

THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
ARAB-AMERICAN  
IDENTITY

EDITED BY  
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MICHIGAN

# The Development of Arab-American Identity

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## Ethnic Archetypes and the Arab Image

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Just think Happy—if we guess the identity of the Masked Woman, we get a herd of camels, an oil concession, a completely furnished harem, a goat . . .

—Steve Canyon, 1948

Our major cities are turning into war zones, with all the violence in the streets that we see. We're in Detroit this week, and this great city is being torn apart by violence. Many people here are accustomed to the daily sound of gunshots ringing out, fire bombs being launched, cars being torched. Why? I'll tell you, pal. Because the largest community of Arabs outside of the Middle East lives right here in Detroit . . .

—Morton Downey, Jr., November 18, 1988

The word stereotype originated in the early publishing industry and refers to the wood block from which identical prints were derived without variation or deviation. The word was popularized by Walter Lippman in 1922 in his classic work on public opinion. Today it is routinely used to describe unfriendly, undifferentiated imaging of cultural or ethnic groups.

Philippe describes stereotyping as “a kind of motionlessness, a repertory of eternally true types” (1980, 25). Stereotypes of course can be hostile or nonhostile but we are more concerned with hostile stereotypes that cause harm or do damage. Examples of nonhostile

stereotypes are that the Irish are cheerful or that Chinese are good at mathematics.

Perhaps the essential quality of stereotypes is that they take people "out of history" and deny them the right to change across time. It is as if somehow their traits were fixed or defined at some ancient moment and since that time their behavior has been predetermined and ahistorical.

This essay focuses on American images of Arabs, especially in comics and cartoons; but in a sense the topic is much broader. The central thesis is that images of Arabs cannot be seen in isolation but are primarily derivative, rooted in a core of hostile archetypes that our culture applies to those with whom it clashes. The roots of these archetypes lie in ancient conflicts or cultural teachings that go back centuries or even millennia. In one sense their origins are so distant as to be irrelevant to contemporary realities, but their persistence across time attests to their potency and staying power. When conflict or tension emerges they can be conjured up and adapted to new situations.

The concept of generic archetypes is discussed at length by Sam Keen (1986), who focuses on "recurring images that have been used in different times and places to characterize the enemy" (13). Keen believes that in the human psyche—especially in wartime—there is a tendency to generate a hostile Other who somehow represents the negation of our own identity. In portraying such an enemy "the hostile imagination has a certain standard repertoire of images it uses to dehumanize the enemy. In matters of propaganda, we are all Platonists; we apply eternal archetypes to changing events" (13).

This essay will show that two hostile archetypes are particularly significant. The first was traditionally targeted at Africans, who were deemed to be inherently inferior in culture and biology; the second was traditionally targeted at Jews and describes peoples or nations with historically advanced cultures but now somehow believed to be pathologically in error because of some inherent flaw or trait. The two archetypes are typically called racism and anti-Semitism.

In his classic study of prejudice, Allport (1958) hinted at a "reciprocal character" or "complementary" quality in these image clusters, as if they somehow represented distinct poles of undesirability. "Between them they take care of the two major kinds of evil—the more 'physical' and the more 'mental'" (194). Allport also suggested

that hostile images may be subject to a process of transference in which themes that originate with one group can be shifted to a completely different target. By way of example he cited California data showing local Armenians being saddled with images that were traditionally anti-Jewish (185).

The data in this study confirm and elaborate upon this Dual Archetype model. The conclusions in this chapter are based upon several hundred cartoons with Arab characters. Typical examples are included for illustration. The cartoons were taken from editorial pages, comic books, and newspaper comic strips. While the sample cannot be considered either comprehensive or scientifically drawn, it is nevertheless both extensive and representative of materials published in the past few decades. In preparing this study, I examined dozens of cartoon anthologies (by artist or by annual selection), scores of comic books with Arab (and non-Arab) characters, standard works on graphic arts and cartoon images, and a personal collection of several hundred political cartoons.

Comic books and cartoons are useful sources of data because they are aimed at a mass audience, use simplified graphic images, and often have action themes with some story or meaning. In attempting to communicate quickly and efficiently they rely upon reductionist images that contain and transmit cultural messages, often without or beyond verbal reinforcement. Analysis suggests that while some Arab-linked themes are unique to that group (such as those dealing with deserts, oil, or camels), an exceptional proportion of all hostile or derogatory images targeted at Arabs are derived from or are parallel to classical images of Blacks and Jews, modified to fit contemporary circumstances.

### **Classic Studies of Cultural Images**

Since the focus of this essay is not limited to existing images but deals more broadly with the adaptation of pre-existing themes to contemporary situations it is important to understand the cultural legacy upon which those images are based. Rather than make an extensive review of the literature, two seminal case studies can be taken as illustrations of core models of classical images of Blacks and Jews. One is Winthrop Jordan's *White Over Black* (1968), an analysis of early American attitudes toward Africans and African-

Americans; the other is Norman Cohn's *Warrant for Genocide* (1966), a British study of European attitudes toward Jews. For comparison, we can also look at John Dower's *War without Mercy* (1986)—a study of the United States' wartime images of the Japanese—to see how certain themes were applied and adapted to a new conflict situation.

#### Case One: Blacks as a Savage People

Jordan (1968) focuses his analysis on the early formation of Western and American attitudes toward Africans and African-Americans. These attitudes began to take shape even before Westerners first penetrated the African continent in the 1500s. Even then there were "long-standing and apparently common notions about Africa" (34), some of which "derived from traditions which had been accumulating in Western culture since ancient times" (29). Those notions can be compressed into two main themes: the idea of a savage people whose brute instincts dominated their nature and a related concept of biological hierarchies in which certain races stand between civilized beings and animals.

Europeans decided very early that Africans were a savage people and frequently described them as "brutish" or "bestial" (28). They were believed to be "a lewd, lascivious, and wanton people" (32), lower than Europeans in intelligence, sophistication, economic creativity, self-discipline, ability to understand, religious development, and human civilization.

In the eyes of Europeans, it was no accident that Blacks were found on the African continent, a place inhabited by other human-like, black-skinned beings—the simians. There was considerable speculation about possible genetic links between the "man-like beasts and the beast-like men of Africa" (30), especially alleged sexual liaisons between the two. Such views grew from "a centuries-old tradition" about "an ordered hierarchy of sexual aggressiveness" among creatures (490). Beasts occupied one end of this hierarchy—engaging in shameless, promiscuous sexual activity—and humans the other. Blacks existed between the two, sharing characteristics of both beasts and humans.

