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"A WILD ASS OF A MAN": AMERICAN IMAGES OF
ARABS TO 1948.

THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA, PH.D., 1978

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GRADUATE COLLEGE

"A WILD ASS OF A MAN": AMERICAN

IMAGES OF ARABS TO 1948

A DISSERTATION

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degree of

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BY

TERRY B. HAMMONS

Norman, Oklahoma

1978

"A WILD ASS OF A MAN": AMERICAN
IMAGES OF ARABS TO 1948

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"A WILD ASS OF A MAN": AMERICAN IMAGES OF ARABS

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This study concerns itself with the how and why of anti-Aab prejudice in America up to the creation of Israel after World War II.

American images of Arabs were almost exclusively negative. Arabs were perceived as fanatical, ignorant, libidinous and dangerous, beliefs with roots deep in Western culture. Americans inherited those images, and concurred with them, but Americans soon built their own interpretation of Arabs. A uniquely American set of images of Arabs appeared in the nineteenth century, the result of missionary efforts, spreading diplomatic and commercial relations, tourism, and traditional and scholarly literary sources. The Bible and the Tale of the Arabian Nights were particularly important to American images.

The key to the American reaction to Arabs was their generalized ideology of social and cultural superiority, herein called Savageism. Savageism was an economic and psychological tool of American expansion because it justified both economically and morally, the dispossession of primitive people. Because the idea defined the savage it could also be turned around to define the civilized man, so in that way it also became a tool for American nationalism. Americans saw Arabs as savages and that conditioned their response to

all relations with the Arab world. A powerful sense of American mission and related Biblical imagery complicated the images even more, as did the national experience with American Indians.

In the 20th century the United States assumed an expanded role in the Middle East and those images began to determine policy. Americans believed Arabs were dangerous and backward so they supported European imperialism, conservative Arab leadership, and Zionism decisions that set the parameters of contemporary policy in the region.

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CHAPTER I

THE INHERITED IMAGE

In the fall of 1922 the Senate Foreign Relations Committee un-animously approved a resolution favoring the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine. The resolution was of little practical importance, but it allowed Chairman Henry Cabot Lodge to present a congratulatory speech to his colleagues. The speech revealed the primal roots of his Zionism, and conversely, his unthinking anti-Arab attitudes. Warming to his subjects, Lodge said:

You may smile when I tell you that, although as a child I read my Bible, both Old and New Testaments, I got my first idea of the present condition of Palestine and of the Mohammeden possession from two of Scott's novels, which absorbed my thought when, as a boy of nine, I read with most passionate interest Sir Walter Scott's stories of The Talisman and Ivanhoe. I had, of course, intense sympathy for the Crusaders, and it seemed to me a great wrong that Jerusalem should be beneath the Moslem rule. 1

He concluded with several stanzas of open verse and the observation that "...the dominant impression of the boyish mind was hostility to the Mohammadan and an intense admiration for Richard the Lion-Hearted."²

It was an extraordinary aside but it went unnoticed. If his audience was even listening his childhood reminiscence would have only evoked, as he predicted, a smile and an impreceptible nod. Any rational examination of the statement would show it to be dangerously simple-minded: Lodge, a mighty power in the world of international politics, was admitting that some romantic novels, read at the age of nine, hardened his opinions about a question of global importance. But no one questioned his reasoning because his adolescent fantasies

were common stuff and the assumptions they bred were universally held.

The Senator's speech revealed a great deal about the psychological power, sources and impact of images. His ideas of "the present condition of Palestine" and its satellite images of Arabs were at the same time deeply personal and deeply communal; they were rooted in his childhood; and they transcended logic.³ The fact that it was Henry Cabot Lodge, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, showed that such poorly founded impressions can occasionally have important ramifications. The impact of perceptions can be considerable, yet because of their fundamental nature they often go unrecognized in our equations of historical causation. The power of images rests in their role in the formation of assumptions, those things few people ever question.⁴ If Americans heard all their lives that Arabs were fanatical savages who brutalized their women and shunned work for brigandage, they would naturally come to assume that Arabs were dishonest, irrational and dangerous. Such assumptions become the unacknowledged anchor, the common denominator, of policy-making. They are the givens.

Lodge's hostility toward Arabs was natural given his cultural milieu. The Senator's ideas were the culmination of an anti-Arab tradition that stretched back through Western culture for thousands of years. Millenia produced a set of images whose chief characteristics, beside their polemical quality, were an astounding continuity and sustained irrationality. The source of both was the deep religious

impulse that generated the images. From first to last the antagonism between western culture and the Arab world has been religious. Until the Enlightenment all that the western world knew of Arabs was of a religious nature and derived largely from religious sources.⁵ That has changed somewhat in the past two centuries but less than one might expect. Among the inarticulate, religiously laden and romantic images of Arabs are still the rule. In even the most objective and scientific writings about Arabs the attack and images that result have only changed vocabulary while retaining the impulse. Arabs have ceased to be the minions of the Anti-Christ but they remain exemplars of anti-progressivism, the equivalent of paganism in the modern age. In short, recent centuries have seen only the partial secularization of images of Arabs and there has been no substantial changes in content or effect.

Western society had longer contact with the Arab world than with any other non-western people. Indeed, it began before such a thing as "western culture" existed. Yet the communications between the two peoples were always sporadic and seldom involved many people. Lacking steady personal knowledge, the kind that might have produced a healthy estimation of Arabs, the role of literary sources and their images became magnified. Herodotus wrote that the Arabs of North Africa lived in holes and spoke like bats.⁶ Aesop's opinions were no higher. In "Herbe's Chariot" the gods traveled the globe leaving the proper

share of greed, deceit, misery and treachery in every nation. When they got to Arabia the natives, thinking they were wonderful gifts, stole them all.⁷

The literary bedrock of Western culture, the Bible, became the first and most powerful medium of propagation for a hoary and sinister set of images, images that carried divine sanction. The rise of Christianity signalled the spread of a mythology that featured Arab people in most of the villainous roles. During Christianity's infancy the images operated in a vacuum as the new faith spread and became the spiritual web of a new vision of life and society. Europeans embraced a desert faith and created a new culture, but in embracing the faith they also embraced a desert people's hatreds and fears.

Then in the middle of the seventh century Mohammed's new creed galvanized the Arab world and transformed the Biblical Ishmaelites into a terrible reality. Bedouin warriors captured northern Africa and moved on southern Europe. Christianity, still a tenuous proposition in many parts of Europe, was facing the gravest threat to its existence since the invasion of the Huns. In many ways the Muslims were worse than the Huns. They were every bit as awesome and in addition they were motivated by a relatively sophisticated and attractive faith, a faith as dynamic and militant as early Christianity itself. In the face of possible extinction the Church instituted an on-going conspiracy to depict the Arabs and Islam in the worst possible manner. The Church had already lost half its domain to the Arabs and the belief that the struggle was mortal justified any means. Despite access to

correct information about Islam and its adherents the war psychosis produced a deformed image.⁸ A process of demonization began that continued into the modern era.

It was easy enough to do. Credulity was universal and the Church had a monopoly on intellectual production and communication. Many of the images from the Bible became central to the theological attack. Arab voluptuousness and violence, fornicationes et furta, became the major themes of ecclesiastical imagery. St John of Damascus, born fifty years after the Hegira, was the first anti-Islamic polemicist and his writings established the contours of Christian perceptions for centuries. He stressed Arab savagery, the licentious nature of the faith and Islam's illogical and fraudulent nature. Even after the Arabs ceased to be a real military threat the images continued to harden and grow, centering now on Islamic doctrine, a doctrine that the Church believed endorsed pleasure as an article of faith.⁹

The images of Arab sensuality were most apparent in beliefs about Muslim paradise and the life of Mohammed. The one element of Islam that every Christian knew was that the Musselman who died in battle for his faith was borne immediately into a paradise of sloe-eyed houris for an orgiastic eternity. That translated, most immediately, into the absurdity that Arabs would happily die slaughtering Christians and supported the images of the Arab as a fanatical warrior poised constantly on the edge of Holy War. As for the Prophet, Church literature and most other sources until the last century, portrayed

him as a satyr who founded Islam to mask his own lusts. Some authors stressed the Prophet's impious libido while others made his supposed epilepsy the primary motivating force.¹⁰ Warped ideas about Mohammed's life, Islamic laws of marriage and divorce, and the supposed Koranic approval of homosexuality combined with the folk knowledge of Muslim paradise to form a single theme of Arab licence that "proved" the rival creed a carnal fraud and vindicated an entrenched Christianity. Such beliefs simply flew in the face of reason and decency as the Christian world understood them, and the ascetic's condemnation of the sensualist has prevailed Christian-Arab antagonism from the beginning.¹¹ From such a basis it was a short step elevating the licentious false prophet to the role of Antichrist and the demonization process was completed.

By the eleventh century the ecclesiastic images of Arabs were firmly embedded in western culture. The Crusades renewed contact and the fervor strengthened the religious overtones of anti-Arab imagery. Mohammed was portrayed in apocalyptic terms and the visions of Daniel and Revelations were often applied.¹² The Crusades introduced substantial person-to-person contact but since it was at sword-point it was no surprise that the Arabs were perceived as fanatical, inherently warlike, treacherous and savage. The romances of the Middle Ages made it clear that violence was the only way to deal with the Saracen. The romances were often the crudest type of propaganda and barely gave a nod to the canons of real romance literature.¹³ Authors used the popular form only because it had wide appeal--their real

message was not the ideals of chivalry but the conquest, at any price, of Islam. The Christian knight that did mortal battle with a Saracen giant was a common plot element, a medieval version of David and Goliath.¹⁴ The depth of Christian hatred and fear was evident in the popular romance about Richard the Lion-Hearted. The Crusader king became ill and craved pork but his men could not find any in the Muslim country. They substituted a plump young Arab and Richard ate him with gusto. He regained his health, developed a taste for Saracens, and later cowed a banquet of enemy warriors when he served boiled heads.¹⁵

The Song of Roland was one of the most popular and enduring of the Romances. It was written in the eleventh century to commemorate the Battles of Roncevaux, fought between the French and rebellious Basques in the late 770s. By the time the tale was formalized it was the Arabs that Christians feared so the historical Basques became the polemical Saracens. The Arabs were depicted as treacherous, cowardly and cruel. The tone of the epic was hysterical, indicative of the Christian world's irrational terror. Gore dripped from its pages and up to the last moment gallant Roland slew the demon Muslims. As Roland lay dying a Saracen bent over his body to steal his famous sword (the one with St. Peter's tooth in the hilt), but Roland rallied to take his final victim, smashing him on the head with an ivory horn so hard that "both the eyes burst from the face."¹⁶ The Arabs were treated seriously in the chansons de geste. They were a crucial problem and the Romances helped fire the imagination for the supreme struggle against the Saracen threat. More polemic than Romance they

were a psychological imperative of a war psychosis and accepted as truth, not fancy.

The Crusades reintroduced a Biblical image that had lapsed under the prevailing hysteria. The image of the Arabs as a people of luxurious and exotic wealth entered western mythology as caravans of spices and silks trailed into Europe. It produced wild visions of eastern wealth and gave impetus to the Age of Discovery and eventually the exploration and settlement of the New World. In The Song of Roland the evil Muslim king sent Charles "bears and lions, leashed boarhounds, seven hundred camels and a thousand falcons lately mewed, four hundred mules weighed down with gold and silver, fifty wagons to range in a wagon train, every one of them groaning with gold coins."¹⁷ Such descriptions of Arab wealth were common and were loaded with theological implications. The image of wealth was another side of the ascetic critique of Arab sensualism; Martin Luther believed Arab wealth forecast their eventual doom--the Lord frequently heaped material pleasures on the most despised, thereby insuring their condemnation in the afterworld.¹

The Renaissance and the Age of Discovery, made possible in part by Arab preservation of classical knowledge, did little to affect European images of Arabs. Trade increased but with the rise of the Ottoman Empire so did fear of Jihad. Obviously, religious themes and fears remained dominant. Travel narratives began to appear during the early years, the first of a genre that eventually became an important source of information and images of the East. The most important of the early narrative was The Travels of Sir John Mandeville, which appeared first

in France in the mid-fourteenth century and in England at the end of the sixteenth.¹⁹ Most of it was the wildest fiction and the authorship was disputed but its readership was wide for its day and it became the archetype for narratives that followed. Its view of Arabs was an uneven mixture of fact and fantasy. Arabia was the home of the phoenix and centaurs roamed the deserts of Egypt. Mandeville also reported trees that bore fruit seven times every year and emeralds so abundant that they were mere baubles. As for the Arabs,

They be a folk full of all evil conditions. And they have none houses, but tents, that they make of skins of beasts, as of camels and beasts they eat....They till not the land, and they labor not...and they be strong men and well-fighting. 20

The Travels of John Mandeville, purportedly a true account, reinforced Church propaganda. Mandeville made much of the Muslim paradise and the Assassin sect. The Assassins were a group of Muslim fanatics that were dedicated to perpetual Jihad. Their tactics were to kill selected Christians and they would stalk them to the ends of the earth to carry out their mission. The Assassins hid in a mountain redoubt where their converts were brainwashed with hashish and turned into gore-crazed killers. Mandeville and other early travelers, including Marco Polo, spent an inordinate amount of time discussing the sect, an indication of its symbolic importance. The Assassins represented the frightening images of Arab violence, fanaticism, and sensuality. In the twentieth century we can also see the roots of the Arab terrorist image in the medieval sect.

It was only with the Enlightenment that westerners began to

receive information that was not freighted with religious bias. Sales' translation of the Koran and Simon Ockley's The History of the Saracens were well-received and followed in a few generations by Gibbon's history and Burke's remarkable defense of Islamic law.²³ The more grotesque legends about Mohammed faded, appearing only infrequently, as in Voltaire's Mahomet.²⁴ Enlightenment thinkers, so often pre-occupied with political and social criticism of their own cultures, turned to the same concerns when examining the Arab East. Intent on creating a philosophy of liberalism to suit an emerging capitalist social order they made a concerted attack on religion, the major bulwark of non-rational, non-progressive power. Their interpretations of Christianity as an illiberal force led to similar conclusions about Islam and the Arabs. While the East had preserved western knowledge and did evidence a complex civilization, they were still barbarians because the Arabs lacked even the rational tools for growth.²⁵

The Enlightenment, concerned with science, stressed the effect of environment on the Arabs. Gibbon said the extreme heat "inflames the blood" and caused the Arab's "libidinous complexion."²⁶ That libidinous complexion was the cause of their downfall. The Arab Empire rose swiftly because of the zeal and purity of the early faith, but power and wealth soon worked their corrupting influences. Seraglios, legions of eunuchs and mountains of treasure resulted in despotism and stagnation.²⁷ The West was no longer afraid of the Arabs, either militarily or religiously, and Enlightenment imagery lost the paranoid edge of earlier centuries. The new intellectuals did not dispute

prevailing images, however, they merely explained them differently. A rationalist condemnation replaced a religious condemnation and the net gain for the Arabs was zero.

European contact with Arabs increased rapidly after Bonaparte conquered Egypt in 1799. Enlightenment curiosity brought scholarly adventurers into the region for a first-hand look and their journeys produced dozens of travel and exploration narratives that had a strong impact on western perceptions of Arabs. Americans contributed to the effort but the major works were French and English. Their books seldom reached a wide audience but they were primary sources for popular treatments and required reading for more casual and less daring travelers. William Lynch, a nineteenth century American explorer of the Jordan River, took a copy of Chateaubriand's narrative; Thoreau, one of the great armchair travelers, had almost a dozen narratives about the Arab world on his shelves; and T. E. Lawrence fantasized over Charles Doughty's peculiar Travels in Arabia Deserts.²⁸

The travel and exploration narratives did nothing to improve western images of Arabs. In fact, because they were contemporary and heavy with facts and examples they served to strengthen existing prejudices. Even authors who liked the Arabs described the East in terms that the average western reader had to despise. Sir Richard Burton, one of the handful of westerners to penetrate the holy city of Mecca, was strongly attracted to the Arabs but mainly because he was in full revolt against the strictures of his own society. Like many other famous Arabists his nihilism and romanticism conditioned

his images of Arabs and his writings stressed Arab violence and sensuality. H. St. John Philby, Ibn Saud's equivalent of Lawrence, lived for years with Arabs and even converted to Islam. Even he had little good to say for the Arabs. Those travelers and explorers who were not especially pro-Arab to begin with were adamant in their denunciations. Charles Doughty spent several years wandering between desert tribes disguised as a Muslim physician. He came back filled with contempt, convinced the Arabs were dangerous degenerates. John Lewis Burckhardt traveled among the bedouins and wrote two scholarly books about his experiences and Arab history and culture. He found them, on the whole, to be savage robbers who debauched their women and profaned their holy places.

Their reactions were to be expected. Explorers and scholars were themselves a product of liberal culture and even if they spurned modernity the ideas still determined how they thought. Their approach to the Arabs was frequently openly hostile, as in Doughty's case, and seldom any more positive than the scholarly disgust found in Burckhardt's books.

Romanticism, in many ways a reaction to Enlightenment rationality, influenced eighteenth and nineteenth century images of Arabs. The Romantics—painters, novelists and an occasional adventurer like Burton or Lawrence—rejected European society and looked to the East as an antidote for Western materialism. The Arabs came to symbolize freedom and passion, the two traits the Romantics felt modern society repressed; violence and voluptuousness were positive traits for Romantics and

they emphasized those aspects of Arab culture in their work. They exalted Arabs, but for all the wrong reason, and the result was that they reinforced ancient preconceptions.

The Arabian Nights was a precursor of Romanticism and was so popular in England and France that it dominated Romantic conceptions.²⁹

Burton's massive translation provided the clearest link between the nineteenth-century Romantics and the Eastern tales and demonstrated the morally-skewed quality of their attraction to the Arabs. Disgusted with the West they turned to the East, and found it exciting and liberating. Burton wrote in the preface to The Arabian Nights:

From my dull and commonplace and "respectable" surroundings, my Jinn bore me at once to the land of my predilections, Arabia, a region so familiar to my mind that even at first sight, it seemed a reminiscence of some bygone metaphysical life in the distant past. 30

He characterized the stories, and Arab life in general, as "musk, blood and hashish," and his translation was reflective of his own special predilections.³¹ His version of the stories was prodigiously footnoted from his extensive knowledge of Eastern life. Much of it was sexual and bizarre: he informed a waiting West that vengeful Arab women sometimes tore their lover's testicles off with their bare hands and that Egyptian fellahs gang-raped crocodiles.³² His Terminal Essay shocked Victorians with its defense of homosexuality, a condition that Burton claimed was endemic among the Arabs.³³ The Victorian audience reacted predictably to the explicit sexuality of Burton's translation. Anthony Comstock, the moral crusader and censor, condemned it in Boston and other critics found the sensuality and sybarism

defects in Mohammedan moral development.³⁴ Burton's contemporaries were not as convinced as he was that the East offered a needed balance to western rationalism--what he and others saw as romantic many only saw as degenerate.

Literature of the previous century showed the Romantic impression of Arab life. Sir Walter Scott, an author who enjoyed tremendous popularity in America, was the most important of the Romantics dealing with the Arab East. The Talisman, a Crusader tale, was the best known of his books dealing with Arabs. He admitted in his preface that his knowledge of the East was restricted to The Arabian Nights so it was not surprising that Saladin, the major Saracen character, was part sorcerer, part warrior and part satyr.³⁵ Yet Scott's Saladin was the most sympathetic Arab character in modern English literature. He was chivalrous, courageous and wise, but he was also still a Saracen. An English princess, when given the opportunity to save the Crusade by marrying Saladin, chose to allow the Crusade to fail. The implication that anything, even failure and the death of thousands, was preferable to union with the savage was indicative of the general esteem westerners granted Arabs.

Nineteenth century Romantic painting also exploited Eastern and Arab themes. The Orientalists, like the French artists Delacroix, Chasseriau and Fromentin, and the Englishmen William Holman Hunt and Richard Dale, drew on the travel narratives and personal visits to the Arab lands. Violence, decay, sexuality and indolence characterized the paintings, imagery apparent in their titles: "Fantasy of the

Egyptian Harem" (Richard Dale), "Mameluke Restraining a Horse," (Theodore Gericault), "Women of Algiers" (Delacroix), "A Fellaah Woman" and "The Capture of Abdel Kader's Train by the Duc Aumale" (Lecomte-Vernet.)³⁶

So, Romanticism, the only western intellectual movement that was not unalterably anti-Arab, contributed to traditional images and biases. The Romantics' perceptions of the Arabs were no different than a medieval monk's--the Romantics simply encouraged what everyone else denounced.

From the early Church to the Romantics western images of Arabs showed a remarkable continuity. Religious hostility, ethnocentrism and fantasy conditioned the European reaction and for milleniums the Arab was conceived as lustful, dangerous, demonic and mysterious. Vast cultural differences and periodic wars kept the deprecatory imagery meaningful and each era produced a new literary or artistic vehicle to express them. But two books, the Bible and The Arabian Nights, were more important, and more representative than any others in forming and maintaining western images. They deserve separate examination.

Nineteenth and twentieth century American writing about Arabs display so many allusions, similies and metaphors from the Bible and The Arabian Nights that they soon numb the reader. One is tempted to dismiss them as trite literary devices, but that would be to dismiss

both the acknowledged importance of fantasy in an individual's consciousness and the religious orientation of our collective national consciousness.³⁷ It would also be to dismiss the possibility that people often mean what they say.

