

Friday, June 22nd 2007

10.00-11.00h

## **Perpetuating Prejudice or Merely Telling the Story? Media Portrayal of Arabs in the United States**

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This paper has two objectives: (1) to review from an historical perspective the nature and extent of Arab immigration to the United States and (2) to identify and analyze media research portraying Arab immigrants in the United States. Indications of Arab immigrants to the United States appear almost from the earliest years of the nation. Scholars have identified several subsequent waves of Arabic immigration with economic considerations often serving as the motivating force. But other factors, namely, family as well as turmoil in the Arabic world, also came into play. Those who entered the U.S. with the first wave (1880-1924) were mostly Christians. Their Arab ethnicity gave way relatively easily to Americanization, and they assimilated into the fabric of American society. It was somewhat different for a second wave (1925-65), although this group, diverse demographically and with many affected by local politics, also assimilated into mainstream society. A third wave (1965-present) has come about as a result of changes in US immigration laws and quotas. Attitudes toward these latter groups were affected by events beyond their control, namely, the creation of Israel and subsequent disorder in the Middle East. As a result, some Arabic immigrants never completely became part of the American “melting pot” and have been in a quest for their American identity. Exacerbating the situation for Arabs in the U.S. were the attacks on 9/11 and events following that. Research involving portrayal of Arabs and Muslims—the two terms often are used interchangeably albeit erroneously—shows news and entertainment media generally presenting a distorted, usually negative image of Arabs. These negative stereotypes cut across most media, advertising, television and especially movies. The Arab as a villain emerged in the form of a nasty sheikh or a terrorist. Yet other events during this era—hostage taking, plane hijackings, bombing of the World Trade Center in New York, etc.—further fueled these negative images. Arab American organizations, meanwhile, have responded by trying to combat the stereotyping and media misrepresentation and correct the public record concerning Arab Americans. Among leading organizations in this effort are the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC, founded in 1980) and the Arab American Institute (AAI, founded in 1885).

## **Kenneth Starck,**

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Kenneth Starck is a former journalist and current dean of the Zayed University College of Communication and Media Sciences. Before joining Zayed, he was at the University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication where he served as director for 17 years. In his first term as director, he helped the School regain national accreditation. Starck has spent much of his career studying international communication issues. His interests center on role of the media in society, including media freedom and responsibility. Courses he has taught include intercultural affairs reporting and international communication. Starck has worked as a reporter for the Decatur, Ill., Review and the Memphis, Tenn., Commercial Appeal and as a free-lance correspondent in Scandinavia and China. From 1997-2004 he was news ombudsman for the Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Gazette Company. He has held two Fulbright professorships--during 1994-95 with the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Bucharest, Romania, and from 1986-87 in the Department of Journalism, Graduate School, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing. He also taught a year at the University of Tampere (Finland) and has lectured in Japan, Iceland, Canada, Ukraine, Great Britain, Hong Kong, Korea, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Germany. He has also published extensively. His book, *Public Relations and Community: A Reconstructed Theory* (1988), co-authored with Dean Kruckeberg, received a national award for "outstanding developmental, and educational research in public relations" from the Commission on Public Relations of the Speech Communication Assn. He is past president of the Assn. for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (1981-82) and the Assn. of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication (1984-85). Honors include a Past President Leadership Award from the Assn. of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication (2003), and many more.

Research Interests: Press Freedom and Responsibility; Intercultural Communication

Teaching Interests: Reporting and Writing; Intercultural Journalism

Professional Memberships: Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (president, 1981-82); Kappa Tau Alpha; Society of Professional Journalists