The quasi-religious concept of a chain of being conveniently reinforced these perceptions. The concept is summarized in a 1799 treatise: "From man down to the smallest reptile . . . Nature exhibits

to our view an immense chain of beings, endued with various degrees of intelligence and active powers, suited to their stations in the general system" (499). While "rank in creation" was not an inherently racist concept, the charged environment of slavery soon made it so. Also contributing to its transformation was the centuries-old conflict between Europe and the Turks which made nonwestern peoples seem inherently threatening and worthy of subjection. "International warfare seemed above all a ceaseless struggle between Christians and Turks. Slavery, therefore, frequently appeared to rest upon the 'perpetual enmity' which existed between Christians on the one hand and 'infidels' and 'pagans' on the other" (55). Subjection was also ideologically facilitated by the fact that Blacks in the United States were not seen as having the "quality of nationality." In Western thinking, "nations" were more advanced than "peoples." Given that Africans had been denationalized to the extent that "Negro nations tended to become Negro people" (90) they were more easily viewed as inferior and subjectable.

#### Case Two: Jews as an Inverted People

Classic anti-Semitism tended to see the Jews as an Inverted People whose values were the mirror image of those held by others. This belief originated in pseudo-Christian doctrines (since renounced by the Christian churches) and seen in full bloom in the infamous "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a nineteenth-century Russian propaganda document. This mind-set held that while other peoples love God, the Jews killed God; while others love children, the Jews sacrifice children in their rituals; while others love their country, Jews betray theirs; while others work hard for a living, Jews cheat and lie for their livelihood; and while other peoples love peace, Jews thrive on war.

In outlining the structure of this logic, Cohn (1966) says that between the French Revolution and World War II "certain ancient and immensely destructive fantasies were reactivated" (19). These fantasies—that Jews were "mysterious beings, endowed with uncanny, sinister powers" (21)—go back to the second century after Christ when the church and the synagogue were competing for converts. During this time Christian leaders often portrayed Jews as "habitual murderers and destroyers" and the synagogue as "the temple of

demons...the cavern of devils...a gulf and abyss of perdition" (21). During the Crusades such images were adapted so that Jews became "agents employed by Satan for the express purpose of combating Christianity and harming Christians" (22). Through their demonical religion they came to possess "limitless powers for evil" regardless of how weak they might seem (22).

According to the Protocols, Jews exercised their power through a mysterious council. Specifically, there was "a secret Jewish government which, through a world-wide network of camouflaged agencies and organizations, controls political parties and governments, the press and public opinion, banks and economic developments" (22-23). The goal of this group was world power. Their strategy was to generate domestic disorder and international war so as to enhance their own influence. Controlling as they allegedly did key international economic structures, they were very successful.

Overall, there were three kinds of classical anti-Jewish sentiments: hostility to the Jewish religion, seeing it as perverted and evil; demonical anti-Semitism, portraying Jews as the source of social disorder and disruption; and economic anti-Semitism, focusing on Jewish wealth and power. In combination, these alleged traits accounted for an exceptional proportion of social ills: bolshevism, capitalism, heavy taxes, debt, stalemated wars, unemployment, ecumenical religion, secularism, sexual license, drunkenness, breakdown of the family, and poor schools.

Cohn argues that these hostile images had exceptional power. "What Jews really were or did or wanted, or what Jews possibly could be or do or want, had nothing whatsoever to do with the matter." Once in place, images "can be deliberately exploited in multitudes of ordinary human beings. This had happened before, during the witch-mania that gripped Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was to happen again as the myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy began its deadly work" (25).

### Case Three: The Monkey Men of Asia

According to Dower's 1986 landmark study of U.S. and Japanese wartime propaganda, U.S. views of the Japanese built upon certain "formulaic expressions" and "archetypical images" whose origins



went back several centuries and were long ago used to characterize nonwhites in general (9-10). Dower's argument parallels that of Jordan in suggesting that two beliefs were particularly important: the concept of a hierarchy of races and the idea of savage peoples. He sees a belief in "civilized" versus "savage" peoples as particularly significant for it provides an ideological foundation for racist thinking (149). From it grew the assertion that nonwhites have animal natures that place them in a lower stage of development characterized by primitiveness, immaturity, and serious deficiencies in the mental, moral, and emotional realms (153).

In the 1940s these traditional images were mobilized for war. The Japanese were portrayed as an inherently inferior people, subject to primitivism, childishness, and collective psychic deficiencies (9-10). Politically they were "fired by blind and relentless nationalistic ambitions... given to 'mad dog' orgies of brutality and atrocity" (20). Constantly abstracted as "the Jap" they were denied "even the merest semblance of pluralism" (79). They were a "numerous and undifferentiated pack, devoid not merely of humanness and individuality but even of gender and age" (93). Their society was an impersonal anthill and their people subject to "sheep-like subservience" (83). They were "primitives or savages" in a tribal, uncivilized sense; they were "infantile or childish as individuals and as a group, collectively abnormal in the psychological and psychiatric sense, and tormented at every level by an overwhelming inferiority complex" (122). Their "suppressed individualism" was reinforced by "a primitive 'group ideology,' sanctified by an archaic communal religion and reinforced by centuries of tyranny" (141). They were "a race suffering from severe collective psychological disorders" (117).

In cartoons the Japanese were depicted as nonhumans or subhumans, "often as animals, reptiles, or insects" or as a "herd" (81). One common image was the octopus, grasping Asia in its tentacles, often reaching out to plunge daggers into the heart of neighboring lands (83-84). The simian personification was particularly popular, "perhaps the most basic of all metaphors traditionally employed by white supremacists to demean nonwhite peoples" (86). And while Hitler and the Nazis also occasionally emerged as simians, "this was a passing metaphor, a sign of aberration and atavism, and did not carry the explicit racial connotations of the Japanese ape" (87).

**American Images of Arabs**

In 1977, Lipset and Schneider detected in U.S. public opinion a pattern of attitudes toward Arabs that they described as "negative, close to racist" (22). Slade's 1981 analysis added that "The Arabs remain one of the few ethnic groups who can still be slandered with impunity in America" (143). Jarrar (1983) reported that a study of forty-three high school social studies textbooks found Arabs portrayed as "primitive, backward, desert dwelling, nomadic, war loving, terroristic and full of hatred" (387-88). And in 1984 Shaheen analyzed over 200 television programs and found that most Arab characterizations followed what he called "The Instant TV Arab Kit." The "kit" consists of "a belly dancer's outfit, headdresses (which look like tablecloths pinched from a restaurant), veils, sunglasses, flowing gowns and robes, oil wells, limousines and/or camels" (5).