The impact of the books was due to several factors. First, and most obvious, was the sacred character of the Bible. Its imagery carried divine sanction for millions of Christians. Both books were universally known, especially the Bible. Among the literate The Arabian Nights was nearly omnipresent for the last two centuries. During the nineteenth century it went through seventy-five editions in England and America and its characters and stories became common parlance.³⁸ The impact of the tales can be seen in the writing of Scott, Tennyson, Dickens, Irving, Stevenson, Kipling and Twain.³⁹ But the popularity of the books was due, above all, to the fact that both the Bible and The Arabian Nights were art—they spoke to universal problems in universal symbols and archetypes. Their symbolic character also explained their image-making power, especially since they were usually encountered during childhood when the mind was the least discerning and the most susceptible to forceful imagery.⁴⁰ That is also the age when most of the variations of ethnocentrism, from religious to racial bigotry, develop. Bruno Bettelheim, studying the psychology of "enchantment," classified both books as fairy tales and analyzed their subliminal effect from that point of view. He found that their powerful symbolism and simple, moral-laden stories were easily understandable and often useful to children.⁴¹ Part of

the unavoidable, and unintentional, result was irrational and deprecatory set of images of Arabs.

The sibling rivalry motif illustrates the principle. Sibling antagonism was the starting point of many tales in both the Bible and The Arabian Nights. In The Arabian Nights greedy and treacherous brothers were turned into black hounds or charcoal statues, providing the young reader a satisfying fantasy solution for his own repressed anger.⁴² The stories also taught that an inordinate number of Arabs were greedy and treacherous, not to mention unusually harsh and vengeful. The same theme was of even greater importance in biblical stories because of sacred associations. The stories of Cain and Abel, Abraham and Lot, Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and Esau were all of special interest in that regard.⁴³ In all of them the protagonist in the sibling conflict was a founder of the Hebrews and the antagonist a founder of the Arabs. Cain, the ancestor of the Canaanites, was a fratricide and cursed by God; Lot was a sodomite whose incestuous relations with his daughters produced two Arab patriarchs; and Ishmael and Esau were depicted in images of wilderness, violence and savagery. In the story of Ishmael, the mythological father of modern Arabs, no less authority than God declares, "He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him; in opposition to all his kin shall he encamp."⁴⁴ Esau, patriarch of the Edomites of Sinai, was born red and hairy, a pointed description in a book noted for its lack of physical descriptions. Symbolism of that type is easily understood, even to a child.

The same motif lent itself to deeper interpretations that were valuable to adults as well as children. Conflicts between brothers could also be interpreted as an individual's internal ego-id conflicts, each brother representing one aspect of the whole personality. The Hebrew brother, always triumphant, was the rational and civilized ego, the Arab brother was the violent and sensual id. The ego-id parallels were evident in each story and while nineteenth-century interpreters lacked the Freudian vocabulary they did not miss the concept. While discussing Jacob and Esau's struggle in Rebecca's womb, one religious scholar wrote perceptively, "This strife begins early; every true Israelite begins at war with his being." He also identified the Canaanites with man's "corrupt affections and lusts." they were "not to be spared..we must crucify and slay them; we must show them no mercy; our hatred of them must be irreconcilable and incessant."⁴⁵ For that minister the Jacob and Esau story was important as a symbolic presentation of the constant struggle the true Christian had to wage against his own corrupted nature. The good, ego side, was the "true Israelite" and the bad, id side, was the hatred Canaanite. The application was to individual psychology but there was an echo of the old ascetic critique of the sensualist about the interpretation.

The psychological utility of the tales could also be seen in the way they addressed problems of coping with overwhelming authority figures. In The Arabian Nights the conflict was often symbolized as a confrontation with a gigantic and ferocious genie or an evil adult, as in "The Fisherman's Tale" or Alladin's Wonderful Lamp."⁴⁶ The solutions of the stories showed youthful readers that cunning could overcome

physical power, a valuable lesson for anyone but one with particular meaning for children.⁴⁷ They also left the irrational impression that the Arab landscape was one of nightmares and wonders. The Biblical legend of David and Goliath was a perfect example of the motif and its premier popularity among Old Testament stories testified to its psychological appeal. The story of Jacob and Leban served the same function: Jacob's Arab uncle, Leban, deceived him twice, first foisting his elder daughter onto Jacob and then denying the young man the flocks he had rightfully earned. But Jacob worked hard and gained both his flocks and his beloved. At the end of the story Jacob built a watchtower to forever separate the two peoples.⁴⁸ The story of Joseph and his sojourn in Egypt combined many elements in a single tale. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery to Ishmaelites who in turn sold him to the Egyptian, Potiphar. Potiphar's wife tried to seduce the boy and when he refused he was exiled to slave labor. His wisdom and cleverness led eventually to his rise in the royal court and a dramatic reconciliation with his family. Sibling rivalry, separation anxiety, oedipal traumas, and the resolution of powerlessness were all combined to provide a story of great subconscious appeal in which Arabs were the consistent villains.⁴⁹

Those examples demonstrated why fantasy tales had strong image-making potential—they addressed common human problems with universal symbols and made their deepest impression in childhood. But those examples showed only a few of the sinister images in The Arabian Nights and the Bible, images that were often unrecognized and unexamined and

doomed the reader to irrational and fanciful assumptions about Arabs.

Violence, immorality and wealth were the dominant images in both the Bible and The Arabian Nights. No other type of imagery was possible in the Bible—it was, after all, largely a history of the ancient Jews and the Arabs were their enemies. The Old Testament was especially laden with stories and images of perpetual war, massacre and horrible vengeance.⁵⁰ The martial relationship between Hebrew and Arab was conceived, literally, with Cain and Abel and continued through the dissolution of ancient Israel. To justify their history and faith the sacred texts had to portray the Arabs as violent, lascivious and savage. Those ancient prejudices were the bedrock of western culture and Europeans, and in time, Americans, absorbed them naturally.

One of the strongest Old Testament images of Arabs was related to their function as God's agents of retribution and temptation. When the Hebrews entered Canaan they were assured conquest of the land but also that a remnant of the former people would remain to be "...a thorn in your sides, and their gods will be a snare unto you."⁵¹ Arabs were first a medium of temptation, (their women and faith) and then of chastisement. When the Hebrews strayed too far from the fold their neighbors were sent to punish them—God's own hell-hounds unleashed periodically on a nation of stiff-necked sinners. Yet that same retributory function insured the Arab's destruction. Time and again horrible prophecies of death, pestilence and ruin were leveled at the Arabs and no punishment was too dehumanizing or extreme when the

Hebrews got their revenge.⁵² Joshua went through Canaanite cities like God's own wrath, leaving nothing alive; Jezebel was crushed and left for the dogs to devour; and David, the greatest Arab-killer of all, was sent to raise a dowry of one hundred Philistine foreskins. He returned with two hundred.⁵³ The Arabs were a continual threat, both spiritually and physically, to the Hebrews. They were so awful that extermination, even castration, was warranted and sanctified.

Wilderness imagery reinforced ideas about Arab violence and savagery. Ishmael was banished to the wilderness of Paran where he became an archer; and Lot and Esau wandered the deserts and founded their dynasties. Bedouins were often called "children of the east," a phrase pregnant with paternalistic and sinister overtones. Fiercesome beasts--lions, jackals, hyenas, hawks and flying serpents--symbolized the wilderness and the books of Exodus and Joel named Arabia as the home of the locusts, establishing the base for a powerful and popular metaphor:⁵⁴

And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them. And they camped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle and their tents, and they came as grasshoppers for multitudes; for both they and their camels were without number: and they entered into the land to destroy it. 55

Occasionally the association with animals was direct; Esau's hairiness was so interpreted, as were the "ravens" who fed Elijah at the Wadi Chereth. The Midianite warrior that faced Gideon was named Zeeb. (Wolf), a symbol that remained popular until the nineteenth century.⁵⁶

Images of Arab sensuality were often linked to those of violence. The promiscuous religions of the Canaanites, often referred to in images of harlotry, were a constant temptation to the Hebrews. Old Testament prophets repeatedly inveighed against the Hebrews' propensity to backslide into the pagan voluptuousness of the surrounding people. The Arab women, the "outlander," were the greatest symbols of Arab licentiousness. Jezebel led Ahab into idolatry; Delilah betrayed Samson; Bath-sheba the Hittite bedazzled David and brought Nathan's wrath; Potiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph and Solomon was undone by no fewer than seven hundred foreign wives.⁵⁷ The strong Biblical image of Arab sexuality entered the language—we still speak of Jezebels, sodomy and onanism.

Arab wealth reinforced the image of the Arab voluptuary and carried its own condemnation in the eyes of the ascetic Hebrews. Arabia, especially the fabled Ophir, produced precious metals, jewels, spices, onyx, fine woods, pearls and exotic animals. They all flowed into Solomon's court and provided its legendary opulence.⁵⁸ When the Queen of Sheba came to his court she brought gold, spices, and precious stones to exchange for his wisdom. One of the few references to Arabians in the New Testament was of the eastern kings who traveled to visit the Christ-child and brought frankincense and myrrh.⁵⁹ Such images were both fantastic and implicitly immoral. Within the Hebrew, and later, the Christian, value system it symbolized worldliness, vice and all the things inimical to spirituality and grace. Job made it clear that all the gold of Ophir could not buy wisdom or God's love.⁶⁰

The same imagery appeared in The Arabian Nights. Sex, violence and fabulous wealth dominated the tales and created an atmosphere of wonder and horror. Images of plunder and wealth--rubies as big as oranges and valleys of diamonds--appeared continually in the tales. "Alladin's Wonderful Lamp," "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," and the Sinbad stories, among the most popular of the tales, all turned on finding fantastic fortunes. Their popularity over other stories was undoubtedly due in part to their appeal to two centuries of pubescent capitalists. But windfall profits were only part of the image--horror and wonder always accompanied them. Each of Sinbad's seven voyages returned bountiful riches but only after fantastic adventures. He was cast into a hollow mountain full of rotting corpses, including his beloved's; a rukh and a gigantic serpent nearly ate him; a terrible old man with legs like an animal clung to his back for days; and a black giant, with lips like a camel, fiery eyes and claws like a lion nearly killed him.⁶¹ Ali Baba escaped the thieves but his brother was captured and cut into quarters. Ali Baba almost fell into their hands but his maid-servant poured scalding oil over them and killed them.⁶² Alladin was trapped under tons of earth and later had to decapitate an evil magician to retain his lamp.⁶³ The magnificent treasures were only a part of a larger landscape of terror. Carpets flew through the air but so did rukhs that sank ships with boulders and gulahs that ate men.

The Arabian Nights reeked with sex, often of a perverse variety. King Shahriyar married and killed a virgin every night for years to

avenge himself against an adulterous wife. His brother discovered his wife and blackamoor slave in a similar situation and he cut the lovers in two. One princess, trapped in a bottle by a genie, still managed to make him a cuckold a hundred times. The seductress of one story encouraged her lover to admit her sister to their revels. When she became jealous of the younger woman the older sister cut off the younger's head and left the youth to take the blame. The wife of the King of the Black Islands drugged him and then went to her slave lover. The king followed and witnessed her degradation. The slave made her eat rat's flesh and drink the dregs of barley-beer before he bedded her on a pile of filthy rags. The king avenged himself with his scimitar.⁶⁴ In his famous Terminal Essay, Sir Richard Burton commented on the women of The Arabian Nights. They were "mostly Sectaries of the God Wunsch; beings of impulse, blown about by every gust of passion; stable only in instability, constant only in inconstancy."⁶⁵

So, the Bible and The Arabian Nights, the two books about Arabs that every literate person knew, worked their wiles on the western mind. The effect of the books was to create a strong fantasy warp on the way Europeans and Americans perceived Arabs. In the case of the Bible the images were first, ancient and obscured by time. Even if it were not, the Bible, stripped of any sacred assumptions, was largely a polemic history and as subjective and biased as any other comparable history. The argument is more apparent with The Arabian Nights. It admitted to being only fantasy--fairy tales for children or dream-food for

eccentric Romantics. During the nineteenth century the better translations were increasingly accepted as bona fide anthropological tools for understanding Eastern life, which they were, but not as a sole reference.⁶⁶ To think that one understood the Arabs after spending an evening with The Arabian Nights was analogous to thinking one understood the Germans after spending an evening leafing through the Brothers Grimm. Ironically, the stories were not even really Arab--the origin of many of the tales was either Persian or Hindu, and Alladin, as most have forgotten, was Chinese. But both books had tremendous psychological appeal and they usually did their magic and receded before logic and rationality were firmly established. Forever after their images were secreted in the reader's mind, periodically dredged out, dusted off and applied to make sense of the peculiar and exotic Arabs. One sacred and the other profane, the Bible and The Arabian Nights came to dominate western "imaginings" about Arabs. They did so to the detriment of both cultures.

Such was the imagery of Arabs that America inherited from the Old World. When Americans became independent and began dealing with Arabs they were steeped in a prejudice that was barnacled with age. Its roots were buried in a primal antagonism and its contents and structures solidified centuries before the New World was discovered. Religious antagonism was the traditional basis of the bias and Americans, as the most Christian of Christian nations, could not

escape its effects. A thick veil of fantasy, the product of ignorance and romanticism, made any rational appraisal of Arabs even more difficult.

But Americans were not Europeans and were not slaves to their set of images. Travelers, missionaries, novelist and propagandists of all stripes soon produced a distinctly American imagery. The new images relied on the European inheritance but showed strong elements of the American experience with the Indians, the particular American tendency to identify with the ancient Hebrews, and the growing belief in American superiority. The result was not a better image, merely an American one.

FOOTNOTES

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23. Smith, Islam in English Literature, 55, 100.
24. Ibid., 99.
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29. Martha Pike Conant, The Oriental Tale in England in the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1908), xx.
30. Richard F. Burton, The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night; With Introduction Explanatory Notes on the Manners and Customs of Moslem Men and a Terminal Essay Upon the History of the Nights (Calcutta, 1886), I:4.
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32. Kenneth Walker, ed., Love, War and Fancy: The Customs of the East from the Writings on the Arabian Nights by Sir Richard Burton (London, 1964), 206, 240.

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34. Margaret C. Annam, The Arabian Nights in Victorian Literature (unpublished dissertation, Northwestern University, 1945), 41.
35. Scott, Talisman, 5.
36. Roger Hardy, "Inspiration from Oriental Themes," Events: Newsmagazine on the Middle East (Sept. 9, 1977), 48-49.
37. Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales, (New York, 1976), 3-19; and William Anderson and Patrick Groff, A New Look at Children's Literature (Belmont, Calif., 1972), 34-55.
38. Annan, Victorian Literature, 6-7.
39. Ibid., 156-227; Conant, Oriental Tale, 253.
40. Levine, "Socialization, Social Structure, and Intersocietal Images," 4
41. Bettelheim's ideas are fully explained in his introduction but the following excerpt can serve as a summary:
 "Applying the psychanalytic model of the human personality, fairy tales carry important messages to the conscious, the pre-conscious, and the unconscious mind, on whatever level each is functioning at the time. By dealing with universal human problems, particularly those which preoccupy the child's mind, these stories speak to his budding ego and encourage its development, while at the same time relieving preconscious and unconscious pressures. Fairy tales aid in developing a moral personality by enabling the child to solve the moral dilemmas of the characters--they enable the child to develop his imagination, thereby learning to fit unconscious content into conscious fantasies which then enable him to deal with the problems." 6-7.
42. Stories from the Thousand and One Nights (The Arabian Night's Entertainments), trans. by Edward William Lane and revised by Stanley Lane-Poole. (New York, 1909), 23-26, 71-78, 107-115. The Harvard Classic edition will be used throughout because it was the most widely read in America.
43. The King James Bible has been used throughout, Genesis 4: 1-10; 9:24-27; 13: 1-13; chapters 16 and 17 and 25-28.
44. Genesis 16:12.
45. George Bush, Notes, Critical and Practical on the Book of Genesis (New York, 1850), 23, 61-63.

46. Stories from the Thousand and One Nights, 28-33, 355-443.
47. Bettelheim, Enchantment, 7.
48. Genesis 29-31.
49. Genesis 37-42.
50. T. R. Henn, The Bible as Literature (New York, 1970), 64.
51. Judges 2:2-4.
52. Isaiah 7:7; 13: 19-22; 34: 1-17; Jeremiah 49:23-33; Ezekiel 25: 1-17; 26: 3-12; Exodus 27:14.
53. See the Book of Joshua for Joshua's military conquests; II Kings 9 for Jezebel's ignoble end; and I Samuel 18 for David's gory quest.
54. Job 38:39-41; 39:5-12; Isaiah 34: 13-15; 14:29, 30:6; Numbers 21:6; Exodus 10-:13; Joel 1 and 2.
55. Judges 6:3-5.
56. I Kings 17: 4-6; Bush, Notes on Genesis, 63.
57. I Kings 16; Judges 14-16; II Samuel 11; Genesis 39; I Kings 11.
58. I Kings 10:2-15, ee; II Chronicles 9:1-21; Job 22:24, 28-16; I Chronicles 29:4.
59. Matthew 2:11.
60. Job 22:24, 28:16.
61. Stories from the Thousand and One Nights, 355-443, 242-310.
62. Ibid., 443-460.
63. Ibid., 355-443.
64. Ibid., 5-17, 150-58, 50-60.
65. Burton, The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night, v. X, 194.
66. Annan, Victorian Literature, 411-12; Walker, Love, War and Fancy, 7-12.

CHAPTER II

AMERICAN CONTACT AND AMERICAN IMAGES

American perceptions of Arabs differed from European images only in degree. Americans believed the same general things about Arabs as the rest of Christendom. What was different was why Americans believed them. European anti-Arab imagery was rooted in religious antagonism and military fear. For centuries Arabs were a real threat to the Europeans, spiritually and militarily, and their reaction was defensive. Such fears were meaningless to Enlightenment Americans. By the time the United States came into existence any religious reason for fearing Arabs was long dead. Military fears, except for a brief encounter during the Barbary Wars, were non-existent in the nineteenth century and barely credible during much of the twentieth. The traditional anti-Islamic and Arab warrior images remained part of American imagery but they no longer dominated.

Several distinctly American ideas impinged on their images, ideas that warped American perceptions above and beyond the ancient antipathies. The first was an American tendency to identify mythically with the ancient Hebrews, a tendency that made them early and fervent Zionist and conversely, generated an automatic anti-Arab

sentiment. The ideology of Savageism, an ethnocentric idea-complex that Americans used to justify the subjugation of primitive people and to define their own emerging culture, also had an impact on images of Arabs. Lastly, the ideology of Mission, the supposition that America had a message of Christianity, democracy, capitalism and the Good Life to teach the rest of the world. Those ideas converged, intersected and reinforced each other at so many points that it is possible to say they combined to comprise a uniquely American world-view.

The American-Hebrew parallel was one of the first and most basic American myths. The Puritans, steeped in the Bible and victims of the psuedo-science of typology, identified strongly with the Israelites of the Old Testament.¹ They saw their own history prefigured in the saga of the Hebrews, complete with a punishing Pharoah, a wilderness sojourn and a Promised Land. They too had a covenant with God and a mission to His children. It was a powerful metaphor that both justified and sanctified American history. Since the New Englanders were, metaphorically, the Israelites, that made the hapless Indians they met the evil Amalekites and Canaanites, liable to the same treatment the Israelites meted out to those ancient and offending Arabs. At the earliest stage of American history the association of Indians and Arabs was made, and it continued to obfuscate images of Arabs until the modern era. Cotton Mather believed the Indians were either descendants of the Scythians or the Canaanites who fled before Joshua's advance.² He compared them to the Armonites who "...made themselves to stink

before the New-English Israel" and, never fearing excess, likened them to Amalekites, Babylonians, Moabites and the mythical giants that inhabited Sinai before Esau.³ Benjamin Thompson, writing of King Philip's War, evoked Nimrod, the Arab hunter-king, to describe the Indians.⁴

As a metaphor of conquest the American-Hebrew/Indian-Arab parallels justified the dispossession of the Indian, but that was not its only function. It also provided the prevailing interpretation of the Indian's role in American history—they were the periodic scourges and tempters that God sent to test His stiff-necked people, the same role the Arabs once served for the Israelites. Frequent wars and countless captivity narratives kept the analogy alive and meaningful. Captivity narratives, one of the most popular literary forms in colonial America, demonstrated the use of the parallels. They often told of a woman torn from her family and dragged into the wilderness where she underwent torments and temptations at the hands of savage Indians. If she maintained her faith and did not succumb, she would be redeemed—saved from her captivity and returned to home and loved ones.⁵ They were written in a realistic narrative interspersed with frequent Biblical allusions, leaping literally between the ages. Mary Rowlandson's narrative, one of the most popular, alluded frequently to the Israelite captivity in Babylon. The style was calculated to the narrative's function, a function that made the parallels obvious and offered the reader catharsis from New World fears. The narratives assured the colonial Americans that it had all happened before, long ago and that faith and perseverance would assure eventual

triumph. When Cotton Mather compared Mr. Rowlandson's search for his wife to David's after bedouins stole his family from Ziklag he was stating an obvious and psychologically necessary parallel.⁶

The frequency with which the parallels were repeated indicated their profound hold on the American mind. Since the Puritans insisted on their correspondence to the Hebrews there was no other way to perceive Indians. The desert encounter of two groups of Semites four thousand years before predestined their roles and images. As the Puritans' faith disintegrated under New World pressures their mythology receded but never entirely disappeared. By the nineteenth century its religious symbolism was muted but the metaphor was still used actively during Andrew Jackson's wars against the Indians.⁷ All through the nineteenth century Americans saw striking similarities between Indians and Arabs that reinforced their early impressions and cemented the association in the American mind. Because of physical and some cultural parallels Arabs were so reminiscent of Indians that the association was a natural one for Americans to make. Really knowing little about Indians, and almost nothing about Arabs, the similarities of warfare, diet, nomadic lifestyle and material culture convinced many that the two vastly dissimilar peoples were actually very much alike and could and should be treated the same way.⁸ When Europeans first met Indians they tried to understand them in terms of Biblical Arabs. Two centuries later, when Americans opened contact with modern Arabs, they tried to understand them in terms of Indians. Neither the Indians or the Arabs benefited from the comparison.

