employ it as a tool to surmount divisions imposed by occupation and poverty. From internal checkpoints and Separation Walls to gender norms and generational differences, this is the story of young people crossing the borders that separate them. An example of new work from an Arab-American filmmaker that counters stereotypes.

**THE VISITOR**
(2007, 104 min)
This lovely independent film looks at one of the tragedies that followed 9/11—the widespread deportation of Arab and Muslim immigrants. The film follows the boring life of widower and lonely Professor Walter Vale, who teaches college and is trying to learn how to play the piano, despite not having the necessary musical talent. When he meets Tarek, a Syrian musician, and Zainab, a Senegalese street vendor, he finally comes out of his shell.

Please note: Make sure to watch all films you are considering screening in your classroom in advance as some of them contain violence or allusions to violence, and some of the stereotypical images can be graphic. These films are recommended for high school audiences or older.
I teach a class called Middle East History and Diplomacy at Pacific Ridge School in Carlsbad, CA. The course is a three-trimester seminar for juniors and seniors who are interested in international affairs and conflict resolution. The first trimester is entirely dedicated to a dual narrative exploration of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. At the beginning of the trimester, students learn to feel the conflict through poetry, music, a viewing of “To Die in Jerusalem”, and an email exchange with teenagers in Israel and the West Bank. Once the humanity of the conflict becomes real, students investigate the modern dynamics of the conflict including issues of security, borders, refugees, the wall, checkpoints, divided education systems, Jerusalem, racism, stereotypes, economics, etc. Finally, the students move back in time in order to discover the historical roots of this intractable conflict. The second trimester focuses on gaining understanding of the larger Islamic world in the Middle East and North Africa. Last year the trimester began with an in-depth look at the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria. Significant attention was given to the social, economic, and political conditions that led to these popular uprisings. Viewing these events as the most recent attempt by the people of Middle East and North Africa to improve their lives, the class moved backwards in time in order to examine other ways in which people in the region have attempted to improve their societies. We looked at the rise of Arab Nationalism in the time of Nasser, the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and the rise of non-state actors like the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, Hezbollah, and Al Qaeda. As part of this study, students attempted to define “extremism” and “terrorism.” Additional topics include the role of women in the region, nuclear proliferation, human rights, oil as power, and the destabilizing influence of outside powers including the United States and the recent war in Iraq. The term ends with an independent research paper about a related topic of choice. The third trimester is all about conflict resolution and diplomacy. Given the problems in the region, how can the situation ever improve? Students learn about conflict resolution and negotiation by studying the Thomas Kilmann model and reading Getting to Yes, by Roger Fisher and William Ury. Students participate in a Model UN style simulation where they play the roles of actual Israeli
and Palestinian politicians from different political perspectives. They try to negotiate the terms under which they would return to the bargaining table.

**How has your work supported the goals of MEOC?**

Through teaching, facilitating coexistence dialogues, and leading trips to the region, I seek to increase understanding and tolerance.

**How and when did you first become interested in learning and teaching about the Middle East?**

I first visited Israel when I was in 8th Grade. I have been hooked on the Middle East ever since. While at college at the University of Michigan, I took every course that was offered on the region. I also spent a summer studying international relations at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. During Law School at the University of Denver, I spent a summer at Tel Aviv University studying comparative law and legal issues of the Arab-Israeli conflict. I have since become involved as a facilitator with Hands of Peace, a dialogue-based coexistence program for Israeli, Palestinian, and American teens. I have also led two student trips to Israel and the West Bank with the help of MEJDI. The focus of the trips are dialogue, hearing different perspectives, service, and home stays.

**What activities do you find are most successful in introducing Middle East-related material?**

Students need to experience the region through cultural activities, Skype and email exchanges, art, film, poetry, stories, and hands-on simulations. A trip to the region, like the one to Israel and the West Bank that follows my class, is the ultimate exercise. The history of the region is much more accessible when it is taught as a way to understand the present.

**What do you find most challenging and rewarding in teaching and outreach?**

The Middle East and the people who live there are not well understood by Westerners. There are many stereotypes that govern the way Americans view the region and its people. These stereotypes are perpetuated by the media. There are also many strong emotions attached to narrative histories of the region. Much of this is due to different religious backgrounds. Teaching young people or adults to recognize and appreciate different cultures and historical narratives is extremely rewarding.

**What upcoming Middle-East related project are you most excited about?**

I am currently working to start a San Diego site for the Hands of Peace Program. If successful, we will bring 17 Palestinian, Jewish-Israeli, and Palestinian Citizens of Israel to San Diego for dialogue-based coexistence during the summer of 2014. They will be joined by 13 American students in the first year, and they will stay in local family homes. I am currently raising $135,000 and seeking volunteers for the Program.
Join the Middle East Outreach Council!

Members gain access to MEOC’s forum, where you can get timely answers to questions you post about resources, travel opportunities, or other topics; copies of Perspectives, our semi-annual curriculum newsletter; web space to showcase your events and curriculum; and more!

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