In his classic study of Western attitudes toward the Middle East (including Islam, Turkey, Iran, and Arabs) Edward Said (1979) found a set of collective images applied to Eastern peoples that he summarized under the term "Orientalism." This image cluster contains within itself "the Western approach to the Orient . . . that collection of dreams, images, and vocabularies available to anyone who has tried to talk about what lies east of the dividing line" (73). While some of these views are ancient, many emerged during the thousand-year conflict between Europe and the Middle East, and were associated especially with the Crusades and later wars with the Ottoman Turks. During much of this time Europe was on the defensive, sometimes fearing for its survival. Not until the era of Napoleon did the balance shift so that Europeans became the rulers of the East.

Said's thesis is that Western Orientalist scholarship emerged during this era of Western ascendancy, primarily a byproduct of conflict and conquest. Since Europe's primary orientation was in "dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3), Western scholarship had an inherent interest in portraying Arabs as simple, emotional, volatile, backward people, needing protection and elevation. The emergent Western view of the region was "more particularly valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridical discourse about the Orient" (6). Scholarship became "a system of knowledge" that, "because generated out of strength, in a sense *creates* the Orient, the Oriental, and his world" (40).

Said says the key symbol of this alien world was Islam, a word

that even today strikes fear in many Western hearts. Historically Islam represented the aggressiveness of the region, its threat, and its danger.

Not for nothing did Islam come to symbolize terror, devastation, the demonic, hordes of hated barbarians. For Europe, Islam was a lasting trauma. Until the end of the seventeenth century the "Ottoman peril" lurked alongside Europe to represent for the whole of Christian civilization a constant danger, and in time European civilization incorporated that peril and its lore, its great events, figures, virtues, and vices, as something woven into the fabric of life. (59-60)

In a later analysis of American media and "expert" portrayals of Islam, Said observed that "in no really significant way is there a direct correspondence between the 'Islam' in common Western usage and the enormously varied life that goes on within the world of Islam" (Said 1981, x).

If Said summarizes classic Western images of the generic Orient, the Slade study cited above focuses more specifically on contemporary American attitudes. Slade relied upon a national public opinion poll that asked respondents to say whether certain words applied to different ethnic groups, Arabs being one. Analysis showed that most words associated with Arabs were unfriendly or hostile. *Rich* led the list with 69 percent thinking it applied; in second place with around 40 percent agreement were the words *warlike*, *mistreat women*, *treacherous and cunning*, *powerful*, *dark and swarthy*, *barbaric and cruel*; in third place were three positive images (*religious*, *intelligent*, *brave*) with 12-20 percent agreement; at the very bottom was *friendly* with only 5 percent thinking it typically Arab. In follow-up questions, 40 percent of respondents felt that most or all Arabs were anti-Christian, 40 percent felt they were anti-Semitic, and 44 percent felt they "Want to Destroy Israel and Drive the Israelis into the Sea." Further analysis suggested that two variables had exceptional power in explaining anti-Arab sentiments, a perception that Arabs were hostile to the West and a feeling that Arab men mistreat Arab women (Slade 1981).

#### Two Explanations

Explanations of why Arabs behave as they allegedly do tend to fall into two main categories: warped socialization practices and the

unhealthy influence of Islam. The socialization argument parallels the pseudoanthropological or pseudopsychological models used against the Japanese (see Dower 1986, chaps. 5 and 6). The Islamic argument is not unlike some forms of religious anti-Semitism.

A classic example of unsympathetic writing is Raphael Patai's lengthy work, *The Arab Mind* (1972). Patai suggests that Arab males are corrupted at an early age by the fact that young boys are breast-fed well into the talking stage. This means that "the verbalization of the one major childhood desire, that for the mother's breast" is followed by "instant gratification." The psychological result is that

the emphatic verbal formulation of the wish carries in itself, almost automatically, the guarantee of its fulfillment without the need for any additional action on the part of the child . . . It may not be too far-fetched to seek a connection between this situation in childhood and a characteristic trait of the adult Arab personality . . . the proclivity for making an emphatic verbal statement of intention and failing to follow it up with any action that could lead to its realization. (31)

Patai says that later socialization patterns (such as urging younger brothers to compete against the standards of older brothers) also generate sibling rivalries. These rivalries help explain Arab disunity and the "conflict proneness" that is an "outstanding characteristic of the Arab mind" (227). "At the slightest provocation the fighting propensity surfaces . . . and easily degenerates into physical violence" (225).

In Patai's model, Islam contributes to Arab problems by excluding "human will" from society. This exclusion makes long-range planning sinful since "it seems to imply that one does not put one's faith in divine providence" (150). Islam also encourages a willingness to accept "Oriental Despotism" since it teaches that good and evil are defined by an "absolute will" from above (148).

A more contemporary example of this kind of analysis is an article in *Omni* magazine on "The Importance of Hugging" (Bloom 1989). *Omni* is a mainstream popular science magazine not ordinarily given to ethnic bashing. In this case, the author argued that many of the ills of the Middle East are a by-product of child rearing practices. "Why do some societies seem to revel in violence?" he asks. His answer: societies that hugged their kids were relatively

peaceful while "cultures that treated their children coldly produced brutal adults" (30). Islamic cultures "treat their children harshly. They despise open displays of affection. The result: violent adults. . . . 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?" (30). His conclusion: "In much of Arab society the cold and even brutal approach to children has still not stopped . . . and 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" (116).

Explanations focusing upon Islam often emphasize the allegedly violent nature of the religion. Laffin (1975) suggests that in the Koran violence is "the most positive form of prayer" and as such "forms a thread in the normal fabric of life" (106, 108). For a non-Muslim to look for reason in such a conclusion is "to expect something logical from the fundamentally illogical" (131). A study of U.S. K-12 textbooks (Al-Qazzaz 1983) found something similar, a "singular emphasis on war as an instrument for the spread of Islam." Such an approach, the author observed, "tends to create a misleading mental image in which Islam is associated primarily with holy war and violence" (376).

In the factional realm, similar images also persist. When Leon Uris (1985) described the Palestinian people in his best-selling novel *The Haj*, he drew together some of the most hostile and derogatory stereotypes imaginable. In one typical passage he described pre-1918 Palestine as "a mucky, diseased swamp" and "a backwater" covered with "a curtain of darkness." It was "devalued to bastardy and orphanhood . . . reduced to sackcloth and ashes." The political system was characterized by "total cruelty, total corruption." The local rulers had "no more compassion than the blistering sun" and showed "little mercy to the weak." People lived in "a system of absolute social order" in which "each man had a specific place in the tribe into which he was locked from birth to death. The only way to rise was to destroy." There was "no room for democratic principles" since "the law of the desert was absolute." The local Arab was a "thief, assassin, and raider" to whom "hard labor was immoral" (16-17). Uris also explained that "hatred is holy in this part of the world" and that for Muslims, "hatred of the Jews is sacred" (52, 55).