The Indian-Arab parallel was less popular in the twentieth century, primarily because Indians were no longer as visible. Yet it appeared again in relation to the Israeli-Arab dispute and became an unconscious but powerful reason for American support to modern Zionism. The intervening years put a peculiar twist in the metaphor--where the earliest American settlers saw themselves as ancient Israelites, twentieth-century Americans frequently compared the modern Israelis to the American pioneers. Kibbutzim became hardy Kentuckians fighting off marauding Shawnees; the early Haganah were Texas Rangers; and David Ben-Gurion and his advisors were metamorphosed into the Founding Fathers. In the new metaphor the Arabs retained their old role--they were still the Indians. Again, the parallel was an easy one to make. The modern Jews were much like the first American pioneers--they too were a persecuted people seeking religious freedom in a wilderness of semi-savage pagans. The new "bearers of civilization" were East Europeans in shorts carrying Sten guns to synagogue and the Indians were Palestinian armed with Czech assault rifles skulking behind sand dunes but the metaphor retained all its old power. For Americans to reject Zionism would meant rejecting their own history, an inconsistency many Americans were not likely to make.

The American-Israelite metaphor and its corollary, the Indian-Arab metaphor, supplied the Biblical underpinning for an ideology Roy Harvey Pearce labeled Savageism. Savageism was devised in the seventeenth century to explain the Indians, Africans and other primitive people that Europeans encountered as they pushed into a wider world during the Age of Discovery.¹⁰ The idea was most fully developed in America because

it was there that Europeans were most immediately concerned with savages and there that savagery was a daily threat. Pearce and others have argued that the most important function of the ideology was in developing a nascent American self-image. By defining the savage state the idea could be turned around to aid in defining the civilized state, and it was civilization that concerned Europeans.¹¹ Facing a hostile environment and victims of centuries of horrible wilderness-lore (much of it Biblical and featuring Arabs as villains and monsters) the Europeans in America feared both physical and spiritual annihilation--if a war party did not get them they were equally afraid they or their fellows would kick off their buskins and leap naked back into the bushes themselves.¹² A clear understanding of what the savage was and why savageism was morally inferior aided in the combat. Savageism was a type of psychological armor, a relief column to their besieged super-egos.

Indians and Africans were the primary models for Savageism because they were the primitive people Europeans knew best. But up until the modern era the ideology was commonly applied to other non-western people. The striking parallels that Americans and other westerners thought they saw between Arabs and Indians only strengthened the conviction that Arabs were savage.

Savageism had both an academic definition and a much-diluted popular version. Scientists struggled for two centuries to produce a satisfactory theory of social evolution and an American, Henry Lewis Morgan, finally succeeded in the nineteenth century.¹³ Modern anthro-

pology quickly destroyed his formulations, but the idea was deeply entrenched in the popular mind that it maintained its force despite scientific criticism. The popular conception of savage life was already centuries old and it ignored the academic categorizations and hair-splittings over kinship systems and relative levels of material culture--filth, ignorance, heathenism, violence and blatant sexuality characterized the savage and it was not necessary to know that he married his cousin. That was assumed.

The real key to Savageism was its lack of progress and control over the physical and emotional environment. That was also the key to its usefulness in an emerging American self-image. Considering themselves the apogee of western civilization, Americans saw themselves as the most progressive of all western people. The savage was a living example of all they must combat and strive to avoid becoming. The Indian and by extension Arabs and other non-western people, were savages because they did not progress, they did not conquer their environments. They were prisoners of both the physical environment and their own animal natures and never even suspected there could be a superior way. They had no private property and they did no work and compounded their sins with a preening ignorance and a false sense of freedom. The savage lived in nature like an animal: he ate like an animal, smelled like an animal, treated his women like animals and as often as not lived in a filthy hovel with real animals. The savage was religiously, culturally, economically and politically an uncompleted man.¹⁴

In the case of the Indians the best solution to the savage threat was a combination of extermination and cultural assault designed to pull the savage up into civilization before he pulled the civilized man down into savagery. In the case of the rest of the world's savages the solution was simple—political isolationism while American institutions, especially trade (to provide the material base for civilization) and Christianity (to provide the spiritual base) worked their magic. It was at that point that Savageism converged and merged with the Mission ideology. There could have been no sense of Mission if there had not first been a consensus about non-western inferiority.¹⁵

Savageism, like the American-Hebrew metaphor that sanctified it, served both an economic and a psychological function. Psychologically it was a tool for self-definition and economically it was useful in dispossessing the primitives from needed land. Civilization was based on material progress and exalted agrarian life above the nomadic-hunter existence. According to their conceptions of natural law the land belonged to men who cultivated and improved it, an idea with its roots in Genesis and the Hebrew experience. Americans used Savageism to resurrect the old idea of vacuum domicilium, a rationale that allowed them to take the Indians' land and maintain a sense of self-righteousness at the same time.¹⁶ A century later it was still being used to rationalize the dispossession of Palestinian Arabs. An important Zionist argument was that the Arabs reduced the land to rubble and that the Jews, the agents of civilization, were making it bloom again—making gardens

appear in the desert and producing waving fields of grain where once the Arabs only tended a few diseased camels.¹⁷ That argument did not need elaboration for many Americans—the Jewish settlers obviously deserved the land, just as Americans' own forefathers deserved their land, because they used it. The Arabs, like the Indians, had no rights because their savage state kept them from earning any.

Savageism was first formulated to help make sense of the fierce forest-dwellers Europeans found in America and Africa. In America, where savageism was an immediate problem, the idea came to maturity and eventually, by a process of negative identification, became an important component in the developing American self-image. When Americans made contact with the Arab world at the beginning of the nineteenth century the idea was applied to Arabs as it had been to Indians. The fact that Arabs and Indians seemed to have so much in common made the transference even easier. It was no accident that the Marine Hymn linked the halls of Montezuma and the shores of Tripoli—in the American mind they were two sides of the same coin.

The American-Hebrew metaphor and the ideology of Savageism were reinforced by, and blended into, the idea of American Mission. Mission was the pacific belief that the United States should be an example of the efficacy of free men living in free institutions.¹⁸ The idea appeared after Independence, although its roots go back at least to the Puritans, and like the ideas that fed it, Mission was also a product of and tool for American nationalism. Like the Israelites, the Americans were the new priests among the nations, covenanted with God and bound to

spread His message of freedom, prosperity and Christianity.

The leading historian of the phenomena has argued that Mission was politically isolationist. Although occasionally its rhetoric could be adopted to fuel a more bellicose and imperial Manifest Destiny, Mission was in the main isolationist. But Mission was never a policy—it was an impulse, a widely popular yet completely individualistic impulse. As such it was uncontrollable. Many Americans believed they were part of a great experiment in freedom and to a greater or lesser degree discovered an obligation to spread their system to all men. Where Americans differed was in determining their personal and group roles in that Mission. Some Americans, called missionaries incidentally, believed they heard a call from God to go among the heathen and regenerate them spiritually and materially, teaching the American Way of Life as an intergal part of the Gospel. Politicians and government officials frequently interpreted their role in Mission to mean an active effort to reform whatever corner of the globe they found themselves in. Even businessmen found a way to wrap profits in the flag. As a consequence Mission, basically continent-bound, often worked to pull the United States into foreign involvements on an unofficial level—involvements that official America usually preferred to ignore.¹⁹

That was certainly the case in the Arab East. Missionaries, businessmen and government officials, often working from a sense of Mission, brought their country into closer contact with the Arab world. They represented one aspect of the total idea of Mission and their special interests determined their primary images of Arabs. Missionaries,

dedicated to Christianity, saw paganism and prescribed Protestantism; businessmen, seeing potential, advised capitalism, technology and an Open Door; ²⁰ officials, steeped in republican government, saw despotism and wished for western political institutions. Each group shared many images, especially of Arab backwardness, and each believed the others to be an important component of Arab regeneration. But each group also felt its solution to be primary. The missionaries, for example, felt republicanism and material progress would not come until there was a spiritual rebirth in Christ. Each was essentially a captive of a specific bias and their biases determined specific negative images of Arabs. In fact, their sense of Mission was predicted on them.

The missionaries loved the Arabs, as they loved all lost souls, but they hated almost everything else about them. And everything they hated could be traced to Islam—Islam was the Arab's greatest single flaw. It determined his apathy and fanaticism and that led directly to filth, immorality and violence. American missionaries agreed with the philosopher Schlegel: Islam was a faith without miracles and a morality without love, steeped in violence and sensuality and the delusions of a licentious False Prophet.²¹ They believed that Islam could not be reformed—it had to be utterly destroyed. That was the missionaries' special role in Mission and its belligerence warped their images.

Actually it was a sense of thwarted Mission that frequently conditioned missionary images of Arabs. Try as they might the Arabs

remained resolutely pagan. The Christians built hospitals and schools, and trained generations of Arab leaders but still the Arab world remained unconverted. The Arabs already had a suitable and defensible faith and an anti-Christian heritage at least as deep as the Christian's anti-Muslim tradition. In the 1930s there were over two hundred missionaries in and around Jerusalem and they made under two dozen converts and few of them were Muslims. After twenty years of work in the Arabian peninsula the resident missionaries could count their converts on one hand. Adding injury to insult the local Muslims usually killed the few natives who did accept the Lamb.²² The missionaries were working among people who had little use for them and were often openly hostile. They offered salvation, and they got threats in return. Many developed an ill-concealed paranoia—the Arabs were perched constantly on the edge of Jihad, strangling Christians and teaching their children to spit on crosses drawn in the sand.²³ At the same time they had to maintain their own sense of worth and convince others to support them in their martyrdom. To that end they often switched from anti-Arab diatribes to softly patronizing the Arab's gentle and loving nature, a nature that was primed for the word of the Lord.²⁴ But no matter how they fluffed up figures of mission-school attendance or how many Armenian and Greek converts they trotted out the plain truth was that the Muslim Arab was impervious to their blandishments. Their Mission largely thwarted, bitterness and fear often distorted their images of the men whose souls they meant to save.

Officials and businessmen, often allied, saw their solutions to

Arab backwardness as complimentary. Foreign Service Officers spent much of their time trying to expand trade with the Arabs and businessmen often saw their efforts as a component of a Mission-inspired plan to nurture free political systems.²⁵ Their role in Mission was as agents of economic and political reform and they believed material progress was the most efficient tool for that goal—hence their stress on the Open Door. Their efforts to expand trade usually resulted in the same sense of thwarted Mission the missionaries suffered. No matter what American expectations and desires for trade were, the fact was that Arabs remained impoverished—unable, until the twentieth century, to produce anything the United States wanted and therefore unable to raise the capital to buy anything in appreciable amounts. The repeated lack of success in trade expansion reinforced old images of Arab backwardness, ignorance and obscurantism.

But both foreign service officers and businessmen believed in maximizing the possible so their images were frequently as ambivalent as those of missionaries. Reality forced them to admit that there was little chance of present success; but their biases (and in some cases their interests) led them to high hopes for the future. William Lynch, leader of an 1840s Navy expedition to the Dead Sea and later a proponent of American investment in the Arab world, stated the optimism and general image of Arabs such Mission engendered. Standing on the banks of the Jordan he wrote: "For the first time, perhaps, without consular precincts, the American flag has been raised in Palestine. May it be the harbinger of regeneration to a now hapless people."²⁶ Because such men

were generally hard-headed rationalists they usually believed that American science and technology were the proper tools for the regeneration of the hapless Arabs. In the twentieth century the oil industry insisted that their work in the region was improving the quality of Arab life and slowly encouraging modernism in all sectors of Arab society.²⁷

Mission got entangled with anti-communism in the twentieth century, and came to mean not only saving the Arabs from themselves but also from the Red Spectre. The tools remained the same--trade and technology--but there was a new urgency. More than ever Americans needed to believe the Arabs could improve if given the help.²⁸ Commentators saw the rise of an educated middle class, the Effendis, who could carry westernism to their ragged countrymen. At the same time most urged the support of the most conservative of Arab monarchs, men like Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia and Abdullah of Jordan, because they encouraged American efforts of self-help.²⁹ Few saw the inconsistency involved in applauding a new educated middle class and medieval monarchies at the same time or in expecting one to support the aspirations of the other. Their sense of Mission was often so strong that it made them unable to see that Arabs seldom read their future in the same stars and consequently, seldom ran their governments by the same "game-plan." It was, in part, a sense of Mission that helped bring Harry Truman to offer Point Four Aid to the Arabs after World War II and to lend his support for a fantastic plan to develop the Jordan River along the lines of TVA and open arable land for another forty million people.³⁰

The desire to see free and responsible governments in the Arab East was an important part of American Mission. Trade was the most practical means to that end—it brought gradual reform and kept the United States involved on an unofficial level. But trade as a liberating force was slow. Americans were therefore usually willing to support imperialism and the post-World War I mandates because the Arabs obviously needed the guidance and wisdom of a mature and responsible European power.³¹ Americans were unwilling to supply that guidance but they were willing to support most other nations, especially the British, who were. Support for Zionism can be seen in the same light. Many pro-Zionists expressed the belief that the establishment of Israel would lead to the economic and political regeneration of all the Arab world. The Jews would serve as an example of industry and democracy and a center for technology, capital and expertise that the Arab needed.³² When Arabs complained that Israel was a bastion of western imperialism they were right—but it was a well-meaning cultural imperialism more akin to Mission in American minds.

The American-Hebrew metaphor, Savageism and Mission were closely related ideas and each rested, in part, on the others. All of them were used to categorize Arabs and other non-westerners and all were also used to aid in developing the American self-image. Those self-images of American beneficence and superiority were predicated on images of non-western inferiority and fanaticism. From the beginning American images of Arabs were inextricably bound up with their ideas about themselves, a condition guaranteed to result in confusion and emotional

misinterpretation.

From the colonial era to the eve of World War II American involvement in the Middle East was sporadic and restricted. Missionaries, travelers, a few businessmen and a small diplomatic and military presence was the extent of United States involvement throughout most of the period.³³ Until in the 1940s American's Arab policy was undeviatingly isolationist. In fact, the United States really had no Arab policy, beyond the traditional principles of non-involvement and the Open Door. There was no practical reason for any other policy: the Arab world was already under some form of imperial control until well into this century; trade was negligible; the region was of no importance in national defense; and there were no Arab-American immigrant groups making it a domestic issue. In addition, policy-makers and the informed public imagined the Arabs to be decadent, semi-civilized fanatics who were best left alone. Those assumptions had a serious impact on American thinking when it became necessary to develop a coherent, long-term Arab policy in the frantic days after World War II. As a result the United States made policy decisions that soured American-Arab relations at the beginning and since then hostility and distrust have been the rule on both sides.

The first American contact with Arabs began before the Revolution as Yankee traders pushed into the Mediterranean region and

opened trade with North Africa and the Levant. That brought them into conflict with the Barbary pirates, city-states whose corsairs exacted tribute from most of the civilized world. As long as England maintained a peaceful relationship with the pirates Americans could trade safely. That arrangement ended when the colonists declared their independence, and lacking a navy, American shipping became easy prey for the swift-moving pirates. In 1785 the Algerines held twenty-one Americans in their dungeons and in less than a decade it rose to over a hundred.³⁴ The humiliation of bargaining for their freedom prompted George Washington to write to Lafayette that "If we could command the (force) I should be clearly in sentiment with you and Mr. Jefferson, that chastisement would be more honorable, and much to be preferred to the purchased friendship of these Barbarians."³⁵ But the infant nation did not command the force and in 1786 they began signing a series of treaties, all involving tribute, to protect their shipping.

The Federalist and Jeffersonians were at odds over Barbary tribute. The Federalists favored paying it if only to keep foot in the door. Jefferson felt the national honor was slandered and that only violence would cauterize the wound.³⁶ After 1801, Mr. Jefferson had the power to exercise his opinions and a small war fleet sailed into the Mediterranean to chastise the Barbarians. Between 1801 and 1804, American frigates fought a war that left little changed. In 1807, the warships were withdrawn and American shipping was again at risk. In 1815 President Madison ordered another fleet

into the region to put an end to Barbary depredations. The job was finished in less than two weeks and a new series of treaties guaranteed American safety and marked the beginning of the end for Barbary states.³⁷

Young America revelled in its victory over Old World Barbarism and the image of Arabs suffered accordingly. Like the Indians they became pawns in American myth-making. Poets and historians raced to point out that the wars enhanced American prestige in Europe, demonstrating to that corrupted continent American military mettle and moral superiority.³⁸ The great powers pandered to the pirates, even encouraged them. It was the infant republic that took the banditti to task and redeemed Christianity and civilization, a self-image that bolstered the nascent sense of American Mission. David Humphreys penned, "A Poem: On the Future Glory of the United States of America," to honor the triumph. It showed the hyperbole and messianic quality of American perceptions:

Teach me in shade of Stygian night to trace,
In characters of hell, the pirate race!
Teach me, prophetic, to disclose their doom—
A new-born nation trampling on their tomb. 39

Hyperbole drifted into hysteria as the stanzas marched on:

Transfix with scorpion's stings the callous heart,
Make blood-shot eye-balls from their sockets start!
For balm, pour brimstone in their wounded soul;
Then ope, perdition! and engulf them whole! 40

The Biblical tone was more than a literary device—it indicated America's assumption of the sanctified mission of ancient Israel. As the New Israel they called down God's incredible wrath in the same manner

as the Prophets of old.

By the twentieth century the Barbary Wars had receded in importance but that was not the case in the nineteenth. They seemed larger then, especially in the years before the Civil War. Henry Adams, remembering his own childhood, reminisced that,

"...Preble and Rodgers, Decatur and Hull, became brilliant names; the midnight death of Somers was told in every farmhouse; the hand-to-hand struggles of Decatur against thrice his number inflamed the imaginations of school-boys who had never heard Jefferson and his party once declaimed against a Navy." 41

Adam's cranky Federalism notwithstanding his point was correct-- the Barbary Wars were an early source for American mythology. When Jared Sparks began publishing his "Library of American Biography" in the 1830s the only post-revolution figures he included were Preble, Eaton and Decatur.⁴² Two of those stories, Easton's march on Derne and Decatur's raid on the "Philadelphia," passed immediately into folklore. The images of Arabs they purveyed were necessarily bad.

William Eaton was a consul in North Africa when the war began. He devised a plan to replace the ruler of Tunis with the man's own brother, a figure more malleable and sympathetic to American interests. He found the brother, Hamet Carimaldi, in Egypt and there raised a rag-tag army of a few dozen Christians and several hundred Arab mercenaries. He drove them across a thousand miles of desert and took the city of Derne, a deed Henry Adams found so "...daring so romantic and even Quixotic that for at least half a century every boy in America listened to the story with the same delight with which he read the

Arabian Nights." ⁴³ Eaton was credited with the courage of Alexander the Great and his accomplishment seemed even grander considering the treacherous actions of both his Arab allies and enemies. ⁴⁴ Once under the walls of the city Eaton's actions were painted in medieval imagery: "The issue of the contest revives in the recollection...the feats of Sir William Wallace, and his valorous partisans. The Christians engaged the Barbarians in the proportions of tens of hundreds, and actually put them to flight." ⁴⁵ It was an old theme, the confrontation of civilization and savageism, and Americans were to rework it many times.