### Themes Shared and Derivative

Each ethnic group has culturally assigned image themes unique to itself. Such themes are reserved for the group and cannot be easily transferred to others. To depict aggression or hostility, for example, one can portray a Black as a violent savage (in the jungle or in the street), a Jew with a knife ready to assault an unsuspecting innocent, and an Arab holding a sword dripping with blood. But Arabs cannot be accused of killing God, Jews cannot be shown in a jungle, and Blacks cannot be shown manipulating power from behind the scenes.

On the other hand, certain images or themes are more generic and *can* be transferred or adapted to different groups. Where depiction of Arabs is concerned, at least six image themes seem exogenous or derivative. These images are so similar to stereotypes of other groups that they almost certainly are adaptations.

*Sexual depravity.* One almost universal theme of hostile stereotyping is that our "enemies" are driven by crazed animal passions unchecked by social limits (Keen 1986, 58-60, 129-34). "Their" women are either shamefully promiscuous or have a thin veneer of pseudo-modesty which they take off as easily as a dress; their men view women as nothing but objects of pleasure, as chattel to be passed from one to another, or as booty to be taken by the strongest. Living as they do with the often unattractive or unsophisticated women of their own kind, the men are driven to the verge of madness by the beautiful women of our own people. Sometimes this lust is rooted in a pathological desire to possess and despoil, sometimes in a primitive drive to have that which is higher on the evolutionary scale, sometimes simply by the beauty of blond hair. Almost always their relations with "our" women have political overtones, the assertion of power, or a challenge to authority.

These themes were used against Jews and Blacks and are used against Arabs as well. Nazi propaganda often portrayed the lustful Jew enticing young girls, leering at a beautiful but modest Aryan woman, flirtatiously seducing an innocent, or forcing himself upon an unwilling victim (Bytwerk 1983). In action stories set in Africa it frequently happens that a blond female (Tarzan's mate, Jane, for example) is kidnapped or captured by vile natives whose evil intentions one can see only too clearly. Her pathetic cries as she is dragged off into the darkness are strikingly similar to action stories set in the

Arab world. The reader of these stories inevitably cringes with contempt at the brutality of her treatment, and at the inability of these savages to contain their lust. Occasionally a variant story will occur in which a white woman is captured or enchanted by a dashing Arab sheikh of the desert, is well treated, and falls in love with him. No such variant ever occurs with white women in Africa.

In an earlier era, Thomas Jefferson (1787) offered an explanation for this behavior. He hypothesized that Black males preferred white females over Blacks for reasons including "flowing hair, a more elegant symmetry of form, their own judgement in favour of the whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is the preference of the Oran-ootan for the black women over those of his own species" (138). In *The Haj* Leon Uris writes of Gideon, the Jewish hero in 1920s Palestine, and his relationship with promiscuous Palestinian women. As Uris describes it, Gideon "knew many women . . . frequently a dozen times a day" although "no Arab man ever knew or suspected" (23). Arab men, for their part, would raid Jewish settlements and would always "save one of the Jewish women for men's sport." (31).

Attitudes toward Arab women are illustrated in figures 1-5. They frequently appear as a faceless, indistinguishable mass, as in a Steve Canyon classic, available in contemporary reprint (fig. 1); in an adventure story about Sinbad they sit nude in their harem bath discussing past and future infidelities (fig. 2);<sup>1</sup> in a contemporary adventure story set in North Africa during World War II, an American unit meets an Arab father and his seemingly modest daughter Azir. That evening Azir undresses and performs for the soldiers as the embarrassed American hero tries to deal with the shameless father (fig. 3); later, Azir embraces and fondles an American sentry to distract him so he can be strangled.

1. The term harem is misunderstood in the West. In a bedouin tent there is a cloth that separates one side from the other. One side is the public area where guests are received. Men and women alike can be on that public side although it is mostly for men. The other section is for women and children only. It is where food is prepared and where women sit to chat. The two sections are a few feet from each other so that people on different sides can exchange comments or share conversations. The harem of Western imagination is in contrast a luxurious place where the multiple wives of a powerful man lounge carelessly on pillows awaiting their turn to be called for wifely duty. The women are always young, always attractive, and frequently seminude. Much of their time is spent bathing and perfuming in anticipation of their call. For an honest perspective on the institution of the "harem" see Croutier 1991.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

The attitudes of Arab men toward women range from the shameless pandering of Azir's father to pathological possessiveness. When a blond woman ventures into the Middle East, an Arab ruler decides to add her to his harem—without bothering to ask her views on the





Fig. 3

matter (fig. 4); when Tarzan ventures into a nightclub to find another Westerner he is confronted by an Arab horde who accuse him of “insulting” a seminude belly dancer they had enslaved for their pleasure. The invective against Tarzan is typical of that used by cartoon Arabs (fig. 5). When the Arabs push Tarzan too far, the text tells us that his anger explodes like “a desert storm.”

*Creature Analogies.* While Arabs are sometimes subjected to the racial simian analogy they are more frequently subjected to vermin images closely paralleling the painful Jewish experience. This has been especially true in situations involving violence or war. Palestinians in particular have been portrayed as rats malevolently entering a house or caught in a trap, or as fleas infesting a region and being exterminated.

In the wake of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, several cartoons portrayed Palestinians in this manner. A classic by Scrawls asks the difference between a rat and Arafat and finds the rat more



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

lovable (fig. 6). Szep used the simian analogy to show Palestinian apes cheering bombastic Ape Chieftan Arafat (fig. 7).

Among less flattering camel images was an Oliphant cartoon showing an Arab household complete with tent, faceless wives in black, and a scruffy male with a profile strikingly similar to his beast (fig. 8). Oliphant originally set the scene in Libya but apparently liked it so much that he later placed it virtually unchanged in Saudi Arabia. During the Gulf War the camel theme was especially popular, relaying an image of a people wedded to desert-style warfare (fig. 9). A widely distributed T-shirt also showed an Iraqi soldier on a camel, both in a gun sight, with the slogan "I'd Travel Ten Thousand Miles to Smoke a Camel."

But this reference to a classical cigarette slogan was not entirely good for the company. In earlier times, cigarettes were associated with the Arab world and the Arab image was a boost to sales. But today is different and in the 1980s, Camel Cigarettes found themselves burdened with a negative "camel" logo. Their solution was to contain the damage by an aggressive "Joe Camel" advertising campaign. Their "Smooth Character" attracted beautiful women, drove fast cars, wore tuxedos, and was a war hero. He quickly became a popular figure and surveys showed his recognition at an exceptionally high level. Perhaps there is some truth in the old piece of advice: When the world gives you lemons, make lemonade.

*Physiological and psychological traits.* Here the parallel between the depiction of Jews and Arabs is striking. The physiological traits of the generic evil Jew are well-known: thick lips, weak chin, crooked nose, shifty eyes, unkempt hair, scruffy beard, vile leering mouth, crooked teeth. The generic Black also has unpleasant physical qualities: thick lips, heavy brow, ugly teeth, stupid expression, stooped shoulders, bent knees, long arms (Hardy and Stern 1986).

The generic Arab shares with Jews thick lips, evil eyes, unkempt hair, scruffy beard, weak chin, crooked nose, vile look. He also shares with Blacks thick lips, heavy brow, stupid expression, stooped shoulders. This double overlap suggests that image transfer may be working at multiple levels. It may be that in earlier eras Jews were saddled with the images of despised Africans and that those images are now being transferred to Arabs. Certainly, Jewish images during the era of Rembrandt are completely different from Jewish images today. Likewise, Arab images earlier in this century were much more benign.

QUESTION: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A RAT AND ARAFAT...?

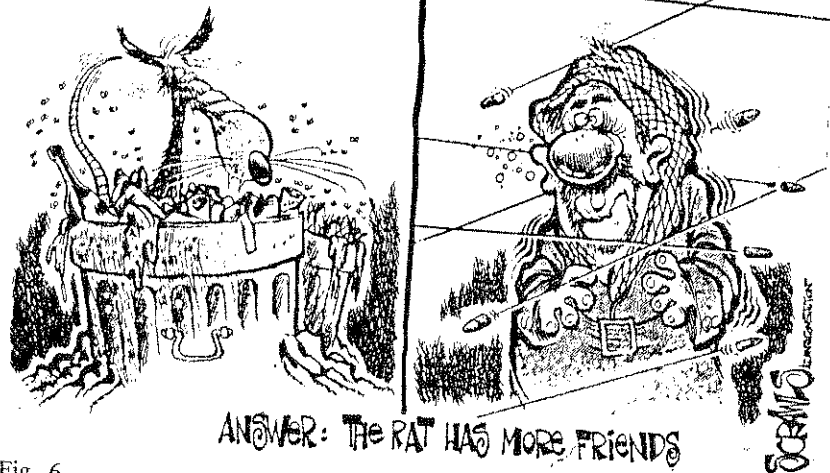


Fig. 6

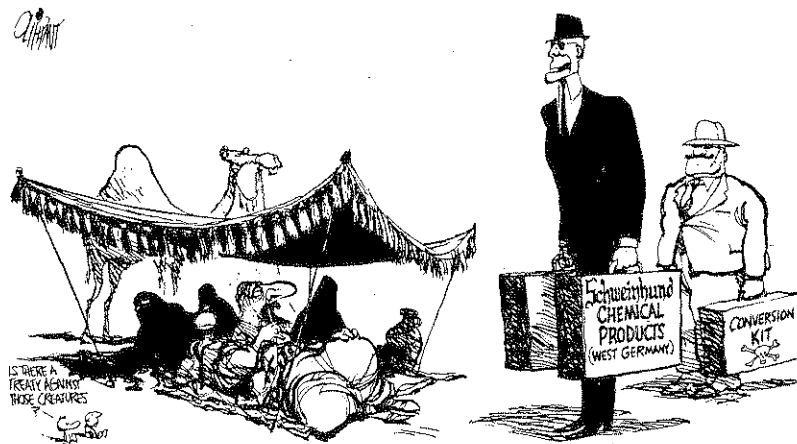
Then exotic, nonhostile themes were dominant, including the romantic sheik and the friendly native. The noticeable shift came after the 1967 war when political tension apparently revived certain hostile images and grafted them onto a new target.

It is ironic but not illogical that Jewish images would be superimposed on Arabs. It was not until the late 1800s that the word *Semite* changed from a linguistic term incorporating both Arabs and Jews into a more specialized term applying only to Jews (Kraemer 1967). Earlier, Shakespeare's Arab Othello and his Jew Shylock were—in spite of vastly different personalities—both transplants from the Middle East whose alien values left disorder and tension in their wake. That cartoonists should follow the connection by using parallel depictions is not surprising.

In 1989 a national monthly on Middle East affairs published a cartoon on "The Arab Mind." The similarity with a cartoon ninety years earlier on "The Jewish Mind" is striking (figs. 10 and 11). "Reading the Arab Mind" shows a generic cartoon Arab—prominent nose, thick lips, heavy eyebrows, shifty eyes. Inside the mind are predictably simplistic ways of thinking: fanaticism, vengeance, double



Fig. 7



PERHAPS VE COULD INTEREST YOU IN GLOBAL SUPREMACY THROUGH PHARMACEUTICAL INVESTMENT, JA ?

Fig. 8

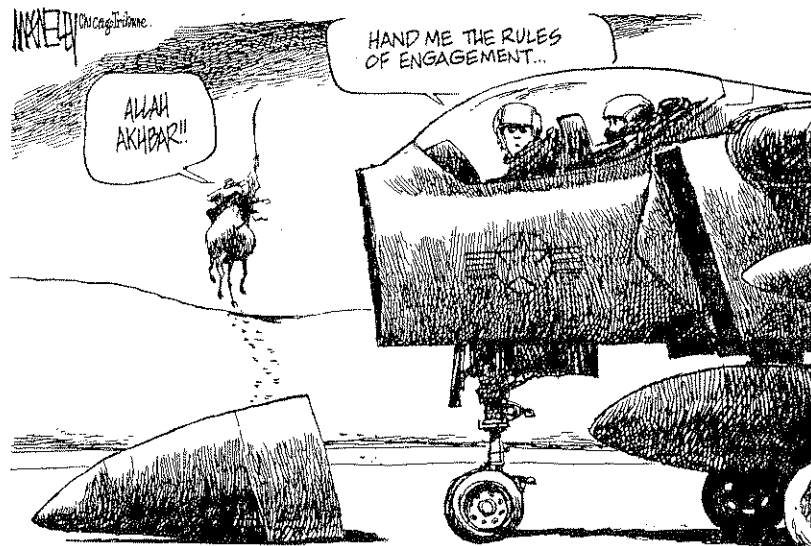


Fig. 9

talk, fratricidal hatreds. The parallel with the generic "Jewish mind" a hundred years earlier is striking. In the Jewish mind are worship of money, propensity to theft, and unwillingness to serve one's country. The common physical features of Arab and Jew include a curved nose and facial hair. Both minds center upon socially hostile orientations to the world and rigid mental compartmentalization with thought processes alien to normal humans. The pervasive theme in stereotyping—that the group shares a common mind set that allows for little individual variation—is clearly present. The fact that "the Arab Mind" was published by a Jewish group merely shows that stereotypes are culture wide and do not exempt any subgroup from being affected by such thinking.