Decatur's legend began when he volunteered to sail into the harbor of Tripoli and destroy the "Philadelphia", an American warship captured earlier. They slipped into the darkened harbor and boarded the ship, the Arab sentries putting up a "wolf-like" howl and scurrying for the rails like "water-rats." ⁴⁶ Decatur's knights killed twenty of the unholy Saracens and then torched the ship. A providential wind rose and the heroes escaped without sacrificing a single American. ⁴⁷ David Ramsey, an early American historian, wrote: "This was indeed as gallant an enterprise as ever was recorded to the honor of any hero, or the glory of any nation." ⁴⁸ Others repeated Admiral Nelson's observation that it was the most bold and daring act of the age. ⁴⁹ The Decatur epic continued to grow after the burning of the "Philadelphia." In a later battle an Arab killed his brother, an officer serving on another ship in the same battle. When Decatur heard the news he sped after the murderer. Sailing alongside Decatur and

nine men boarded the corsair and fought their way to the offending Arab, a man "...of gigantic frame; his head covered with a scarlet cap, his face hidden by a bristly black beard. He was armed with a boarding pike and made a fierce lunge at Decatur."⁵⁰ The American was wounded and the combatants fell into a death-grapple. Decatur twisted and back-shot the devil with a pocket derringer. The moment was immortalized in David Carter's famous oil, "Handling the Arab, 1804." The Young officer was the American David conquering Goliath, the New World knight vanquishing the Saracen giant. In 1815 when Madison decided to end Barbary piracy forever it was the intrepid Decatur who led the fleet. He subdued the Barbarians in short order and treaties in hand, the Open Door and American honor triumphant, "the hero stood forth the crowned champion of civilization."⁵¹

It was unfortunate that America's first major contact with the Arab world was in a war. The Barbary Wars reinforced ancient pre-conceptions of Arab barbarism, treachery and arrogance. An occasional author gave them credit as valorous warriors, but only because there was no glory in drubbing hopeless fools. More often the Arabs were characterized as viciously cruel, the "plague" and "the scourge of Christianity."⁵² Assuming the mantle of civilization's champion Americans imagined Arabs to be the opposite—a supposition certain to produce negative images and strengthen pre-existing prejudices.

The smoke from Decatur's guns barely cleared when American missionaries began their assault on the Arab world. For the next century they were the most important element of American involvement in the Middle

East and their impact on how Arabs were viewed was enormous.⁵³ They authored numerous books about the Arabs, the literary fodder for thousands of sermons, lecture series and Sunday school lessons. William Thomson's The Land and the Book, for example, sold over two hundred thousand copies and was second only to Uncle Tom's Cabin in popularity in the years preceeding the Civil War.⁵⁴

As late as World War II, they and their descendants, working still as missionaries, oil company representatives and diplomats continued to influence American thinking about Arabs. In the twentieth century they became even more important as other American interests grew in the region. The missionaries were on-site and conversant with the situation, albeit from a peculiar and hostile point of view, so many were consulted and eventually absorbed by the policy-making apparatus. Their anti-Muslim beliefs came to have strong influence in the councils of state, and in the twentieth century, as in the twelfth, religious bias muddied images and complicated problems.⁵⁵

The American Board established the first American Middle Eastern mission in Syria in 1819. In 1822 they brought over a printing press and began proselytzing the Muslims. They found the Muslims uninterested and often hostile so most missionary effort shifted to converting the "degenerate" Eastern Christians. Within two decades there were over two hundred missionaries in the Arab world. In 1837 the Episcopalians broke into Iraq and in the mid-1850s the Presbyterians opened work in Egypt. After the Civil War missionaries and religious travelers swarmed through the Middle East, making it the biggest single mission field. The first

Arabic Bible was printed in 1865; American College was established in Beirut in 1866; and a medical school opened in 1870.⁵⁶

Money from America doubled and trebled and in 1900 there was two hundred missionaries in Egypt alone. Missionary effort shifted to China after 1890 but growth continued unabated in the Arab East. In 1890 the Dutch Reform Church accepted the momentous challenge of the Arabian peninsula, the citadel of Muslim orthodoxy. They called it a "land of living ruins."⁵⁷ Progressive era optimism spurred more growth and underlay the belief that mass conversions were just around the corner. By the 1930s there were over 19,000 students in Presbyterian schools in Egypt and American College in Beirut was one of the most important learning centers in the Arab world. In 1932 Americans operated three medical missions in the Persian Gulf and opened a junior college in Bagdad.⁵⁸

Life for the missionaries in the Arab lands was hard, but that was undoubtedly one of its attractions. Still, they survived on little money and even less reinforcement from the obstreperous Arabs. The Muslims occasionally massacred Christians, as they did in Damascus in the 1860s when thousands were killed, so missionaries were sometimes allowed to actually earn their martyr image. The constant fear of Arab fanaticism made them strong advocates of both a more active American presence and European imperialism.⁵⁹ But violent murder was not their only fear--they found a level of disease that was appalling and it took its grim percentages from their ranks. Their books were filled with tales of young zealots, much-loved "brothers" and "sisters," wasting

away with exotic diseases among a wretched and ungrateful people. Their lives were hard and the rewards few, but after a century and a half their toil, in every field except religion, had worked a revolution on the Arabs.

Their books and the works of dozens of traveling divines were a peculiar blend of fact and fantasy. From their professional point of view the Arab world was a sea of hatred and fanaticism and such preconceptions made negative interpretations common. At the same time they showed a tendency to vault from simple denunciatory ethnocentrism to the most heady type of religious fantasy. For believing Christians, the Arab world was the land of the Bible--the Holy Land, like Brigadoon caught in time and space, unchanging and sacred. That belief produced fantasies of faith that made for some bizarre images of Arabs.

American Biblical literalness created a historical hyperopia concerning Arabs. They often crossed milleniums, looking at Arab shopkeepers and muleteers and seeing Canaanites and Midianites. Some authors traced a genetic line from Ishmael to contemporary Arabs; others relied on geography--if a people lived in the Holy Land and were not Jews or Christians they were descendants of the Biblical Arabs.⁶⁰ Once that assumption was made missionaries and professional Christians then projected all their traditional hatred for Arabs of yore onto contemporary Arabs. William Thomson indignantly rebuffed a group of nomads because he feared they would rob him, just as their Ishmaelite forefathers did to other travelers thousands of years before in the same spot.⁽¹⁾

Such thinking may be history's greatest example of the sins of the fathers being visited on the sons.

The equation of modern Arabs and Biblical Arabs was as understandable as it was ridiculous. Many Americans received an intense Biblical education, and Biblical imagery was hammered into their heads as children and exercised great subliminal power. Even in the modern era it took almost an act of will for some Americans to move beyond impressions gathered at father's knee or snatched whole from the super-charged air of Sunday meeting. Edward Robinson, a world renowned Biblical scholar, wrote of his own childhood and the impact of the Bible on his mind: "As in the case of many of my countrymen, especially in New England, the scenes of the Bible had made a deep impression upon the mind from the earliest childhood."⁶² As a child grew up "...the names of Sinai, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, the Promised Land, became associated with his earliest recollections and holiest feelings."⁶³ When Robinson rode into Jerusalem he "...seemed to be again among cherished scenes of childhood, long unvisited, indeed, but distinctly recollected."⁶⁴ Like thousands of other Americans his Christianity intruded upon his thinking and colored his images of Arabs and their land.

The Biblical Arab comparison also served a theological purpose. Since the Renaissance science had been knocking the intellectual pegs out from under institutional Christianity. As the traditional defense of faith, the divine origins of the Bible, was becoming increasingly untenable, access to the Holy Land opened a new empirical

defense: the unchanging nature of the region and its people proved the authenticity of the Scriptures.⁶⁵ At its best the idea rested on archeology and modern Biblical criticism and at its worst, where it was usually applied, it relied on curious and often bizarre coincidences and self-delusions. Nonetheless, it set off a hegira of literal-minded Protestants who combed the Holy Land for any parallel to some Biblical text. Many saw a similarity between bedouin life and life among the Patriarchs.⁶⁶ Harry Emerson Fosdick described a feast in his honor as being a replication of the eighteenth chapter of Genesis and a nineteenth-century missionary found old hags, "more witches than women," still living in the caves around Endor.⁶⁷ A particularly gullible traveler noted that at Gergesa, where Christ cast the demons into swine, there were still swine to be found, grunting proof that absolutely nothing had changed.⁶⁸ Another scholar spent two pages comparing contemporary and Biblical sandals to make the same point.⁶⁹

The idea seems almost quaint from the perspective of the twentieth century, but it had a powerful impact on how Americans viewed Arabs. It gave its holders a sense of spiritual security and allowed them to believe they were getting as close to God as was possible in this life. They walked in His steps, breathed the air He breathed and met the people He met. The idea rose from their earliest memories and also served to bolster a faltering faith. But it was a pernicious and fantastic idea—it made any real understanding of Arabs immeasurably more difficult than it needed to be.

Travelers were another important source of American images of

Arabs. Their books gave Americans an excellent picture of contemporary Arab life and also revealed, as nearly as possible, the reactions of informed people to Arabs. Their wanderings were often dangerous but after the 1850s Americans were moving about the Arab world like army-ants seeking adventure, God or an exotic encounter. They often found it but many were still disappointed--travel in the Middle East could be rewarding but most commonly it was exhausting, frightening and usually marred by malodorous and grasping Arabs.

Americans began touring in the region in the 1830s. At first only a few came but as steam locomotion improved the pace increased. By 1838 it took a month to reach Alexandria from New York City and accommodations, guides and field equipment for touring were available by mail.⁷⁰ A Tammany lawyer, John Lloyd Stephens, toured in the 1830s and wrote Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land, the first important American travel narrative about the Arab world. In its first two years it sold over twenty thousand copies and made Stephens a literary lion.⁷¹ During the 1840s tourism continued to rise and by the Civil War over five hundred Americans were going to Cairo every year, the usual starting point for tours as far afield as Morocco and Mesopotamia. After the Civil War tourism boomed. Spreading prosperity, advancing technology and the American desire for instant culture all served to bring thousands into the region every year. To handle the flow Cook's Tours negotiated treaties with the shieks around Jerusalem and in 1889 even opened Mecca to selected visitors.⁷² After 1900 travel narratives fell off although the number

of travelers continued to rise. Professional wanderers like John Gunther and Richard Haliburton published their observations but it was the new national periodicals, especially The National Geographic Magazine, that assumed the travel narrative's function.

The nineteenth-century travelers were usually well-educated middle and upper class people and they brought their class biases to their writings about Arabs. They were men and women who had little patience with filth, poverty and shrieking, pushing natives. More than one agreed with Mark Twain that the East was a "malignant swindle."⁷³ The verdant country of the Holy Land and the antiquities charmed them, but they had nothing good to say about the Arabs. Contempt and distaste riddled their writings. Arabs were usually characterized as thieves, liars, fools and worst of all, beggars. Every traveler complained of the constant badgering, a trait that Americans found reprehensible.⁷⁴ William Lynch probably had the last word on the subject: recovering from an especially galling encounter, he wrote, "Such an importunate mode of begging I never saw before, although I have been in Sicily."⁷⁵

The way Americans dealt with Arabs was indicative of their attitudes. The most conspicuous feature of American-Arab interpersonal relations was the lack of them. Travelers avoided contact with Arabs and when they had to handle a situation personally they did so in a pre-emptory manner that precluded any chance of dialogue developing. Henry Field, an 1880s visitor, took a benign but strict approach. He advised that the Arabs had to be kept in "awe" of their "master" and that would insure "docile and obedient behavior." He found them an attractive

people, much like "pet spaniels" as long as the white men maintained his superiority.⁷⁶ William Lynch found that only bribery and appeals to their unquenchable greed guaranteed either service or civility.⁷⁷

William Prime recommended violence. To impress a band of bedouins he pulled his revolver and shot several buzzards out of the air.

"After that they believed in Americans," he wrote.⁷⁸ Even Baedeker endorsed a haughty approach. Travelers were warned to squelch their guide's inevitable impertinence and to avoid friendship with Arabs because they were "demons of cupidity" whose only motivation was avarice.⁷⁹

Travelers' attitudes ran the gamut from paternalism to despotism... Their common denominator was the assumption of superiority, an assumption that made the development of rational images impossible. Communications was all one way—the Americans talked and the Arabs were expected to listen and learn. Under those circumstances it was inevitable that Arabs were painted in colors of contempt. American behavior permitted no other reaction.

Before World War II official presence in the Arab world was minimal. American policy was cooperation with the imperial powers, maintenance of the Open Door and non-involvement.⁸⁰ That lasted until the 1940s when Zionism, oil and the Cold War pulled a reluctant America into a deeper and more active role.

The policy of non-involvement carried a price--there was never a sizeable contingent of regional specialists, or a satisfactory intelligence network to gather and generate an intelligent official view of Arabs. The United States relied on British intelligence all through

World War II and was generally thrown back on the same fund of images and assumptions as the informed public. Those few officials who were involved with Arabs generally displayed the same biases as other Americans. That was to be expected since they came from the same class and cultural milieu that produced missionaries and most travelers. The only discernible difference was that diplomats usually liked the Arabs despite their admitted filth, corruption and fanaticism. Proximity and the diplomat's trained optimism probably accounted for the differences.

The first official American involvement in the Arab world was in North Africa and contact continued to focus on that region more than on the Arab lands east of Suez. With the exception of the Holy Land and Syria most of the area beyond Egypt remained mysterious. In 1787 the United States signed a treaty of commerce with the Sultan of Morocco, a treaty indicative of America's major interests in the region, trade and the Open Door.⁸¹ That ostensibly was the reason the United States fought Barbary Wars and maintained a Mediterranean Fleet thereafter. But the desire for trade far outweighed the reality. Arab poverty and the presence of pre-existing imperial control kept investment at a minimum and made official involvement unnecessary. The dilemma of the American consul in Muscat illustrated the problem. Relations with Muscat began in 1833 with a commercial treaty. A consul was sent to the south Arabian backwash and one stayed there for almost a century. One American ship called in 1855 and not again until 1897.⁸² In 1913 the lonely consul cabled his superiors that the office should be

closed:

So far as I am able to discover, the total result of six years of effort along trade promotion lines by my predecessors and myself has been the selling of two motor boats and two small pumps, none of which, owing to the mechanical ignorance of the natives, gave satisfactory service. ⁸³

He continued that his only real work consisted of certifying thirty to forty invoices of dates a year and that several years of "practically enforced idleness" was bad training for a young foreign service officer. ⁸⁴ His colleague in Yemen found time to write articles about the joys of gat-smoking for The National Geographic Magazine. ⁸⁵

The junior officer's problem was admittedly extreme, but only because of the isolation of Muscat. A foreign service officer in Jerusalem in the late 1890s called American attempts to expand trade "laughable" in light of the general backwardness of the city and its inhabitants. ⁸⁶ American representatives tried to open trade with Egypt in the 1830s but the similarity of Egyptian and American products, especially cotton, precluded success. A small trade in spices, gum arabic, opium and dates grew before the Civil War, but it was always inconsequential. ⁸⁷ Middle Eastern trade declined all through the second half of the nineteenth century as the United States industrialized and found new foreign and internal markets. ⁸⁸ The Khedive of Egypt, anxious to maintain a tenuous freedom from the Ottoman Empire, was an eager customer for American military personnel and arms in the late 1860s and 1870s. ⁸⁹ For a decade American veterans trained and led the Khedive's army and navy, but other than that special case trade was generally moribund.

As a result American diplomatic presence was unprofitable and unnecessary. Until the 1850s many consuls were unpaid foreign volunteers seeking special concessions for services rendered.⁹⁰ In Morocco, one of the more important Arab countries, American diplomats were starved for money, unable to speak the language, and often corrupt.⁹¹ More than one was simply erratic. Warren Cresson, consul in Jerusalem in the 1840s, indicated the importance of the government saw in the Arab world. Cresson was a known crank who flitted from religion to religion and finally lighted on Judaism. He wrangled the consul job through a Philadelphia rabbi and, leaving a wife and eight children, sailed for the Holy Land with his favorite dove. He was an arch-Zionist and meddled in Ottoman affairs constantly. Before he was removed he caused the United States considerable embarrassment.⁹² The twentieth century often saw no better. Harding appointed a card-crony, J. Morton Howell, Minister to Egypt. The man was a moving insult, given to handing Egyptian officials small printed homilies on cleanliness, character and honesty.⁹³ Even the best foreign service officers often developed the British "sahib" complex and segregated themselves from the Arab people, allowing a nasty racism to interfere with their jobs and opinions.⁹⁴ If the region had been at all important such appointments and behavior would have been unthinkable.

Despite an occasional buffoon like J. Morton Howell the foreign service in the Near East did expand and professionalize in the twentieth century. The Division of Near East Affairs was created in the

State Department in 1909 and Beirut became a consul-general in 1916.⁹⁵ The growth was due far more to America's generally rising power and prestige than to any intrinsic change in Arab power.

Presidential politics became entangled in Middle East Affairs for the first time; and Theodore Roosevelt, ever the bellicose expansionist, even managed to get involved in North Africa. He mediated the Moroccan Crisis of 1907, but two other incidents, the Perdicaris-Raisuli affair and a series of 1910 speeches critical of Arab nationalism, were more indicative of the quality and motivation of Roosevelt's Arab entanglements, and in a larger sense, of his other Americans assumptions about Arabs.

In 1904, on the eve of the Republican convention, the Moroccan bandit cheiftain, Raisuli, kidnapped a Greek businessman, Ion Perdicaris, who was supposedly an American citizen. Roosevelt and his Secretary of State, Elihu Root, rattled the sabre and even threatened intervention. Roosevelt orchestrated the crisis to create a groundswell of convention support and succeeded.⁹⁶ Again, in 1910, he used Arabs as whipping boys to build his own popularity. When he emerged from the jungles of Africa he went immediately to Egypt and gave a series of speeches very critical of Arab nationalism.⁹⁷ In both cases the Arabs, totally unimportant to America, became the pawns in Roosevelt's plan for his own political career. In Southern politics the same tactic has long been known as "niggering"--it was a crowd-pleaser, a balm for everyone's ego and something everyone could agree on. It was the perfect political stand, employing at on time morality, nationalism and Mission, and

best of all, it offended no important group and positively enthused many.

But Roosevelt was in many ways an aberration. His tendency to meddle went against historical tide of non-involvement and once he was gone the United States lapsed back into a passive attitude toward the Arabs. After World War I the United States began opening diplomatic relations with newly-independent Arab nations. In every case recognition and formal relations were opened with hesitancy, indicative of American distrust and suspicion of the Arabs. Saudi Arabia applied for recognition in 1928 but it was withheld until 1931; Iraq was recognized in 1930, but a legation waited until 1934 and commercial treaties until 1938. In Egypt the United States continued to defer to the British and did not sign commercial treaties until 1938. Yemen was not recognized until 1946.⁹⁸

Oil was the primary reason for increased official involvement between the two world wars. American oil companies allied with the State Department to break the European monopoly on Arab oil in the 1920s and they were able to enter the field in 1928 as part of an international consortium. During the 1930s Americans discovered and began developing oil reserves in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf sultanates. It was the greatest American investment in the Arab world at that time, but as late as 1938 Arab oil was unimportant to the United States.⁹⁹ It was not until World War II and afterward that Arab oil became a gigantic business and of real importance to American national interests. The oil business pushed for on-the-spot representation from the government, but

it did not come until the middle of the war. Until that time Saudi Arabia was served by the Minister in Egypt.

During the 1930s and 1940s Saudi Arabia became the focus of official American interests in the Arab world. That was unfortunate. Saudi Arabia was the most traditional, albeit the most stable, of the major Arab powers. Fanticism, autocracy and obscurantism were more deeply entrenched there than in any other country. Several officials stationed there wrote memoirs revealing the distorted picture that duty in Saudi Arabia produced. Age-old imagery of Arab violence, sexuality, fanaticism, and backwardness were leavened with frequent allusions to The Arabian Nights.¹⁰⁰ Ibn Saud, the autocratic ruler, became a veritable Haroun al-Raschid with overtones of Chingachgook and everyday Arabs were either comic figures or Saracen warriors.¹⁰¹ They shared the conviction that the Arab world was fanatically united against Zionism and would fall into Communist hands because the United States supported the Zionists.¹⁰² Their images of Arab solidarity were heavy with overtones of Jihad and, as time has proven, it ignored the realities of Arab politics. The fact that they lived in a country where the rhetoric of Arab solidarity was pervasive probably accounted for their certainty about America's policy options.

For a hundred and fifty years the American diplomatic presence was too small to provide a broad and comprehensive view of the region and its people. World leadership came to the United States in a rush in the years after the Second World War and it was then that their ignorance of the Arab world came home to roost. When it came time to

formulate a mature, long-range policy the policy-maker's images, so important in forming basic assumptions, were largely the stuff of fantasy, ethnocentrism and religious bigotry. It was unfortunate, but given the vast cultural differences and the low level of contact, there was very little chance it could have been otherwise.

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CHAPTER III

THE ARAB AS SAVAGE MAN

For a century and a half Americans applied the rhetoric and imagery of Savagism to the Arabs. Most of the common images of Arabs—of Arab violence, sexuality, backwardness and religious fanaticism, for example—were merely constellations of the Savage image. It was, metaphorically, the nucleus around which other images rotated. The idea gave a coherence and unity to many other preconceptions. That Arabs were violent and sexually aggressive was assured because those were well-known savage traits. Americans, looking for those traits because they expected them to exist, usually found them, just as Americans usually found Englishmen to be polite and Chinese to be hard workers. Its inclusiveness gave the idea its power—it explained practically everything else about Arabs that Americans found strange. In one idea Savagism provided a single sweeping interpretation, and indictment, of Arab life.

When Americans went abroad they took the idea with them and it had a powerful impact on their perceptions of the world and its people. In the Middle East it was given free rein and almost every facet of Arab life was so interpreted. The way Arabs looked, lived and behaved—the most visible aspect of Arab life—were all deemed proof

of Arab savagism. That categorical assumption, more than any other, was the premise that controlled American perceptions and actions toward Arabs since first contact.