*Savage leaders.* A common scene in racist comics or cartoons has the witchdoctor or chief—driven by wild xenophobic passion and bravado—renouncing whites and calling upon the natives to destroy them or drive them out. The witchdoctor or chief is usually depicted with his arm flailing wildly in the air, his face contorted with hatred. The natives—dangerous in their simplistic acceptance of whatever they are told—respond with hysterical passion, often jumping into the air or chanting slogans such as "kill, kill" (Hardy and Stern 1986).

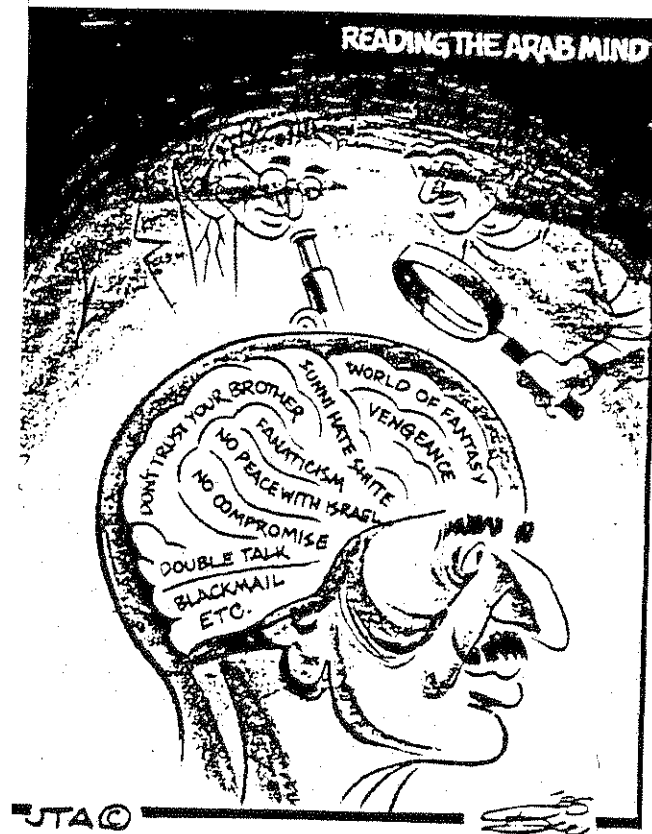


Fig. 10

Depictions of Arab leaders often rely upon similar images. In action stories a common theme has a tribal chieftan or megalomaniacal dictator calling upon his people to attack or drive out foreigners (often religious or Crusade-linked words are used, such as "jihad" or "infidel"). The motive of the ruler is often personal, perhaps an imagined slight or a desire to maintain his power unchecked by the civilized ideas that might be brought in by outsiders. The unstated but obvious weapons of the leader include the simplemindedness of the people, their innate xenophobia, their prejudice against foreigners, their antipathy to structured norms. Their response is enthusiastic, passionate, irrational, dangerous. In a comic-book style biography distributed by the Catholic church, even the gentle St. Francis is



Fig. 11

threatened as he tries to mediate the Crusades, and is nearly killed for his effort (fig. 12).

In a 1988 story, America's counter-terrorist group (code named GI JOE) must go into an Arab Emirate where a ruler named Sharif "has been known to behead jaywalkers." Sharif's band of followers (the word army would be too dignified) are called Guardians of Paradise (fig. 13). The term Paradise is itself an ironic word to describe the mound of useless sand Sharif controls. The Guardians cheer wildly when he urges them into battle, with assurance that the infidels are "weak and cowardly" and that "a special place is promised in paradise for all who fall in the cause." In the final confrontation, dozens of Guardians die as two courageous Americans—one male, one female—stand against them.



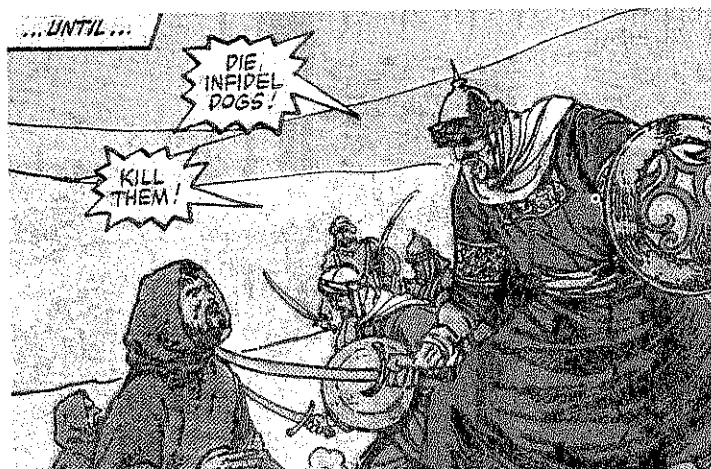


Fig. 12



Fig. 13

The related theme of the blustering Arab is used to describe that most dangerous of all Middle East cartoon creatures, the desert Bedouin. This prototypical Arab is known for ruthlessness, cruelty, deceit, and a tendency to view life as a cheap commodity. The way to

deal with such people (according to cartoonists) is to recognize that while they appear tough and aggressive they are in truth weak and cowardly. The bluff and bluster is neutralized if one stands up to them. In a Lawrence of Arabia retelling, Lawrence is "tested" by a stream of invectives. He maintains his poise and punches out his assailant. This action astonishes a second tormentor and wins the admiration (and political support) of the Prince, who has been watching secretly from the sidelines (fig. 14).

A more contemporary story occurs when Batman visits Beirut to find Robin's long lost mother. When he encounters a terrorist army his comment—"this is going to be easier than I thought"—is painfully reminiscent of a parallel mindset during the 1983 marine mission to that troubled land (fig. 15). President Reagan's masterful understatement when 241 marines died in their barracks was that "the situation in Beirut was much more difficult and complex than we initially believed" (Reagan 1990, 461). Reagan went on to explain that Arab "depravity," "ancient tribal rivalries," and "pathological hatred" had produced an "irrationality" that challenged the "moral" commitments upon which American policy was based. "How do you deal with a people driven by such a religious zeal that they are willing to sacrifice their lives in order to kill an enemy simply because he doesn't worship the same God as they do?" (462-63).