The way Arabs looked confirmed American beliefs that Arabs were savages. Travelers usually avoided lengthy descriptions, dismissing most Arabs as filthy, ragged, or some equally deprecatory adjective. Occasionally a reporter with a romantic turn found individual Arabs physically handsome but it was the exception. When Americans did set down a full description two extremes emerged: Arabs were either beautiful or horrifying, and the latter was far more common than the former. The physically superior Arab and the physically degraded Arab appeared to be contradictory but the idea of Savagism accommodated both.

It was the accepted canon that savage life usually produced a physically degraded people—hence a visitor to Joppa in the 1890s found Arab peasants resembling "anthropoid apes" and another reported bedouins with "low, receding foreheads, and an expression of countenance that is sinister and half idiotic."¹ But it was also accepted that savage life, life lived in Nature, periodically produced perfect physical specimens. Those Noble Savages were valued precisely because they were so rare. The same traveler who described Arabs as neolithic savages provided an example of the Noble Savage stereotype when describing his guide, the bedouin sheik, A'kil:

He was a magnificent savage, enveloped in a scarlet pelisse, richly embroidered with gold. He was the handsomest, the most graceful being I had ever met. His complexion was of a rich, mellow, indescribable olive tint, and his hair a glossy black; his teeth were regular and of the whitest ivory; and the glance of his eye was keen at times, but generally soft and lustrous. 2

There was a veiled ambivalence about the description, an ambivalence built into the archetype. A'kil was "handsome" and "graceful," his complexion a "rich, mellow, indescribable olive tint," and his eyes, sometimes "keen," were usually soft and lustrous." With just a little imagination A'kil could have been a woman, or a horse. Ambivalence notwithstanding, A'kil was still a "magnificent savage." He was handsome, even beautiful, but it was a beauty derived from the savage life and anterior to the higher virtues and beauties of the civilized man. A later passage about A'kil showed the development of the idea: "He was the most perfect specimen of manhood we had ever seen...that arm which, in its easy and graceful position, seemed almost nerveless, had wielded the scimitar with fatal strength."³ Beauty was acknowledged but the imputation of brutal savagery denied it any moral quality.

But the Noble Savage was the exception. The most common descriptions of Arabs were of men in postures of horror and death, mutilated victims of savage life in a harsh, sterile environment. Travelers frequently reported seeing children whose eyes were so encrusted with flies that they could not see.⁴ William Lynch evoked death imagery when writing of a beggar he met near the Jordan River:

His complexion was a pale, waxy, cadaverous hue. His eyes were small, black and piercing, shadowing his thick pent-house brows, which like his straggling beard, was nearly red; his lips livid, his teeth whit and pointed, and the nails of his skinny hands as long as talons. His whole appearance assisted materially in sustaining the idea of coffins and palls, mildew and worms. 5

John Lloyd Stephens told of meeting a wandering mystic in the ancient land of Edom in the Sinai. He was very old, naked except for a few rags, emaciated and covered with blotches like "the graves of an ancient coat of mail." He looked like one who "literally crawled on his belly and licked the dust of the earth." The mystic, as Stephens imagined him, became a human variety of desert lizard. Shortly afterwards he met a party of bedouin warriors who resembled skeletons with glowing eyes. Their leader was enveloped entirely in red, including his boots, and had the obligatory black beard and piercing eyes--the very incarnation of Satan. Stephens, evidently a Biblical literalist, believed such figures rose naturally from the God-cursed landscape of Edom.⁶

Environmental determinism and popular evolutionary thought were the scientific supports of the physiological and racial elements of the idea of Savagism. The Arab, whether physically degraded or magnificent, was the product of the environment. Phillip Hitti, the twentieth-century Arab historian, employed a loose environmentalism when describing the bedouins:

The continuity, monotony and aridity of his desert habitat are faithfully reflected in the Bedouin physical and mental make up. Anatomically he is a bundle of nerves, bones, and sinews. The leanness and barrenness of his land show themselves in his physique.⁷

The implication was that Arabs were completely adapted to their environment. A more subtle implication, undoubtedly unconscious, was reflected in Hitti's use of the word "habitat"—a word more commonly used in connection with animals than humans. Within the idea of Sav-

agism such mindless adaption was characteristic of the savage and visible proof of inferiority. The civilized man adapted the environment to his needs, he did not revert to a natural state to suit the environment. The rhetoric of evolution--the mechanism of adaptation--thereby reinforced an apparent contradiction in the Savagism theme: to be physically superior was to be culturally inferior. It was a circuitous route but within the science of its day it was air-tight.

Animal similes and metaphors were often used to describe Arabs, a practice indicative of the writers' moral judgements and the environmental interpretation. Arabs were commonly compared to hawks, wolves, falcons and snakes, images, not only of animalism, but of animals that carry an aura of violence, treachery and fear.⁸ A desert sheik's eyes were "...black, lascivious, and glistening like that of a snake; he wore a tangled black beard, and, with his fang-like teeth, he smiled."⁹ T.E. Lawrence's description of his bedouin raiders demonstrated the subtle and powerful function of the animal simile.

They were physically thin, but exquisitely made, moving with an oiled activity altogether delightful to watch. It did not seem possible that men could be hardier or harder. They would ride over immense distances day after day, run through sand and rocks bare-foot in the heat for hours without pain, and climb their hills like goats. 10

The Arabs were credited with physical virtues--strength, endurance, and grace--but they were animal-like virtues. The simile of goats emerged naturally from both the hilly Arabian environment and the idea of Savagism and it carried an implicit denunciation. William Prime, a nineteenth-century traveler and perhaps the "Ugliest American" of them all, carried the animal parallel to its logical conclusion.

While crossing the desert he spied a band of bedouins, "those wild-looking animals called men by courtesy," and admitted an almost irresistible urge to fire into the middle of them: "I felt as I used to feel on seeing a drove of deer in summer, that it was a capital chance for a shot."¹¹ Such reactions were akin to the medieval horror story about Richard the Lion-Hearted eating a young Saracen.

The resemblance between Arabs and Indians was the litmus test of physical savagery. Certain similarities of appearance were taken as evidence of Arab savagism, the syllogistic reasoning being that since Indians were savages anyone who looked like an Indian was also a savage. A nineteenth-century explorer described a desert beauty and drew the natural parallel for his time: "The tawny complexion, the cheek-bones somewhat prominent, the coarse black hair, and the dark, lascivious eye, reminded us of a female Indian of our border."¹² Twain compared the way Arabs went semi-naked and adorned themselves with "absurd gewgaws and gim-cracks" to Indian practices.¹³

Many Americans believed the physical similarities were evidence of a genetic bond between Arabs and Indians. The popular idea that the Indians were descendants of the lost tribes of Israel was a powerful stimulus to such thinking. A tourist in the 1850s commented that, "Strangely and slowly gathers in your mind the conviction that the last inhabitants of the oldest land, have a mysterious sympathy of similarity, with the aborigines of the youngest."¹⁴ A novel of the same era fancifully told how the Jews, captives in Assyria, escaped to the Bahamas and were destroyed in a volcanic eruption. The strongest Jewish

warriors, Gad and Omar, came to America with their virgin brides to begin anew. They ate berries that dyed their skin copper, and, adapting to the wilderness, began living in trees and wearing skins. Their progeny were the contemporary Indians.¹⁵

American perceptions of the physical Arab reinforced their judgment that Arabs were savages. Whether physically superb or devastated, the Arab was a Child of Nature, and more often the victim of Nature. Their inability to control their environment, and the resulting physical manifestations of their failure, confirmed their status. The widely held, yet incorrect belief that the ancient Jews came to America and fathered the Indians also supported the tendency to look at Arabs and see Indians, and seeing Indians, see savages.

The way Arabs lived, the appalling poverty and filth of their villages and cities, their social forms and customs, often seemed savage to Americans. Since the majority of information sources were non-fiction the American public had a diverse and reasonably accurate picture of daily life among the Arabs, although it was a picture filtered through the prism of American values and mores. Most writers were unable to lift themselves above their own ethnocentricity, and even if some were the fact that they were writers drew them to subjects, and interpretations, that would capture and hold their reader's in-

terest. Carrying their audience of their shoulders, they pointed to the most colorful sights.¹⁶ That meant lengthy descriptions of the most bizarre aspects of Arab life while passing over the more commonplace universals. Therefore the most unusual aspects of an alien society were its most fascinating and its most heavily documented. Even if the commonplace was described it was often interpreted as further evidence of savagism.

The nomadic bedouins were the most common stereotype of Arabs. Considering how few nomads there actually were, they attracted disproportionate attention, especially in the fictional literature. The environment, harsh, sterile and violent, dominated bedouin life. It was life lived far beyond poverty, a life practically devoid of material culture. From an American perspective, of course, the accumulation and protection of private property was the basis of civilized life. A few black tents and rude cooking utensils, some scraps of cloth and rugs and weapons were all most nomads could boast. Bedouin tents, if the owners were lucky, were filthy hovels made of goat skins. If they had no tents the bedouins slept under ledges or in caves and holes in the ground.¹⁷ Their environment made any more impossible and the only way to get more, and then only more of the same, was to steal it from some other impoverished nomad.¹⁸

Sanitation was unknown, due primarily to the lack of water, a fact that Americans overlooked. An ex-soldier visited a bedouin camp in the Sinai and was reminded of the many Indian camps he visited in America, mainly because of the overpowering odor.¹⁹ A missionary who

spent his life among the Arabs reported a man who allowed his dog to lick his eating bowl clean. When the dog died the bowl soon became unuseable.²⁰ Medical missionaries complained that surgery was often impossible because they were unable to get the dirt off their patients.²¹ Coming from a culture that equated soap with Godliness, such filth was inexcusable and prima facie evidence of savagism.

Descriptions of bedouin eating practices, how they ate and what they ate, were popular topic and travelers reactions to the everyday affair revealed the trivia from which prejudices were made. Observers often mentioned that Arab food was filthy and complained about their "disgusting habit of eructation."²² An American explorer was sickened because bedouins did not use knives and forks--Arabs ate with their hands, "...craming (rice) into their mouths."²³ One gentleman likened the Arab manner of eating to that of an anaconda, and two missionaries reported, with detached disgust, how a band of nomads slaughtered and devoured an entire goat at one sitting. The head, skinned and unopened, was left roasting on camel dung coals for a final delicacy.²⁴ But how they ate was only one complaint. Most civilized travelers were more outraged by what they ate. Apparently forgetting the barren environment, (and Western delicacies like tripe and blood-pudding) Arabs were deemed savage because they ate what was available: rice, dates, insects, rats, even locusts. Meat was unknown, except at feasts, and when it was available the Arabs went at it with savage appetite: "They consider it a bonne bouche to take the paunch fresh from an animal, sprinkle the contents of the gall bladder

upon it, and then smack their lips over it. It is also done by many tribes of North American Indians."²⁵

The Arab feast was an interesting variation of the motif. The disgust remained but a sense of wonder was evident. Glubb Pasha, the English officer who founded the Arab Legion in Jordan, remembered the greatest feast he ever saw. Hard-boiled eggs were stuffed into chickens and the chickens were then stuffed inside two sheep. The sheep, in turn, were stuffed into a camel and the entire thing was roasted and served in a kneeling position.²⁶ T. E. Lawrence described a feast with a desert ally in images of horror:

The bowl was now brim-full, ringed round its edge by white rice in an embankment a foot wide and six inches deep, filled with legs and ribs of mutton till they toppled over. The center-piece were boiled, upturned heads, propped on their severed stumps of neck, so that the ears, brown like old leaves, flapped out on the rice surface. The jaws gapped empty upward, pulled open to show the hollow throat with the tongue, still pink, clinging to the lower teeth; and the long incisors whitely crowned the pile, very prominent above the nostrils' prickling hair and the lips which sneered away blackly from them. 27

The whole steaming mess was then poured over with pieces of viscera swimming in boiling grease. Lawrence ate, but he was very careful to grab only handfuls of rice.²⁸

The feast was a highly stylized bout of gluttony and both aspects, the ritual and the gluttony, amazed witnesses. A Sinai traveler attended one that could be taken as stereotypical:

The lamb was brought from the flock and slain at the door of the tent; the eldest wife cooked it in the open kettle and superintended the other women baking bread...and the meal came at last... meat, rice, and vegetables compounded in one great dish and borne by a bevy of slaves. Into the common dish we thrust our hands and ate until our hunger was appeased and then, in order of seniority,

the sheik called the head men of the tribe to eat, until, at last, the remnants were turned over to the slaves to finish. 29

Lute music accompanied the meal and afterwards "the whole tribe danced, led by a woman with a gleaming blade, and fitted to stir up the fighting spirit of the men to such a raid as long centuries before had been launched from this spot on Jericho."³⁰ Descriptions of wild dancing after the meal were also common, as were the pipes, coffee and prolonged war stories that followed most feasts. Travelers never mentioned that, with the exception of dancing girls, the same ritual followed feasts in the best homes in Boston and Philadelphia.

Westerners often reported physical revulsion toward Arab eating customs and the fact that their reactions were physical indicated their depth and irrationality. Eating customs were trivial but they went to the heart of the distinction between the savage and the civilized man. The idea of Savagism, a sociological concept, had a parallel in the individual psychology of the era. The nexus of both was the premise of a hierarchy of learned behavior that must be mastered in a slow climb up from primitivism, a climb that aimed at escaping the influences of nature. Both the savage and the child lived in a state of nature and the civilized man, like the adult, was morally superior because he had learned to overcome nature. One of the first things a child in civilized society learned was a complex of behavior surrounding food. Mastering those skills, and their internalization, were major and difficult steps in the maturation process and left deep impressions on the personality. Arabs were judged uncivilized be-

cause their food customs violated every canon of the civilized man's behavior complex concerning food and eating. Their customs were not only "disgusting" and "dirty," more importantly from a western perspective, they were "childlike" and therefore savage.³¹

The bedouins were also judged savages because they lived in an economy based on raiding. They were consequently labeled thieves, robbers and brigands.³² A twentieth-century elementary school book titled the chapter on Arabia, "The Land of the Plunderers," and continued to inform its adolescent readers that robbery was a way of life for Arabs, a kind of sport-economy wherein everyone robbed everyone else.³³ Lowell Thomas compared it to football.³⁴ Arab society was "thief infested," and anyone, except family, was liable for victimization.³⁵ Information of that type made the Arab robber one of the most common and durable images of Arabs. It was an image with deep roots. Travelers frequently compared contemporary bedouins with the Biblical raiders and plunderers of the Old Testament. William Thomson evoked the Tenth Psalm, likening robbers to lions, and ultimately, in itself: "He sitteth in the lurking places of the village; in the secret places doth he murder the innocent; He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den; he lieth in wait to catch the poor."³⁶

The usual explanation for bedouin thievery was that the harsh environment made it necessary.³⁷ But that was an explanation, not an excuse. Americans interpreted the organized plunder as evidence of the total lack of law and social order that was characteristic of savage society. Worse still, few writers made any distinction between

bedouins and the rest of the Arabs--all were tarred with the same brush, despite the fact that bedouins accounted for a miniscule percentage of all the Arab people.

Comparisons between bedouins and Indians were omnipresent in the nineteenth century, and were, by implication, evidence of Arab savagism. Travelers frequently noted the similarities of lifestyle--the nomadic existence and economy of raiding and other pointed at common customs, attitudes and skills. Bedouins were said to be as adept at cavalry warfare as the plains Indians and just as likely to torture their captives.³⁸ Nomads were also praised for their tracking and guiding abilities, skills they shared with their Indian brothers.³⁹ The praise took with one hand what it gave with another. It was based on the belief that both people had a natural "feel" for the land, a mystical skill actually indicative of their untamed, animal-like natures. Perhaps it was the cynical Twain who most succinctly stated the American tendency to equate the two people:

We met a half a dozen Digger Indians with long spears in their hands, cavorting around an old crow-bait horses, and spearing imaginary enemies; whooping and fluttering their rags in the wind, and carrying on, in every respect, like a pack of hopeless lunatics. At last here were the 'wild, free sons of the desert, speeding over the plains like the wind, on their beautiful Arabian mares' we had read so much about and longed so much to see. 40

When Americans interpreted bedouin life from that perspective the Arabs fared no better than the Indians--both were savages and both had to be either tamed or exterminated. Some, like William Prime and Twain, leaned toward elimination. Others, like the missionary Edward Robinson, suggested the same civilizing policy that was used with Indians--settle

the bedouin on land, make him a farmer and teach him the virtues of work, thrift and private property.⁴¹ Then, and only then would the bedouin become a completed man.

Novels and films maintained the bedouin-Indian parallel into the twentieth century. The 1920s best-seller, Beau Geste, even introduced two ex-Texas Rangers-turned-Legionnaires to slaughter Arabs. Hand and Buddy were given to saying things like, 'Ole Man Bojolly allows they'll run into an Injun ambush if they aint put wise. We gotta warn them there's Injuns about..⁴² When the book became a movie it joined several other Foreign Legion films that were thinly disguised versions of Stagecoach. The cavalry wore red pants and the Indians wore robes and fired from galloping camels, but the appeal, and the message--that savagism must bow before civilization--was the same.

Although Americans usually imagined Arabs in the desert, it was in the Arabs' villages and cities that most Americans actually saw them. The usual judgement was that life in the villages and cities, while occasionally more exotic, was little better. The countless small agricultural villages that travelers saw were invariably pictured as filthy, squalid and disease-ridden. The streets were filled with decaying beggars, packs of dogs and half-wild children. One traveler felt they were better suited to beaver than people.⁴³ The image of

Arab life as stagnant and unchanging appeared often in descriptions of Arab villages.⁴⁴ It was imagined that the huts were standing before the time of Jesus and that the Patriarchs trod the same dusty streets. Many saw that agricultural techniques were unchanged for a millenium:

For centuries the Arab cultivator has carried on the primitive methods traditional throughout the East. Yoking his feeble oxen, his camel, or his ass to a rough-hewn wooden plow, he cultivates his wheat and barley, millet and sesame. In season he beats the fruit on the gnarled olive trees, and his animals stamp out the grain on the threshing floor. 45

A nineteenth-century visitor noted that Arabs still slept on their threshing room floors during harvest, just as Boaz did when Ruth came to him.⁴⁶ The drab sameness of village life, especially in the well-traveled Holy Land, never failed to depress Americans. They came expecting to find Bethlehem and Nazareth suffused with light and found only an odoriferous pall.

Arab cities were seen as corrupt combinations of splendor and squalor. The same streets that were described as filthy pestholes were also likened to scenes of The Arabian Nights.⁴⁷ The beautiful architecture, especially the mosques and the interiors of rich homes, were striking contrasts to the reeking poverty of the fellahs' huts. Americans, still largely a rural people clinging to an Arcadian ideal until the twentieth century, were awe-struck when faced with the vast and fascinating diversity of an Arab city.

The bazaars were a visible metaphor for the splendor of the Arab city and few travelers failed to discuss them. The astounding contrasts left westerners astonished. An American officer in the Khedive's

army stumbled through the Cairo bazaar and described it as if it were a dream. He met "perfumed houris" among the "flies, fleas and horrible odors" and saw snake-charmers and howling dervishes careening through the stalls of Damascus silks and booths selling fried locusts.⁴⁸ The luxurious atmosphere struck William Lynch at the Damascus bazaar. Men sat in small booths,

enjoying the sensual indulgences of coffee and the chilgouque; while those whose tastes were more intellectual, listened silently within, as one read some tales of the East. The scene brought the days of our boyhood back, and we remembered the Arabian Nights,—Haroun al Raschid and his excursions indisguise. 49

An American in Tunis found an almost mystical quality about business in that city's bazaar. The booths were "shrines to Venus," the merchants "officiating priests" and scent-makers, the most wonderful of all, were "sorcerers."⁵⁰ Others were less mystified and more attracted to the chance to find some rare piece of oriental exotica to haul back to Cleveland. For those travelers the bazaars were the last remaining vestige of the ancient image of the Arab cornucopia. Americans, to whom standardization was both a God and a bane, found a commercial fantasia, a veritable Forty Thieves cave, in the bazaars:

Here were the silk stuffs from Damascus and Aleppo, cambrics from the district of Nablous, near the well of Jacob. Gold and silver threads from Mount Lebanon. Keffie, the bedouen handkerchiefs from Mecca, and fabrics of delicate device from Damascus blend their charms with Anatolian carpets of gorgeous tissue. The eyes feast upon the splendor. 51

Howling dervishes, snake-charmers, hanging banks of pistacchios, and booths of perfumes and shimmering silks proved a heady mixture for American tourists. When they came to the bazaar they left behind the

rotting miasma that was the reality of the East and found the fantasy East of their childhoods. The weird contrasts of splendor and squalor, the practically sacred and the definitely profane, left many dazed and the bazaar became symbolic of all that was exotic in Arab life. It was an image free of scorn or pity but heavy with the weight of wonder.

Swarms of beggars were equally visible metaphors for the squalor and poverty of Arab cities. Visitors complained constantly about the Arabs' hyperbolic pleadings for alms and their practice of displaying "malformations" and running sores to elicit pity from passing strangers.⁵² Their supplications were often as galling as they were offensive. Lewis Burckhardt told of a beggar in Mecca who wailed day after day for a specific sum of money. He quit after a traveler who could stand no more of the noise gave him the precise sum.⁵³

Americans seldom showed any signs of pity—possibly a few days of badgering innured even the softest touch. Mark Twain, probably not the best American to beg from, described Syrian beggars and displayed the general lack of sympathy. The beggars were,

...a wretched nest of human vermin...rags, dirt, sunken cheeks, pallor of sickness, sores, projecting bones, dull, aching misery in their eyes and ravenous hunger speaking from every eloquent fiber and muscle from head to foot. How they sprang upon a bone, how they crunched the bread we gave them! 54

Americans were contemptuous of beggars. It ran completely counter to the American belief in individualism and, as often as not, was taken as evidence of Arab sloth, fatalism and backwardness, all cardinal tenets of savage society.

Americans commonly described Arab cities as dens of iniquity. The stories that Mecca, the holy city, was a fleshpot--prostitution on mosque steps, liquor, sex and drugs available everywhere; and a citizenry dedicated to fleecing their own co-religionists--were reported until modern times, despite the fact that few westerners ever got inside the city to confirm it.⁵⁵ A visitor to Cairo found prostitutes working in cribs on the streets and the open sale of little boys to rich pashas. The greasy Egyptian pimps, dressed Valentino-style to attract rich, sheik-crazed tourist ladies, particularly outraged him.⁵⁶ In Lawrence Durrell's famous Alexandria Quartet the sensual, hedonistic atmosphere of the city brought a number of otherwise righteous white men and women down into the moral gutter.⁵⁷

Americans frequently equated nakedness with immorality, so the nakedness that was a natural part of equatorial poverty was condemned out-of-hand. Natives bathing in stagnant pools and rivers while the city moved about them were judged immodest while public baths were imagined in terms of the Arab's sensual paradise.⁵⁸ Bayard Taylor, a romantic Victorian traveler, went to the Damascus baths for a message nearly as exciting as the hashish he ate the night before. Enraptured, he said, "Give yourself with a blind submission into the arms of brown Fate, and he will lead you to new chambers of delight."⁵⁹ A more restrained visitor to the Tunis baths in the 1920s felt differently. Viewing the procession of dirt-caked and flea-ridden natives he said, "I have spent too much of my life in frontier regions to be

finical, but one has to draw the line somewhere."⁶⁰

Arab cities often prompted images of decay and death. Travelers went out of their way to visit and report on the leper districts of Jerusalem and Damascus, sidetrips they probably would not have made in Vienna or Dayton.⁶¹ Damascus, the pearl of the desert, was beautiful and enticing from the hills above but a diseased pesthole within.⁶² On the streets the women moved silently, like ghosts wrapped in winding sheets.⁶³ A similar image was applied to Tiberias:

Veiled and shrouded women glided in from the doorways, and the ghosts of shrivelled old women sat crouchingly in the sun, shaking their palsied heads. Starved and hairless dogs staggered about through the filth, stopping here and there to scratch up the bones of some carcass; foul odors filled the air, and green and foetid pools of water lay stagnant in the ruins. 64

The Reverend J.S. Spence described Alexandria in the same manner and drew the obvious conclusions. The city was shrouded in darkness and gloom and "oppressive and disagreeable in the extreme." As he dodged the milling Arab he saw:

...half-finished houses, portions of walls and heaps of stones and dirt, lying in confused masses; wretched hovels, most of them roofless, and destitute of every convenience which can minister to the wants of life; and to render the picture complete, half-clad, filthy and degraded people, men, women and children, with their little stock in the way of fowls, goats or donkeys, all occupying some favorite corner of their unique habitation, and all, apparently, on an equality;--these and such like, are the things which strike a visitor from a country like ours, where civilization, refinement and the general diffusion of the comforts of life are our most proudest boast and inestimable privilege. 65

The reverend's description summarized American images of Arab cities.

The environment was overpowering, and it took a toll on those who lived in it. Arabs lived amid squalor and wreckage, "heaps of stones

and dirt." It was an environment of death, "shrouded in darkness" and destitute of "every convenience which can minister to the wants of life." The Arabs were "half-clad, filthy and degraded," living, "on an equality" with their animals. Americans found it all the more shocking because it was so different from their own environment, "where civilization, refinement, and the general diffusion of the comforts of life," was the standard. Coming from an environment of abundance, Spence reacted to the stagnation of the Arab environment of deprivation and painted it in images of death, ruin and bestiality. Other visitors drew the same conclusions in the same images for over a hundred and fifty years.

Arab cities, like so much of Arab life, were perceived as dead and decaying and the imagery of death and rot--lepers, ravaged beggars, and shrouded, ghost-like women--seemed to be appropriate metaphors to Americans who were busily building their own, new civilization. They ignored that many of the same conditions existed in New York and Chicago, proving again that the primary purpose of travel to confirm rather than broaden.

Americans had clear and distinct images of Arab life, whether lived in a bedouin camp, a village or one of the ancient cities. They saw great similarities--the ubiquitous poverty and filth--but Americans also believed there were great differences between the nomadic and urbanized Arabs. Despite the volumes of deprecation and contempt heaped on the bedouin, when he was compared to the town Arab he inevitably emerged as an infinitely superior character. Lowell

Thomas said, in a burst of publicist zeal, "The nomad is a sportsman, a lover of personal liberty, and a natural poet. The villager is often indolent, dirty, untrustworthy and entirely mercenary."⁶⁶ A twentieth-century missionary found villagers cringing dogs because they had to rent land, while the bedu, at least, roamed free of economic shackles. Charles Doughty thought the city Arabs were efeminate because they wore feathers and fine silks. Others made vague allusions to the nomad's "pure" blood and the racial mongrelization in the cities. Lothrop Stoddard, a racist writer of some repute in the 1920s, drew on the scientists gift for euphemism and termed the city Arabs, neo-Arabs, to establish a racial distinction. In his novel about the founding of Israel, Arthur Koestler invented a bedouin sheik who despised the villagers and became the blood-brother of the Jewish terrorist leader, a characterization reminiscent of Cooper's Noble Savages.⁶⁷

The same phenomenon was evident in American attitudes toward Indians and it demonstrated a peculiar contradiction in the Savagism idea--it boiled down to the belief that the only thing more reprehensible than a total savage was one caught half-way between savagism and civilization.⁶⁸ Those benighted creatures retained none of primitivism's virtues and acquired only the vices of civilization. Since the most common designation for bedouins was "thief" and for town Arabs, "beggar," the conclusion could be that while Americans despised both they respected the thief more.

.....

To Americans, then, the Arab was an exemplar of savagism. All the outward appearances of his life, from the way he looked and lived to his villages and cities, were evidence of his debasement. He was the victim of a savage land that forced him to live as an animal. He was "degraded to the lowest possible point in the social scale."⁶⁹ From the moment his life began, when his mother bore him "...under a tree, in a cave, in the standing position of a quadruped," until his burial amid wild incantations, the Arab lived a savage life.⁷⁰

FOOTNOTES

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CHAPTER IV

THE ARAB'S SAVAGE SOCIETY

Americans believed that the Arabs' inner life--his faith, though processes, and his character--were as savage as the outward form of his life. The explanation of the Arabs' mental and spiritual savagism was still environmental, but in the broadest sense. It was to the bleak psychological environment of Islam that Americans traced almost every negative aspect of the Arabs' thought and character. The Prophet's faith, combined with the arid landscape, condemned the Arabs to an unrelenting savagism.

When Americans became Christianity's champion, a self-assumed role, they also assumed traditional misconceptions and half-truths about Islam, ideas that were little changed since the medieval ages.¹ The trust of the American attack on the Muslim faith was to expose Islam as a fraud and deny its validity as a revealed religion. It was motivated less by fear, as was the case with Christian Europe, than by simple aggression and ideological competition. Americans did not fear Islam; they were merely contemptuous of it and determined to overcome the Muslim religion and supplant it with their own. Missionaries, of course, led the advance but they were only shock troops. Most other Americans who visited and wrote about the Arab world

followed behind, an ideological phalanx, bayonets at the ready. A few tried to offer a more substantive, objective image of Islam, especially in the academic community, but even they tended to damn with faint praise.

Islam was attacked at various points: its historical genesis; the character and motivations of the Prophet; Islam's ritual and cosmology; its purported licentious nature; and its effects on individuals and society as a whole. With the exception of a more sophisticated interpretation of the social effects of the faith the American image of Islam was no different than that of twelfth-century Europe.

Islam was repeatedly dismissed as a jumble of other faiths, part Christianity, part Judaism, and part bedouin and Persian superstitions.² Mohammed supposedly chose the elements from each that would provide the greatest appeal to the pagan tribesmen of Arabia. Commentators also disputed the divine origin of the Koran, insisting that Mohammed compiled it to compete with the Christian and Jewish holy books.³ Not only was the Prophet's creed a fraud, it was doubly heinous because it was spread by rapine and slaughter, the feared "conversion by sword," and thrived on violence and holy war.⁴

If the development and history of Islam did not prove its spiritual bankruptcy, the life and motivation of its Prophet did. Many commentators credited Mohammed with sincerity in the early days of his movement, but after he gained power he found his faith a barrier to further temporal power, they asserted. As a consequence he polluted

his own creed, one of many men who defiled his own high ends by low means.⁵ Mohammed was frequently portrayed as a voluptuary and a power-mad opportunist, both ancient Christian contentions.⁶ Washington Irving reported that Mohammed took more than his allotted four wives because he was trying to beget a race of prophets and that his visions were the product of disease, fasting and religious fanaticism. "He was, undoubtedly, a man of great genius," Irving declared, "but it appears to us that he was, in a great degree, the creature of impulse and excitement, and very much at the mercy of circumstances."⁷ Interpretations like Irving's prevailed—the Prophet was at first deeply sincere, although obviously deluded, the victim of some hysteria or "fevered dreams."⁸ As he gained power he lost his soul and debased his faith. Unlike Christ, who died rather than renounce His principles, Mohammed embraced luxury and power and became a womanizer and a cruel murderer. He was no longer the Anti-christ; now he was simply a dangerously deluded fanatic.

Americans also adopted the ancient argument that Islam was a licentious, sensual religion and therefore false. The Prophet's life and Muslim beliefs, as Americans understood them, about paradise were offered as proof. Irving characterized Mohammed as a sensual man, given to physical excess—he repeated the old story that the only things that pleased the Prophet were women and perfume.⁹ Impressions of Muslim heaven were the most frequently cited evidence of Islamic licentiousness. John Lloyd Stephens reported that every faithful Musselman had thirty-six perpetual virgins to minister to his needs,

and a famous comparative religions text raised the ante to forty.¹⁰ A travel narrative of the 1920s featured a photograph of two nude, full-breasted bedouin girls with the caption "What Every Pious Moslem Expects to Find in Paradise."¹¹ The idea that Islam endorsed such a view of the after life was comparable to saying that Christianity endorsed the child's picture of heaven as a place where angels lounged on clouds and played harps.

Americans found abundant evidence of Islamic paganism in their rites and customs, many of which were often only tangentially Islamic. The sacred Kaaba, Ramadan, and the pilgrimage rites were repeatedly linked to pagan worship predating the Prophet. Even public prayer was denigrated as hypocritical.¹² The rites of the various sects were widely reported and taken as evidence of Arab paganism. The terrible ritual of the Aissaoua sect of North Africa was vividly described in the popular Victorian novel, The Garden of Allah:

...foam appeared upon his lips, and the asceticism in his eyes changed to a bestial glare. His whole body was involved in a long and snake-like undulation...Then the second youth bowed to the tom-toms, foamed at the mouth, growled, snuffed up the incense fumes, shook his long mane, and placed his naked feet in the red-hot coals of the brazier. He plucked out a coal and rolled his tongue around it...He held a coal, like a monocle in his eye socket...He thrust spikes behind his eyes, through his cheeks and legs, his arms; drove a long nail into his head with a wooden hammer; stood upon the sharp edge of an upturned sword blade. With the spikes protruding from his face in all directions, and his eyes bulging out, he spun in a maze of hair, barking like a dog. 13

Twenty years later a traveler visited the town where the novel was set and found it a major tourist attraction and the sect

performing several times a day for gaping and gagging infidels. He described the Panther Dance, the simulation of panthers mating: "Now the religious ecstasy which had served as a pretext for the preceding performance was at an end: this was sheer animalism, frankly obscene and wholly unashamed."¹⁴ An article in The National Geographic Magazine reported that dervishes ate scorpions, swallowed glass and devoured sheep and goats alive.¹⁵

The "howling dervish" was only the most outlandish example of Arab pagan customs. Practically every other ritual was interpreted in the same way. The circumcision ceremonial, one without parallel in the Christian culture, was viewed with particular horror.¹⁶

Marriages were either ostentatious displays or bachanals involving ritual rape and kidnapping.¹⁷ Funerals were carnivals of paganism:

The loose flowing robes, the clinking of the silver ornaments, the wild gleam of their eye, the Bachantic madness of their saltations, the shrill shrieking and wailing, conspired to give their demonstrations an indescribable barbarity. 18

Others noted the hypocritical, staged quality about Arab funerals because mourners seemed to chant on cue and wail only when being watched.¹⁹

For many Americans, most of whom had only the vaguest notions about Islam, those practices appeared to be the essence of the Muslim faith, when in fact, they were only the inevitable extremes. Rationalists always had trouble deciphering the sacred quality of swallowing snakes and driving nails into your head, and that some Arabs did was assumed to be proof that all of them were savages. Christians considered marriage and funerals to be solemn, even sacramental

occasions, and spinning, leaping and falling into fits was inappropriate behavior. Civilized emotions were internalized emotions, anything more was undignified, womanly and uncivilized.

Islam seemed to dominate Arab life down to a "ridiculous minuteness," and its dominance was a major reason for Arab backwardness.²⁰ Arabs were "fanatics," so positive of the finality of their Prophet's message that they need never stir from their present condition, spiritual, material or political. From an American perspective Islam bred intolerance, obscurantism, a fervid anti-intellectualism and a propensity for violence, all hall-marks of the savage society.

To their chagrin, Americans discovered that Muslim intolerance matched their own. Arabs sometimes killed Christians who violated their holy places; they desecrated Christian cemeteries; and in Damascus, that "fanatical Mohammedan purgatory," unbelievers were not safe on the streets.²¹ Twain was in a constant state of agitation over the Arabs' arrogance and fanaticism. He was threatened in Jerusalem, snubbed by beggars in Damascus and condemned Egyptians for "putting on airs unbecoming to such savages."²² Other travelers felt the same way for the same reasons. Charles Doughty suggested that the European powers 'seize Mecca and put an end to the slaughter of Christians that was a part of each year's pilgrimage.²³

Americans believed that Islamic fanaticism made the Arabs suspicious of any efforts to alter the status quo, a tendency that reinforced Islam's perceived anti-intellectualism. They saw such obscurantism

as the most powerful barrier to the survival of technology and science, factors Americans considered elementary to modernization.²⁴ Visitors familiar with Arabic history and its past intellectual greatness mourned the low state to which it had fallen in contemporary times. Science, once the crown of Arab culture, had lapsed into backwardness and superstition. It was most evident in the abysmal state of the medical arts. Westerners watched in horror as Arabs poured clarified butter down their nostrils to cure headaches; gave birth in open fields; urinated on wounds and wrapped pages from the Koran around open sores.²⁵ Americans blamed Islamic obscurantism for such intolerable, and unnecessary, ignorance.

To Americans then, Islam created a spiritual and mental torpor that condemned the Arabs to perpetual backwardness. The Arabs' single-minded devotions to their religion, to the exclusion of any other influence, was seen as anti-rationalistic, and to the civilized mind, that was Islam's primordial flaw. There was something in that interpretation for everyone. It advocated the abolition of Islam (and Arab regeneration in Christ) for the Arab's social as well as their spiritual salvation, and maintained the traditional unanimous anti-Islamism despite increasing tensions and factionalization in the Christian community. A social scientist with a sophisticated understanding of institutions could subscribe to the idea as easily as the most fundamentalist Christian. The one faction of American society, its intellectuals, who could have presented an image free of religious bias were co-opted and reinforced the traditional Christian prejudices. They had done

precisely the same thing in the Middle Ages.

The way Arabs appeared to think, their apparent inability to reason and create, confirmed their savagism. Conditioned by a stifling Islamic fanaticism the "Arab mind" was deemed incapable of the complexities of modern life. A traveler among the Sinai bedouins said: "A people who are thus but children, must be treated like children, not like full-grown men. It is useless to present them with a formal proposition or argument. I should no more think of reasoning with a Bedawee than of reasoning with a baby."²⁶ Travelers frequently compared Arabs to children because, like children, irrationality, subjectivity and extremism seemed to characterize Arab thought.²⁷ The Arabs, first and foremost, were fanatics--one--dimensional; dedicated to first causes; a "people of primary colours, or rather of blacks and whites, who see the world always in contour."²⁸ Mark Twain grumbled, "they never invent anything, never learn anything," but Charles Doughty was more succinct.²⁹ After several years among the Arabs he concluded, "They are bird-witted."³⁰

Doughty summed it up. From a civilized perspective the Arabs were, in a word, simple-minded. They were absurdly superstitious, living always in a world of jinns, ghosts and the cursed evil eye.³¹ The Arabs' perpetual suspension of reason and superstitious nature made them miracle-minded. After sufficient contact with incredulous Arabs several American ministers began to doubt even the authenticity of Biblical miracles, suddenly seeing the awesome hyperbole of the "senetic mind"

where before they saw only God's direct intervention.³² Their 'mind was in their eyes,' and never considering cause, the Arabs believed, literally, only what they saw.³³

Arabs showed an ignorance of technology that Americans took for stupidity. They crowded around to marvel at binoculars, pocket-watches, and, of course, cigarette lighters.³⁴ Harry Emerson Fosdick mocked them for their technological credulity:

"What is electricity?" one Arab recently asked another. "Suppose," was the reply, "that you had an elongated dog, so long that from its tail you could not see its head; yet if you stepped on his tail he would squeal at his head. Well, electricity is a long dog; it can stretch from Beirut to Damascus and yet when you press it in Beirut it is in Damascus that it squeals." ³⁵

Arab stupidity seemed to miraculously evaporate when it became necessary to use Arabs. Aramco publications and articles about the oil industry commented often that bedouins were bright, eager students and quickly mastered modern technology, such as trucks and complicated drilling equipment.³⁶

Few commentators offered any penetrating insights as to why the Arab thought as he did, other than to relate it to the enervating environment, or more commonly, to Islam, "that procrustean bed of the human intellect."³⁷ They all agreed, however, that Arab incompetence was a long-standing problem. Arabs never showed any ability to create anything. They had vivid imaginations, but were "a people of spasms, of upheavals, of ideas," historically unable to bring anything to fruition.³⁸ Even at the height of Arabic intellectual greatness it was captive people, Jews, Christians, and Persians, who dominated Arabic culture and intellectual life. The Arabs themselves made only

meagre contributions, their fanaticism doomed them to being cultural sponges, absorbing but never creating. Philip Hitti, the Arabs' most important twentieth century American spokesman, said that their most important contribution to the Islamic cultural flowering was their language.³⁹ William Loring, an American officer in the Egyptian army, summarized the western interpretation of the Arabs' Golden Age:

For a moment there was a bright era in literature and the fine arts, and even then it was the narrow and crystallized study of the past. The arts of the Mohometans were similarly confined to architecture, their science to mathematics and medicine; and their literature, soft and voluptuous, was but an outgrowth of their sensual religion. Condemning sculpture and painting, they replaced them by beautiful writing and tracery on stone, nothing lasting. 40

But that bright era could not last. A few enlightened caliphs sustained it briefly but it soon succumbed to fanaticism and the Arabs slipped back into their usual intellectual coma.

The Arabs' susceptibility to language was indicative of their emotionalism. T. E. Lawrence said they "...could be swung on an idea as on a cord," and were likely to bolt from family and wealth to follow a silver-tongued prophet.⁴¹ For Arabs, words were alive and "they liked to savour each, unmingled, on the palate."⁴² Arabs loved high-flown rhetoric, and even if they could not understand its content, its form left them excited and exalted, or, more correctly, fanatical.⁴³ A race of poets, they were given to hyperbole and scattered numbers like the wind.⁴⁴ The same habits of thought, or non-thought, were also ascribed to Indians and were part and parcel of the savage mind. Civilized men subdued the word, honing it and making it a precious instrument to serve a specific, rational purpose.

They did not run wild with words—that was emotionalism, pure and simple, and the mark of the child and the savage.

Americans perceived a complex of behavior traits they labeled "the Arab character." Like the Arab mind, the Arab character was largely a collection of negative elements, usually traceable to Islam, and invariably interpreted as savage. Many commentators were unclear where the Arab mind stopped and the Arab character began and the two terms were frequently used interchangeably. Fanaticism, for example, and its constellation images of anti-intellectualism and intolerance, were often attributed to both.

But observers did see a number of common tendencies that they took for "character," or from an American perspective, an absence of character. The most commonly mentioned Arab character traits were all bad—they were lazy, voluptuous, greedy, treacherous, violent, fatalistic, and of course, fanatical. Americans occasionally saw some complimentary elements in the Arab character, but they were recessive, and on close inspection, were often not real virtues at all. There was nothing consistently admirable about Arabs; their courage was the irrational bravado of the savage, their loyalty fixed on family and tribe and for sale to anyone else, and even their fabled hospitality was a sham:

Their virtues are vices, and are contaminated by an odious selfishness. Such even is their one boasted virtue of

hospitality. It is mere social regulation; and without something of the kind these bands of robbers could not carry on their detestable vocation—could not even exist. 45

Like everything else the civilized man saw in savage life, virtue was tinged with the original sin of savagism and was more proof of Arab degradation than a positive feature.