Later in the Batman story, when Bruce Wayne (Batman) arrives in Beirut and hails a taxi, he is able to converse freely with the driver (readers are told) because he is fluent in Farsi. Readers are *not* told that Farsi is a non-Arabic language spoken in Iran but not Lebanon. When Ayatollah Khomeini then hires Batman's nemesis, the Joker, a murderous sociopath, to be Iran's UN ambassador, the new ambassador appears at the General Assembly wearing a Saudi-style head-dress rather than an Iranian-style turban.

The blurring of identities and sharing of themes is also seen in the similarity between the anti-Arab concept of the "Law of the Desert" and the anti-African "Law of the Jungle."

In parallel but bizarre ways Blacks and Arabs are shown with norms of life that civilized Westerners cannot understand. Their rules of social order dehumanize people, elevate the most evil elements of society, and promote regimented, mindless obedience. Ultimately, their way of doing things is counterproductive and contrary to their own interests, but they can never recognize this.



Fig. 14

*A war of darkness against light.* The war theme has been attached to the Arab image since the time of the Crusades, but there is a twist of demonization in contemporary depictions which is more intense than justified by a conflict that ended 800 years ago. The Arab desire to conquer is attributed to a pathological desire to destroy civilization or to cause ill for humanity. Somehow Arabs allegedly believe that generating social disruption and disorder will promote their own selfish or parochial interests. They are not just enemies in a temporal sense but are enemies in a metaphysical sense as well.

One cannot help but note the striking parallel between this theme and how Jews were depicted in the *Protocols* and in Nazi propaganda. Like Jews, Arabs allegedly engage in war and terrorism to undermine social order itself. They kill because they enjoy it, just as medieval Jews allegedly sacrificed Christian children as a part of their faith. Like the Jews before them, Arabs are portrayed as an Inverted People.

*Deceit.* One of the vilest anti-Semitic (and later Nazi) accusations against Jews was that they were perfidiously deceitful where war and peace were concerned. In particular, they would allegedly wrap themselves in the mantle of peace while secretly working for war (Cohn 1966; Gitelman 1988). They were a people whose very God was war, and who would thrive on the destruction of the nations.

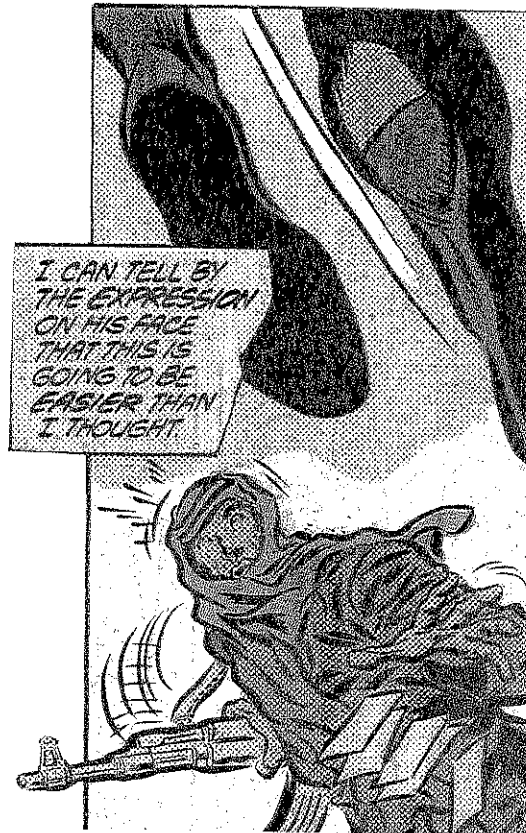


Fig. 15

Similarly, deceit is one of the main traits of cartoon Arabs. They pretend to want peace, but work for war. Arab leaders are shown firing at the dove of peace and shrinking in horror at a small desert flower labeled "peace." In a Herblock classic not reproduced ("Operation Peace") Doctors Arafat, Assad, King Hussein and others carve up a female victim with a palm branch in her fallen hand, proclaiming with crocodile tears that "unfortunately" the victim died.

Conversely those who break rank and really do seek peace are quickly martyred. In "The Sting of Death" an Arab delegate attending UN Peace Talks is assassinated (fig. 16). And in a story set in Israel, the army discovers that a violent terrorist is really El Rachmi, the gentle West Bank businessman who was pretending to help keep the peace (fig. 17).



Fig. 16

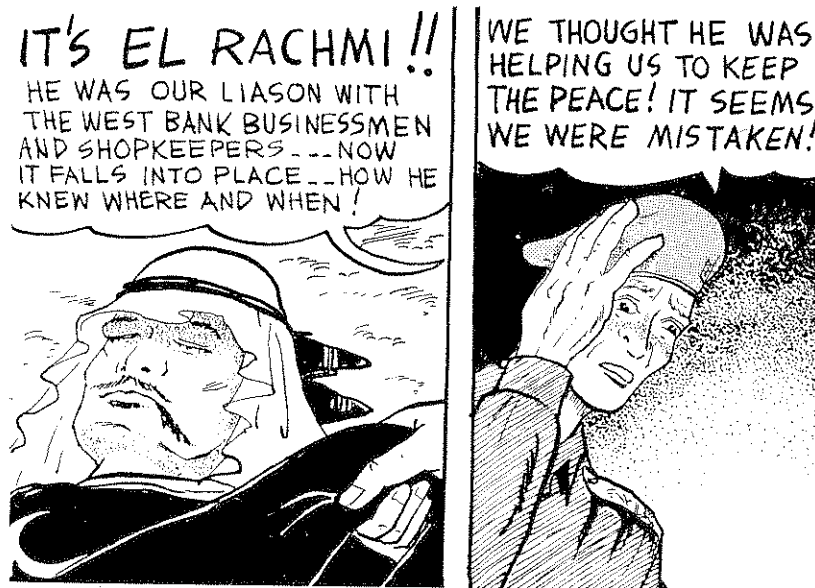


Fig. 17

*Secret power.* Is it possible for those who are in power to be controlled by elements unseen? Is it possible for small, powerful groups to have puppets who do their bidding? If so, what would be the nature of those secret power brokers?

In the *Protocols* Jews are seen as the secret rulers of the world, a people who have a centuries-long plan and a centuries-old organi-

zation for controlling and manipulating those who appear to rule. Their power is based partially on their wealth but even more on their cunning and their ability to support policies that appear to benefit general society but in reality weaken those societies and allow Jews to occupy the vacuum. *The International Jew* (undated, ca. 1920), a famous series of articles published in Henry Ford's newspaper, the *Dearborn Independent*, contains a U.S. variant. Volume 1 has articles on "The Jewish World Program," "Jewish Imperialism," "The Jewish Plan to Split Society," "Jews and the Russian Revolution," "Jews and American Farms," "Jewish Power and the World Press," "Jewish Political Power," and "The Jewish Mark on Red Russia."

The image of Arabs as a secret power bloc is somewhat different. Their power is seen as based on their oil and on the moral weakness and naivete of Western leaders. They buy support and friends with their vast wealth. Their property and investments in the United States enable them to manipulate existing political structures. The image of Arabs as power brokers is often represented by bags of currency, vast checks, offers to purchase whole industries, direct payoffs, and secret board meetings where decisions are made. Much of this is definitely reminiscent of the Jewish Elders.

One parody of this stereotype in the mid-1970s by *Mad* magazine suggested a commemorative stamp ("Sucking Up To The Arabs") to show things "the way they are" (fig. 18). Several cartoons in the mid-1980s showed Jesse Jackson as the paid agent of Arab money. One Szep masterpiece entitled "Jesse of Arabia" showed Jackson in an Arab headdress. Another showed Jackson leaving an Arab embassy with bags of money with the chant of Jackson supporters in 1984, "Run, Jesse, Run," as the theme.

*Hatred of Israel.* While on the surface this theme seems unique to the post-1948 world, in fact its essential components and the images used to illustrate it are very similar to the images of Jews as the enemies of God. Just as Jews were accused of deicide, Arabs are sometimes accused of intended genocide. We must also remember that to many Christians, hating Israel—a nation believed to have been selected by God—is no less than hating God.<sup>2</sup> One does not want to conjure up pseudoparallels where they are weak or ques-

2. Simon 1984 and Stockton 1987 present distinct approaches to the belief that the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine in 1948 was the fulfillment of God's will.



Fig. 18

tionable or to engage in the rhetoric wars so harmful where discussions about the Israeli-Palestinian dispute are concerned, but the image of Arabs as the destroyers of God's people has been so strongly stated that the possibility of an image transfer must be considered.

The parallel theme of terrorism is also used. Terrorism is a frightening word, often ill-defined, that conjurs up images of demonic souls determined to inflict pain on the innocent for no reason other than to see people suffer. Terrorists allegedly enjoy violence, exacting a particular pleasure at seeing the innocent suffer. They are often portrayed as leering gleefully at their evil deeds. It is one of the most pervasive themes used against Arabs (fig. 19). The fact that Arabs are more often the victims of brutality than its perpetrators is largely overlooked.

After the Algiers Conference of 1988 when the PLO renounced terrorism, recognized Israel, accepted the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state, and called for a negotiated settlement between Jews and Palestinians, Israeli intelligence concluded that "the PLO has undergone a genuine change and is truly interested in a peaceful settlement with Israel" (*New York Times*, April 2, 1989, p. 6). Cartoonists saw it differently. Most portrayed the Palestinian effort as a



Fig. 19

charade or as a tactical shift, a “fashion statement” if you will. Yassir Arafat was often shown in designer sunglasses or wearing a stylish “peace” keffiya, recently purchased (fig. 20). And of course, the fact that Arafat was not assassinated reinforced the belief that he was only putting on a performance for Western consumption. To many observers, the assumption that Arabs lie was so ingrained that they were unable to see historical events in terms other than that of a pre-existing mind set. The devious smile on Arafat’s face—similar to that in other cartoons at the time—leads one to ask, “Would you buy a used car from this man, much less a peace treaty?” It was not until 1993 when Israeli leader Rabin shook hands with Arafat that Palestinian statements were granted credibility by cartoonists.

### **The Cost of Hostile Images**

A skeptic might ask what difference it makes if we harbor stereotypes. Is it not natural that we generalize about others and hold unfriendly





Fig. 20

views of foreign or alien peoples, especially those from regions with whom our nation may have tense relations?

We would have to answer "yes" to these questions, but we would also have to point out that what is natural is not necessarily desirable. There are four reasons why one might want to minimize or resist harsh stereotyping.

First, especially where domestic populations are concerned, the costs to the victims are considerable. An estimated two million Arab-Americans (Naff 1983, 9) and over three million Muslims from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (Haddad 1986, 1) are subjected to hostile and derogatory imaging. The harm to children alone is enough to justify a reconsideration of techniques by cartoonists.

Second, entrenched stereotypes (even demonologies) play definite roles in historical outcomes, rationalizing and justifying policies otherwise unacceptable. In the case of Africans, it facilitated the acceptance of slavery, an intolerable institution if applied to whites; in the case of Jews, the outcome was centuries of persecution and ultimately the murder of millions of innocent individuals; with Japan,

it led to conflict conducted with such fury that Dower (1986) called it "a war without mercy."

It is important to remember that while government policies are not simple outgrowths of public opinion, governments operate within parameters defined by what the public will tolerate. If the public is willing to dehumanize a population—be it domestic or foreign—then exceptional latitude is allowed where human rights are concerned. Slavery, brutal war, mass murder, assassination, and indifference to suffering become more acceptable.

A third outcome is inept policy making. As Dower argues about World War II, the Japanese and the Americans misunderstood and underestimated each other. Japan was convinced that the United States was a weak, fading, decadent culture, incapable of sustained resistance. Americans for their part believed Japan was a backward land, doomed to technological ineptness and organizational malfunction. As Dower says of U.S. decision making, "racist anti-Japanese myths overrode rational intelligence gathering" and "prejudice masqueraded as fact" (101, 102). The Japanese went to Pearl Harbor assuming the United States would surrender; the United States was convinced Germany was behind the attack since Japan was incapable of such a sophisticated maneuver. Both sides were wrong, and both suffered dire consequences as a result.

Finally, stereotyping leads to what theologian Allan Boesak (1979) calls a false "innocence." By portraying others in a hostile way or by portraying ourselves as blameless victims of some Manichaean opposite, we engage in a process of self-denial and mutual dehumanization. Faced with issues "too horrendous to contemplate" we deny responsibility for our own actions. "This pseudoinnocence cannot come to terms with the destructiveness in oneself or in others and hence it actually becomes self-destructive" (4).

Put another way, if stereotyping requires misrepresentation of the enemy, it also requires misrepresentation of ourselves (Keen 1986, 23). If our enemies are irrational, aggressive, expansionist, and brutal then it follows that we are rational, accommodationist, peaceful, and gentle. If our enemy abuses women, then it must be that we respect women. If our enemy is racist or intolerant, then it follows that we are egalitarian and open minded. If our enemy has cruel rulers who devalue human life, then our rulers must be pious souls who put human life above all else. As Dower (1986) says, those who live in

the realm of stereotypes "reveal more about themselves than about the enemy they are portraying" (27).

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