Americans found Arab fatalism incomprehensible. They believed it was rooted in both the harsh natural environment and Islam. Islam's emphasis on predestination and the insignificance of man was, in fact, thought to be a product of the desert, where "...the free will is at an ebb and predestination fits the very landscape. So natural is fatalism to the desert that Mohammed's gospel ran through Arabia like the wind, and Islam, which means 'submission,' was the name of it."⁴⁶ When locust ravaged his crops and raiders stole his camels the Arab folded his hands and murmured that Allah willed it; if he was wounded and lost in the desert he covered his body with sand and lay still, sure that the wind would soon cover his face and complete the burial.⁴⁷ Arabs were "stoic" or "apathetic" or "submissive," even "somnambulant," they sat quietly through the trials of time and nature, content with their lot and never aware there could be a better way. Twain's reaction to the sight of children with fly-encrusted eyes spoke volumes about American contempt for Arab fatalism: "Would you suppose that an American mother could sit for an hour, with her child in her arms, and let a hundred flies roost upon its eyes all that time undisturbed. I see that every day. It makes my flesh creep."⁴⁸ Such dogged resignation was even more galling in light of the Arabs' absolute sense of superiority. The Arabs' inability to see the need for change, their fanati-

cism, was aggravated by their disbelief in the possibility of change, their fatalism. Together, Americans believed, they caused stagnation and perpetuated savagism.

One of the worst features of fatalism, from an American point of view, was that it made the Arabs hopelessly lazy.⁴⁹ To an aggressive people that made work a fetish, laziness was an intolerable character trait. Arabs scorned work, Americans were informed, preferring to live as thieves and beggars. The bedouin refused to work, considering it beneath their dignity, and the city Arab merely avoided it whenever possible.⁵⁰ Americans tried reason and violence, but it was often to no avail--the Arabs showed a natural talent for irresponsibility. A Foreign Service officer stationed in Yemen reported that the best antidote for Arab laziness was a dose of Khat, a widely used Yemeni stimulant. Before his khat the Arab was "apathetic," but the "fairy" in the drug transformed him into a new being, capable of "prodigies of strength and energy."⁵¹

J. Ross Browne's puckish guide, Yusef, explained why his fellow Arabs were lazy: since earthly success was fleeting and spiritually corrupting, the only purpose of work should be to keep body and soul together for the next day.⁵² Yusef, was a "very happy fellow... sleeping and smoking his way through life on the capital of one mule."⁵³ Browne was not the only traveler who wondered aloud if his harried fellow citizens could take a lesson from his worthless but ever-grinning dragoman.⁵⁴

Arabs made their women and children work while they spent the time,

usually reclining, over pipes and coffee.⁵⁵ One observer commented that "their highest example of human happiness is to sit in the door of their hut at the day's end, smoke their pipes, drink coffee and meditate on the power of God."⁵⁶ A less charitable traveler added that gossiping and catching fleas were also favored pastimes.⁵⁷ The Arab's disregard for time was related to his aversion for work. An exasperated traveler remarked that "Arabs, like other Orientals, have no respect for the value of time; and among the petty vexations of traveling among them, few annoyed me more than the eternal 'bokhara,' 'bokhara,' 'tomorrow,' 'tomorrow.'"⁵⁸

A maddening venality also seemed intragal to the Arab character. Because greed seemed to be their major emotion, an American explorer judged Arabs lower than the North American Indian, lacking, as the Arabs did, even the savage's sense of honor.⁵⁹ They would do anything for money, including selling their children, and would usually refuse to do anything without it.⁶⁰ Arabs expected backsheesh for every service, and were likely to push their demands as high as the market would bear.⁶¹ Bertram Thomas gave his guide a rifle and then the bedouin complained because he had no ammunition.⁶² A nineteenth-century traveler commented that "The word (backsheesh) acted like magic...It opens sacred places, corrupts sacred characters, gives inspiration to the lazy, and new life to the despondent."⁶³ Mark Twain thought it was the only word children ever learned.⁶⁴

Venality bred a host of ancilliary and equally dispicable character traits. The Baedeker warned that because Arabs were on a "much

lower grade in the scales of civilization," dishonesty was one of their chief failings.⁶⁵ They were congenital liars, especially when dealing with Christians, and cheating was second nature to them.⁶⁶

A diplomat in North Africa in the 1830s wrote that nothing the Arabs said could be trusted--they were only half-civilized and lied as a matter of course.⁶⁷ Lewis Burckhardt, the early explorer, reported that the natives of Mecca learned just enough mathematics to successfully bilk the pilgrims on the yearly hadj.⁶⁸ The bedouins entire culture was based on organized robbery, as Americans saw it, but petty thievery seemed to permeate every sector of Arab life. They stole from one another as quickly as from a stranger.⁶⁹ Lowell Thomas called thievery the "national amusement and pastime of Arabia."⁷⁰

As Americans saw it, Arabs refused to work, preferring to turn their women into drudges and their children into beggars. To compound the crime they procrastinated and evaded all responsibility in favor of either bribery or theft and then remained petulantly ungrateful for what they got. They spent more time talking about getting rich and less time doing anything about it than any other people on earth. Charles Doughty, the British explorer with the gift for turning a phrase, called such ruminations "braying rhapsodies."⁷¹

Arabs also appeared to be complete voluptuaries, constantly dreaming of a life of hedonistic ease where they were free to indulge every physical craving. They used drugs, avidly sought aphrodisiacs and frequently practised homosexuality and bestiality.⁷² A missionary estimated that ninety percent of their pleasure was taken in sex and

that Arabs had the most sensitively developed sexual appetites of any people he knew.⁷³ T.F. Lawrence said that they "dreamed for weeks before and after their rare sexual exercises, and spent the intervening days titillating themselves and their hearers with bawdy tales."⁷⁴ They were "absolute slaves to their appetites, with no stamina of mind, drunkards for coffee, milk or water, gluttons for stewed meat, shameless beggars of tobacco," and only their poverty-stricken land kept them from becoming "sheer sensualists."⁷⁵

Islam, a creed that divorced religion and morality, was believed to be the primary cause of Arab immorality. Islam's beliefs about paradise endorsed a rank sensuality, thereby granting hedonism a religious sanction, and more importantly, Islam supported a social system that subjugated women, the one portion of humankind who could develop and maintain some moral standard.⁷⁶ Americans constantly berated Islam's effects on women, and in turn, on Arab morals generally. Women were chattel, Americans said, unable to exert any pressure for good, in fact, themselves degraded and rendered sluttish by Islamic customs. Two customs, purdah, (the segregation of women) and polygamy were especially repellent to westerners.⁷⁷ Both customs made it easy for women to indulge their natural baseness. The veil provided the anonymity they needed for adulterous encounters and polygamy created situations where neglected wives sought out orgiastic revels with their black slaves, just as they did in The Arabian Nights.⁷⁸ Both purdah and polygamy, as civilized men saw them, resulted in the total absence of love between husbands and wives.⁷⁹ The man never had

an opportunity to know their women in any way except sexually. She was merely a 'machine for muscular exercises,' a condition that some observers believed led to widespread homosexuality.⁸⁰ Islam degraded women, and in so doing, degraded all of society.

Two recurring images, of dancing girls and harem life, especially fascinated visitors and seemed to prove the destructiveness of the Arabs' voluptuous nature. Harriet Martineau came upon a booth of dancing girls in a North African bazaar. She was appaled but unable to understand the dancer's appeal. They were "hideous creatures," their dancing devoid of either "grace" or "mirth," and characterized by a "foolish wiggle, without activity of limb, or grace of attitude."⁸¹ A twentieth-century tourist, also in North Africa, was not as mystified—the dancing girls were "the very essence of oriental depravity," and an "unrestrained appeal to sexual desire."⁸² A traveling minister reported, to no one's surprise, that the dancing girls were often given "libations of wine and arrack" until they "lay aside the last vestiges of modesty."⁸³ The results could be imagined. Another traveler, also morally unable to provide details, hinted that the outrages were equal to those of "certain portions of Paris."⁸⁴ Coming from the same strata of American society that put draperies over piano legs, most travelers could only interpret the dancing girls as evidence of the Arabs' natural perversity and lewdness.

But it was the harem, the famous "abode of bliss," that most clearly demonstrated the Arabs' wantonness.⁸⁵ In the harem the women were dedicated totally to sexuality. They were "dwarfed and withered

in mind and soul by being kept wholly engrossed with that one interest--detained at that stage in existence which, though most important in its place, is so as a means to ulterior ends."⁸⁶ And that, in essence, was the civilized man's complaint--Arabs approached sex as pleasure, not recognizing that it was actually only meant for "ulterior ends."

Hedonism ran rampant in the harem. The women spent their time "crunching melon-seeds, eating candy, smoking cigarettes and showing their jewelry and fine toilettes to their friends."⁸⁷ They spent hours grooming, preparing for their sexual roles. The women shaved all body hair, soaked themselves in perfumes, painted their eyes, and even tattooed their chins. They ate special preparations of honey and fruit, and sometimes of beetles, in order to achieve the soft roundness their men so desired. Some even rubbed a special unguent on their feet to soften their heels.⁸⁸ Gossip and dancing amid the constant din of screams, tamborines and drums filled their days and they aged prematurely, becoming "peevish and brutish."⁸⁹ Harriet Martineau, the eternal innocent, was concerned with the ill-effects of seclusion on the girls. She suggested that since the harems had such spacious marble floors that the women could take up skip-rope to compensate for their lack of healthy exercise.⁹⁰

The harems were also scenes of horror. Wives frequently quarrelled and occasionally murdered each other or a rival's child to avenge a misdeed or vent a jealous rage.⁹¹ Just as frequently their husbands directed the violence. Women were beaten with impunity and William

Loring reported that many were murdered. In one instance the woman was an adulteress and after her husband beat her to death, her father, shamed by his daughter's transgression, gave the grieving widower his youngest daughter to erase the dishonor.⁹²

The harem, like the dancing girl, was a vivid and popular image that Americans took as proof that Arab society was thoroughly polluted and Arabs, personally, were sexually depraved. Family life, in the western sense of the term, was impossible for the Arabs. Women were sexual toys, unloved but lusted after, and the children were corrupted from birth through contact with harem life. Lacking a decent family life and respect for women, the most basic element of civilized society, Arabs were doomed to barbarism, and their voluptuous natures predestined reform efforts to failure.⁹³

The sexually aggressive Arab was not a new image—it was one of the strongest Biblical impressions of Arabs. But in the Bible it was Arab women who were the villains; by the time Americans made contact it had become Arab man who was the sexual predator. The Sheik character was the most popular symbol of Arab sensuality. Edith Hull's romantic novel, The Sheik, was probably the best explication of the image, especially in the twentieth century. Her book reached millions when it became the basis for the Rudolph Valentino movie of the same name. Valentino's film was released in 1921 and followed by a 1926 sequel, The Son of the Sheik. As Valentino bounded into the role of America's first male sex symbol, he also fixed the association of Arabs and sexuality firmly in the American imagination. It is interesting

to note that Valentino's female counterpart in film, Theda Bara, also cashed in on the Arab-sexuality image: her name was an anagram for "Arab Death."

The Sheik, was essentially a twentieth-century captivity narrative, but with a twist--the heroine embraced temptation, went completely native, and refused to leave her abductor-lover:

Her heart was given for all time to the fierce desert man who so different from all other men whom she had met, a lawless savage who had taken her to satisfy a passing fancy and who had treated her with merciless cruelty. He was a brute, she loved him, loved him for his very brutality and superb animal strength. And he was an Arab! A man of different race and colour, a native! 94

Actually the Sheik was not an Arab at all, and that made the heroine fall less terrible. Hull's sheik was, in reality, an English nobleman raised by the bedouins, a literary cousin of Romulus, Remulus and Tarzan. But, for the sake of images, none of that was important. What was important was that he was identified as an Arab and the heroine had already given herself up to sexual riot long before she discovered his peerage.

Not everyone agreed that the Sheik character was attractive--even in Hull's novel there was another desert chief who attempted to rape the heroine. When a jealous wife tried to interfere he brutally stabbed her and threw the body aside.⁹⁵ Travelers reported, usually with disdain, of real Arabs who fit the type. William Lynch described a sheik of the upper Jordan as an "orge prince," reclining lazily "upon the cushions of the divan, with a kind of Oriental voluptuousness, he even and anon raised a rose-bud to his nostrils..."⁹⁶ The real-life

exploits of Egypt's former King Farouk, his world-wide womanizing and infamous pornographic library, gave the image continuity and meaning into recent decades.

The American belief that Arabs were satyrs was natural. It was an ancient image and sexuality was a common component of the savage personality. The image meshed well with perceptions and completed a behavior complex, a "character," that Americans judged thoroughly worthless. J. Ross Browne, a nineteenth-century traveler, summed up his impressions of Arabs and spoke for many others:

But let me tell you, my friends, there is a dreary, commonplace, comfortless reality about Arab life, with all its barbarous romance; a beggarly vagabondism that is entirely unworthy of being aspired to by any person of good principles or common sense; a bestiality that must make any one who has a respectable home turn to it with a grateful heart, and an inward thankfulness that he was born in a tolerably decent country, and among a people, who, with all their affectations and absurdities, are yet something better than savages. 97

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CHAPTER V

THE ARAB'S SAVAGE STATE

For a century and a half American observations of Arab political life and institutions reinforced the general interpretation of Arab savagery. That interpretation was a natural extension of a wider impression of Arabs; and assumptions about the Arab "mind," the Arab "character" and the general state of Eastern society were integral to it. From an American perspective, a people who were irrational, violent and content with horrific squalor could be expected to produce a political life that was chaotic and primitive.

Americans in the Middle East frequently commented on Arab political life. In the nineteenth century it was of only passing interest, but in the twentieth century, as technology broke distance and time barriers and two world wars rearranged the basis of global power, the Arab's politics became more important. The dominant images of Arab politics displayed a strong continuity through both centuries, although the vocabulary and superficial rhetoric was altered early in this century. As in the case of images of Arabs generally, recent decades saw only the old ideas wrapped in new euphemisms. Arab governments were portrayed either as despotisms founded on force or as tribal arrangements based on charisma, blood-feuds and an anarchistic

democracy. Public officials from local sheikhs to national leaders were generally pictured as venal, treacherous cowards operating in an atmosphere of deceit, intrigue and conspiracy. There were a few exceptions, such as the popular image of the noble bedouin sheikh, but even the virtues of those modern Saladins were denigrated because they were products of savagery.

When American observers analyzed Arab political life they worked from two contradictory assumptions, both concerning the possibility of Arab unity. The first was that Arab political life was a cauldron of personal and sectarian passions incapable of compromise or unification. The other was the more hysterical belief that Arab unity was possible and that it would lead inevitably to the dreaded Jihad, the Muslims' Holy War of extermination. Many observers, strangely, held both ideas at the same time and the resulting ambivalence gave their writing a schizophrenic edge, especially in the years following World War I.

The image of Arab particularism was the more objective idea, based as it was on irrefutable empirical and historical evidence, and the Jihad image was a ghost, a recessive idea that lurked in the shadows of western consciousness. Visitors acknowledged that particularism was the rule in Arab lands but that unity--and Holy War--was possible given the right circumstances. In the twentieth century that seemed especially true. From the beginning of the century Americans were concerned about the growth of several new "isms" that appeared in the Arab world. Arab nationalism, Pan-Islamism, even Bolshevism

and Fascism all became fearsome because they threatened to bring about Arab unity. Underpinning every fear was the ageless terror of Arab Holy War, an image of the finally unified and galvanized desert hordes pouring into the Christian world, destroying civilization and sacking western culture. It was an old and sanctified image, shared alike by Hebrew Patriarchs, Crusader Kings and twentieth-century presidents.

For most of the first hundred and fifty years of American-Arab relations those images and the assumptions they spawned were inconsequential. It simply did not matter what one unimportant people thought of an even less important people. But when World War II finally toppled European imperialism and thrust the United States into world leadership American images suddenly became very important.

Americans saw two modes of Arab government, the tribalism of the desert nomads and the more formal governments of the cities and the Arab states. The image of Arab particularism had its finest example in the bedouins and the image of unity and Jihad was associated with the formal governments.

Americans believed the bedouins were the quintessential Arabs, that the nomads were "pure" and retained more of both traditional culture and character than their mouldering cousins in the reeking

Eastern cities. The idea that the bedu were a laboratory example of the Arabs' strange and exotic ways led its adherents to a long series of usually semi-accurate generalizations about Arabs, including their political life. For two centuries westerners observed bedouins and came away convinced that Arabs were anarchistic, parochial and incapable of uniting successfully, a generalization with some validity when applied to nomads but of limited value when expanded to include all Arabs.

Bedouin government was tribal and therefore deemed savage like all the rest of their culture. Its chief characteristic seemed to be an overwhelming particularism related to both the physical environment and the nomadic character.¹ Blood-feuds between individuals and tribes defined desert politics and they lived in a state of perpetual war, secure only in their family and tribe. A rude democracy existed within the tribe, but seldom extended beyond. Ability determined leadership and martial glory and loot determined class so war was the only honorable profession for a man. They fought over wells, grazing land and especially over grievances old and new. If some outside force seemed unusually threatening, the bedouins were capable of forgetting traditional rivalries, and of achieving a momentary unity, but such alliances shifted like the dunes.² It was the sort of politics that bred extremes of both honor and treachery, and to western observers it appeared to be government by conspiracy, an image that was central to western perceptions of Arab government generally.³

Tribalism was a natural reflection of the bedu's innate individualism, a trait that one contemporary scholar said was "so ingrained that the bedouin has never been able to raise himself to the dignity of a social being."⁴ From an American point of view the nomadic Arabs were accustomed to a high degree of personal freedom but seemed unwilling to compromise any of it for the commonweal. They were a people who "instinctively hate things like sanitary measures or police regulations."⁵ They were free, but it was a debased natural freedom that recognized no civic responsibilities and condemned the nomads to political backwardness.

The desert sheikhs were fascinating figures for their martial and political skills as well as their legendary sexual prowess. Visitors often depicted sheikhs as admirable men--witness William Lynch's description of the noble A'Kil or T. E. Lawrence's famous allies, Feisal and Auda Abu Tayi.⁶ Auda was a warrior of great repute, having killed seventy-five men, excluding Turks, and receiving thirteen wounds. He also had twenty-eight wives and innumerable children. On one occasion he became so incensed with the perfidious Turks that he took his false teeth, a gift from the Turkish commander, and smashed them on a rock. It demonstrated his loyalty to Lawrence but meant he had to eat milk and cheese until British dentists in Cairo could replace them. Auda Abu Tayi was clearly a man to be reckoned with, but he was just as clearly a savage.⁷

Visitors pointed out that the sheikhs were chosen democratically and wore their power lightly, knowing the dagger was the desert's

recall petition. To hold their position they had to appeal to a wide spectrum of people, and they therefore owed almost everyone some consideration. They kept the few wealthy Arabs from victimizing the poor because if the rich Arabs became too obnoxious the sheikh would destroy them and confiscate their wealth, all with the frenzied approval of the tribe. The sheikhs themselves were usually poor because they were obligated to distribute most of their possessions to tribesmen and guests. Their tents were always open and their hospitality kept their fortunes pared to the bone.⁸

Not all sheikhs evidenced heroic qualities and travelers often judged them as disreputable a lot as any other group of Arabs. Twain described one as "the star-spangled scum of the desert," and his friend, Charles Dudley Warner, compared his sheikh-guide to the western Indians that constantly pestered travelers for tobacco.⁹ Even Lynch, who so admired A'Kil, criticized another sheikh who stood on a peasant's back to mount his horse.¹⁰ A twentieth-century traveler warned his readers to take the Hollywood image of the "debonair gentlemen with chivalrous instincts and charming manners" with a grain of salt. He had visited many and found them "blackguardly ruffians, lustful, cruel, vindictive, ignorant, debased, as filthy of body as of mind."¹¹

Despite the occasional curmudgeon who pulled aside the veil of fantasy the desert sheikh was the nearest thing to a positive image that Americans had of Arabs. When the sheikhs were bad they were no

worse than the general run of Arabs, but when they were good they were natural aristocrats. Although there was little argument about their savagery—even Hull's cinematic hero was described as an animal—they still demonstrated traits that gave some westerners hope for their eventual redemption, or at least for their usefulness. Some sheikhs could be honorable and loyal allies and they did rule democratically, albeit by a cruder version of the idea than Americans fancied they enjoyed. Their appearance was an important factor also. Sheikhs could be noble-looking fellows when fully clothed in flowing robes, studded daggers and resplendent beards. More than one American expressed deferential awe when they confronted such men.¹²

Ibn Saud, the king of Saudi Arabia (1927-1952), was a case in point. He was well-known among the interested American public, first because of his country's oil and then after World War II because he was one of America's closest Arab allies. There was obviously every reason to portray the king positively and a certain amount of press-agentry was evident. But, just as obviously, Ibn Saud made a profound impression on some men, possibly because he was exactly what they thought a real Sheikh-king would be--part Haroun al-Raschid, part Valentino and part Cochise.

Visitors compared the king to Woodrow Wilson, George Marshall, Haile Selassie, Chiang Kai-shek, even Mohammed the Prophet.¹³ John Gunther, who had almost nothing good to say about Arabs, called him "the greatest living Arab today."¹⁴ His great height (some said almost seven feet) and his magnetic eyes were frequently mentioned, but

it was his noble character that left the deepest impression.¹⁵ He was a charismatic leader who inspired deep loyalty in his people; he was wise, deeply religious, aristocratic, and above all, a loyal friend to the United States and an arch-foe of atheistic communism. It was reported that when Red agents were discovered in Saudi Arabia they were summarily turned over to the women who slashed their "tender parts" to ribbons, a scene so evocative of Indian warfare that it was difficult to believe.¹⁶

That violent and barbaric streak in the king was an apparent contradiction in Ibn Saud's image. Writers, even those who applauded loudest, never made any attempt to ignore what could have been interpreted as serious short-comings in the King. He displayed a dazzling inventory of noble traits, yet he was also capable of red-handed brutality, such as when he beheaded eighteen traitors.¹⁷ Very few observers lost their general tone of approval, even when they described Ibn Saud's savage side. The answer to the paradox lies in the fact that Ibn Saud, for all his millions, was still nothing more than a Noble Savage to Americans, and that was a type they knew and understood. Consequently Americans expected and accepted behavior that would have been judged reprehensible in a civilized man. Ibn Saud's much-vaunted virility was an example. Writers reported that the king had scores of sons and from 125 to 150 wives. An Aramco publication quoted the king as saying that as a young man he made a nation and that now, as an old man, he would fill it with warriors.¹⁸ The desert monarch was a great lover and Americans appreciated that quality for

what it was--an integral part of the savage's morality and no more despicable than the promiscuous matings of cattle. It was instructive that when a similar libidinous strain was exposed King Farouk of Egypt (Ibn Saud's contemporary but a westernized Arab) the Egyptian was roundly denounced as an enfeebled pervert.

Just in case anybody missed the point visitors frequently ascribed supernatural tracking and fighting abilities to the desert king.¹⁹ William A. Eddy, first Minister Plenipotentiary to Saudi Arabia (1944-46), provided a fine example of the image in his book. Eddy described the king as:

One of the great men of the twentieth century. He possessed those epic qualities of the leader which Samuel recognized in Saul; he excelled in the common tasks which all must perform. He was taller, his shoulders were broader, he was a better hunter, a braver warrior, more skillful in wielding a knife, whether in personal combat or in skinning a sheep, he excelled in following the tracks of camels and finding his way in the desert. In him his subjects saw their own lives in heroic size, and therefore they made him their king. 20

Americans were equally benign about the king's court astrologers, scarlet-clad black eunuchs, his slaves and his autocratic rule, all things they normally condemned.²¹ But in Ibn Saud they seemed natural, so they were accepted with the faith of small boys gathered about The Arabian Nights.

Americans liked men like Ibn Saud, and given a choice, they preferred the bedouins to the westernized Arabs of Damascus, Cairo and Jerusalem. The nomads were savages but they were also individualistic, freedom-loving and brave--all traits that Americans admired and thought they saw in themselves. Their leaders were also comfortable and pre-

dictable. The same approving tone given Ibn Saud was evident in writing about Abdullah, the bedouin king of Transjordan.²² Such men were Good Indians, honest and brave and loyal; and more importantly, they were not a threat like the angry young nationalists in ill-fitting suits and screaming Marxist slogans or the recalcitrant young colonels who came to power in the years after World War II.

The United States began filling the power vacuum in the Middle East in the late 1940s with trepidation and reluctance. It was a part of the world Americans knew very little about and one that promised more trouble than profit. It quickly became evident that America developed stronger relations with the traditionalists monarchies than with the westernized rulers of countries like Egypt, Syria and Iraq. This was not strictly because of images, but they were unreckoned factors. Alliances developed in part because the United States adopted British policies as the defeated imperialists withdrew from the region. The British had long supported the traditionalists and the Americans inherited the connection with the job.²³ There were also economic considerations in some cases, most obviously in Saudi Arabia, but that did not explain American support for the Sultan of Morocco or King Abdullah of Transjordan. Strategic location was also a factor but Egypt and Syria were as strategically located as Saudi Arabia and Transjordan. Lastly, the monarchs were more willing to deal with the United States than the openly hostile satraps in uniform.

Wary of Arabs generally, the Americans drifted toward desert monarchs as the lesser of two evils. The traditionalists, men like

Ibn Saud, at least presented the kind of leadership the United States wanted for the Middle East. The traditionalists offered a conservative approach to reform and westernization that would eventually raise their people out of savagery, but not so rapidly that they became infected with dangerous ideologies, an infection Americans saw all too clearly in the westernized Arabs of the cities.

In 1851 President Millard Fillmore wrote the Sultan of Muscat a scolding note concerning a minor disturbance of trade. To make sure the rascally Musselman knew he was dealing with a man of substance Fillmore warned the Sultan that: From the region of ice which bounds the United States on the North to the flowery land of oranges on the South, is a journey of one hundred days, and from the Eastern shores, which receives the first beams of the rising sun, to those of the West, where rests his setting rays, is one hundred and fifty day's journey.²⁴ The President continued, reminding the monarch that, "From the Seat of Government at Washington I send my commands in a few minutes by the Lightning Telegraph, to all parts of the United States, and they are obeyed."²⁵

Fillmore's letter was indicative of a host of attitudes and images that Americans have held about Arab governments in the last two centuries. Its hyperbole was reminiscent of both the "Great White Father" style of so many Indian treaties and of too many literal readings of The Arabian Nights. Above all, there was about Fillmore's note, a

tone of disrespect, of a superior lecturing a refractory inferior. Disrespect, leavened with fear, ran like a leitmotif through American images of Arab governments and political life and predisposed Americans to policies that drove the two peoples even farther apart.

Americans could see few reasons to respect Arab governments and some very good ones to fear them. At their worst they were inefficient tyrannies and at their best they were finally efficient. Arab rulers were seen as venal despots surrounded by luxury and addicted to every vice, especially women and wine. They ruled by main force and their whim was the only law. Their sole redeeming feature was that they could be bought.²⁶

Arab monarchs robbed and oppressed their subjects as nowhere else on earth, and from an American perspective the despotism was withering. One early traveler said that southern slaves lived better than the average Arab peasant and Harriet Martineau reported that one percent of the entire population of Egypt died doing forced labor on the Mahmoudieh Canal. She believed the fellahs were backward and stagnant because, lacking any security of property, they chose to produce none. Americans generally agreed with her theory--the fellah certainly seemed a broken and apathetic creature, oppressed to the point that he accepted a beating with a grateful murmur.²⁷

A beating was grounds for gratitude compared to the draconian punishments the state meted out. Travelers saw hundreds of chained men being led away for non-payment of taxes and public floggings and executions were common sights in the nineteenth century. John Lloyd

Stephens saw a man bastinadoed in court and watched aghast as the crowd of notables cheered. Blinding, branding, amputation of hands and feet and even crucifixion were common punishments for minor crimes. Treason called for more heinous measures. Richard Burton reported that Egyptians favored an especially ghastly form of impalement through the anus that left the victim writhing and slowly dying for days. Early in the twentieth century a North African ruler fed some traitors to his lions and displayed the remains publicly.²⁸ Even in a society like the United States, that endorsed public whippings, hanging and electrocution, such horrors were ample evidence of Arab barbarism, proof that they were congenitally unable to govern themselves in a civilized manner.

With such impressions of Arab statecraft and government it was small wonder that westerners recommended the ennobling hand of western imperialism.²⁹ Arab governments were cruel anachronisms to western and American interests. Richard Burton came to the conclusion that the Arabs were so politically degraded that only the bastinado could produce results.³⁰ Americans, rhetorically committed to independence and self-government, seldom went that far although some agreed wholeheartedly. Many commented on the benefits of imperial rule and even in the nineteenth century a few visionaries urged Jewish immigration to regenerate Eastern society, a harbinger of a powerful Zionist argument in the next century.³¹ Imperialism was only a partial solution and one fraught with ideological contradictions for Americans. Zionism would fulfill the same function creating a westernized and democratic

nation in the Middle East that would bring reform by example and equal social, economical and political relationships with the Arabs. It was Mission one step removed, and when combined with Zionism's mythic power it proved irresistible for many Americans.

Western visitors saw little in Arab governments worth redeeming. It was always some variety of despotism grounded in violence. The only relief for the West was knowledge that the Arabs were so factionalized that they would probably never be able to present a united front. There was some reason to believe that in the last century--the Ottoman Empire, shaky as it was, still presented a facade of government and the European powers, especially Britain and France, were moving into the region to provide still more control over the unruly and fanatical Muslims. Jihad was possible, but not probable.³² Contempt and fear continued to be the dominant American attitudes toward Arab governments well into this century and while fear gained a stronger position, contempt did not diminish.

The early years of the twentieth century brought important changes to the Arab world, changes that Americans sometimes saw as frightening. European encroachment and Ottoman disintegration accelerated, culminating in the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the modern Middle East after World War I. With the changes in imperial masters westernization swept across the Arab lands. One of its most threatening, and unexpected, results was the mushroom growth of

bastardized western ideologies. Early in the new century observers were voicing fears over a series of "isms" that were current in the Middle East. Two were most important--nationalism and Pan-Arabism--and they operated separately or in tandem with communism, Nazism, and Fascism at various times. Worse still, both ideas seemed to be suffused with that most traditional of Arab "isms"--fanaticism. They were interpreted as destructive, anti-western forces, retrograde ideas that encouraged ignorance and violence and spurned rationality and western-style democracy.³³ The only thing the newly politicized Arabs wanted from the West was its military technology and Americans drew the logical conclusions.³⁴

Nationalism was a recessive idea in the area before World War I but strengthened afterwards as more Arab states achieved independence. The mandate system imposed after the war was also responsible for the growth of Nationalist sentiment, mainly acting as a nexus for discontent that channelized into nationalism. The idea grew slowly during the inter-war era and had to fight Islamic obscurantism on the right and radicalism on the left. It continued to be weak and unfortunately prone to subversion. In the years immediately after World War I bolshevism was the biggest threat but it was replaced by Fascism and Nazism in the 1930s. Communism regained primacy again after World War II. Americans were suspicious of nationalism in the Arab world. They hoped it would work and many encouraged the idea and American support for it, if only because it was the only workable alternative to an even more fearsome Pan-Arabism. But Americans were not enthusiastic

about either the chances for nationalism's successful growth or for the probable result if it did succeed. It seemed a choice between the frying pan and the fire.

Theodore Roosevelt got embroiled in a controversy over nationalism in Egypt in 1910 and his comments and opinions could be taken as informed and probably typical. While touring Egypt he gave a series of speeches attacking irresponsible, violent nationalism and encouraging cooperation with the colonial officials. Later, in a letter to Sir George O. Trevelyan, the former president spoke more bluntly about why he distrusted nationalist aspirations. He interpreted the movement as centering on two groups, "Levantine Moslems of the ordinary Levantine type, noisy, emotional, rather decadent, quite hopeless material on which to build," and "the mass of practically unchanged bigoted Moslems to whom the movement meant driving out the foreigner, plundering and slaying the local Christians, and a return to all the violence and corruption which festered under the old style Moslem rule, whether Asiatic or African."³⁵ Roosevelt had managed to pack most of the important images and their assumptions into a single sentence. The Egyptians, and in a wider sense, all Arabs, were so morally and socially backward that they could not possibly create a mature and responsible nation. Since that was the case it was obvious that they needed a lot more guidance and a lot less agitation. He was not anti-nationalist, but he was opposed to turning the madhouse over to the inmates. His generation of Americans, still confident of their own superiority and rectitude, took the Arabs' measure and decided that Arab nationalism

had a good deal more growing to do before it would be acceptable.

The lack of American support for Arab nationalism was evident in the aftermath of World War I when the distrust was translated into a backhanded policy. When the British and French divided the region up into mandates the United States gave tacit approval, and at least part of the reason for that approval was because Americans were still unconvinced that the Arabs were capable of responsible self-government.

There were many other reasons to support the mandates. The United States' interests in the Arab world were miniscule and there was no well-organized constituent group in the United States to fight for Arab independence, as there was for other ethnic groups like the Jews. That meant that the principle of self-determination was just that-- a principle, liable to be sacrificed to national interests. The European powers were involved in the Arab world and had deep strategic, economic and historical reasons to maintain those interests. Since the United States could not dictate a peace the Allies had to be placated. Wilson's illness and growing public disgust with the entire treaty-making process was also an important reason for American acquiescence to post-war neo-colonialism. When the final decisions were made about who got what in the Middle East the United States sent observers but did not even participate.³⁶

But that does not entirely explain American acceptance of the mandates. A full explanation required some understanding of how Americans, including President Wilson, read the chances for successful independence in the Arab world. Their talk of self-determination and

anti-imperialism was not cant. But it was predicated on the assumption that independence was suitable only for those people ready to implement it in a peaceful and progressive manner, and it was obvious, to Wilson and the others, that the Arabs were not yet ready.

Wilson could not help but have deep misgivings about the efficacy of Arab self-rule. His pre-war activities in the Caribbean demonstrated that he had little regard for the irresponsible governments of little brown men and the Arabs were cut from the same cloth. The President was too much the politician to say that the Arabs were incapable of self-government but complete lack of action on their behalf spoke for itself. At the Versailles Conference his Intelligence Division suggested that he support a proposed Arab confederation but Wilson ignored them.³⁷ Even where the United States had bona fide interests, such as in Palestine and Syria, Wilson shunned involvement. He did send an investigative team, the King-Crane Commission, to Syria to sound out nationalist sentiment about independence and a possible mandatory power. They reported that the Syrians wanted independence but needed mandatory control, either under the Americans or British.³⁸ They too were ignored and Syria eventually became a French mandate, the very power the Syrians wished most to avoid.³⁹

In the chaotic months when the decisions were being made about the fate of the world the harried President was overwhelmed by more important problems than the short-range political future of a dubious and far-away people. With the exception of a missionary-influenced clique in the State Department who favored an American-sponsored

Greater Syria plan the rest of the foreign policy establishment was equally apathetic toward Arab nationalist aspirations.⁴⁰ It was evident that the Arabs were a foreign policy tarbaby and best left to the British and French who knew how to handle them. And it was Wilson, after all, who came up with the idea of mandates, a compromise that pleased everyone except the people being mandated. In many ways the mandates were a perfect solution. They implied a rejection of old-style, exploitive imperialism that caused the war while still providing the controls the unruly primitives so sorely needed. The mandates were a logical extension of the paternalistic side of internationalized Progressivism. They were based on the assumption that one group of people so backward that they had to be gently but firmly guided by another more mature and responsible group.

Wilson's unqualified Zionism was also a de facto rejection of Arab nationalism. Efforts to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine became a focal point for Arab nationalists and the two ideas, anti-Zionism and Arab nationalism, became so inextricable that support for Zionism precluded even a coherent dialogue with Arab nationalists.⁴¹ Wilson seems to have been a committed Zionist, a belief predicated on personal friendships with leading Zionists like Louis Brandeis and Felix Frankfurter, political expediency, and his own religious vision.⁴² He was a devout Christian from an oppressively religious background and may have suffered from messianic delusions that predisposed him to Zionism's mythic appeal.⁴³ He once ruminated to Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, "To think that I, the son of a manse, should be able to help

restore the Holy Land to its people."⁴⁴ The brilliance of his vision and his role in it were strong enough to blind him to the fact that the restoration of one biblical people meant the dispossession of another. It was also strong enough to take precedence over his own principle of self-determination. Wilson justified his decision two ways; first, self-determination was not meant to be applied indiscriminately; and secondly, Zionism would solve a world problem larger than the trouble it would cause Palestinian Arabs. To that end he was a consistent Zionist, even though that meant disregarding the advice of all his administration's foreign policy experts.⁴⁵ A quarter century later Harry S. Truman would travel down the same lonely road.

One of the greatest fears of Arab nationalism was that it would become the vehicle for Muslim intolerance. The massacre of thousands of Arab Christians and Armenians during World War I supported the belief that nationalism was infected with the Jihad spirit.⁴⁶ The fact that Turks perpetrated the massacres made little difference--Americans made few distinctions between Muslims, a myopia that caused continual problems in the way they viewed Arabs. A popular book about the Middle East published shortly after World War I argued that the fear of Muslim intolerance was well-founded. It quoted an Egyptian nationalist tract that attacked the Copts, a native Christian sect: "The Copts should be kicked to death. They have the faces and bodies similar to those of demons and monkeys, which is proof that they hide poisonous spirits within their souls. You sons of adulterous women! You descendants of the bearers of trays! You tails of camels with your monkeys faces!

You bones of bodies!"⁴⁷ With examples like that before them Americans easily believed that such extremism was an endemic part of Arab nationalism.

There was some popular support for a few nationalist movements during the inter-war period but it was qualified and was never translated into policy. The wartime Arabian revolt, a rebellion inextricably associated with Lawrence of Arabia, caught the public fancy and pre-disposed many to support Arabian nationalism. They had at least fought for the right of self-rule, and better still, they fought on the Allies side.⁴⁸ The Riff Rebellion, a nationalist uprising in Morocco in the mid-1920s, also attracted some public sympathy. The Riff leader, Abd el-Krim, was viewed as a moderate and sincere nationalist and some Americans raised money for his cause. But at the same time another group of Americans was raising an air squadron to help the French defeat the rebellion and American pilots eventually bombed and strafed Riff villages.⁴⁹ Both nationalist movements, the Arabians' and the Riffians', were of desert people and both were portrayed through a romantic gauze.

The situation in Palestine after the First World War convinced many Americans that Arab nationalism was dangerous and violent. From the end of World War I more attention was given that troubled land than any other part of the Arab world. Much of the coverage was obviously Zionist propaganda and a lot more was sympathetic to Zionist aims, but the source of information was not especially important—images derive from content and few readers seriously question what

they read.

Palestinian nationalism, in the European sense of a popular feeling of national identity and pride, did not appear to exist. What passed for nationalism appeared only as the anti-Zionist backlash of an ignorant peasantry, and even that was orchestrated to suit the needs of important families that were involved in a feud and used the discontent over Zionism to further their own ends.⁵⁰ If left alone the fellahs were content to fester as always, "slum children in possession of a vast playground where they wallow happily in the dust."⁵¹ Their innate fanaticism could be periodically aroused to murder and mob action, but they could not be mobilized for any goal that westerners considered positive.

The Mufti of Jerusalem was thought to be the motive force behind the violence of Palestinian nationalism. He was universally portrayed as a power-mad monster, almost a modern anti-Christ. When he made common cause with the Nazis, even going to Germany to help in the Final Solution, he confirmed the impression. The Mufti was a breathing symbol for the destructiveness and fanaticism inherent in Arab nationalism, and when compared to his contemporary, Ibn Saud, he was symbolic of the type of urbanized Arab leader who rose to power by cannibalizing western ideologies and using them to manipulate his countryman.⁵²

For most of this century the outlook for successful, western-style nationalism seemed bleak but some observers saw hope in a small-but-rising middle class, a group they often called "the Young Effendis." The Young Effendis were the officials, students and the cadre of

professionals who worked for progressive reforms in education, public health and political life. They recognized that xenophobic anti-westernism was an error and tried to adapt the best of western society to the best of their own cultures.⁵³ That, more than anything else, explained their appeal to Americans. The Young Effendis were basically western oriented but were moving slowly, "receptive to healthy change, yet maintaining their hereditary poise."⁵⁴ Yet even that small hope seemed doomed, particularly after the mid-1930s. The moderates were under tremendous pressure from anti-western elements and many observers were afraid their efforts would disappear under a tidal wave of communism or fascism.⁵⁵

Many Americans saw little difference between nationalism and Pan-Arabism and that made them even more suspicious of nationalism when it did appear. The same Arabs seemed to hold both ideas, so that nationalism was understood to be merely an interim step leading to eventual union.⁵⁶ The formation of the Arab League in 1945 and its anti-Zionist goals confirmed the viewpoint that Arab unity was implicitly anti-western.⁵⁷ A few observers argued that Pan-Arabism would be beneficial but most saw only disaster in it. Americans were afraid of Pan-Arabism because they saw it as essentially a religious movement. It was often confused with Pan-Islamism, and that triggered images of crazed Musselmen raping and burning their way across the civilized world. According to some observers, emotional appeal to their common faith could overcome the barriers of particularism, and therefore ~~union~~ would effectively be Islamic union, and that, given the Arabs'

anti-westernism, meant Holy War.⁵⁸

Missionaries were the first to sound the alarm in this century. They watched the spread of Islam into Africa and Asia with increasing unease and interpreted it as a serious portend. Convinced that Islam was a blood-hungry scourge, they saw the Ottoman Sultan leading a world-wide conspiracy dedicated to massacring Christians. Unification of all the Arab people would be the first major step in the unholy alliance. The Sultan's proclamation of Jihad early in World War I, even though it was ignored in the Arab world, did little to quiet fears about Arab unity.⁵⁹

The conspiracy theme was elaborated in the inter-war period with reports that the Sennussiya sect of North Africa was growing powerful and advancing, "slowly, calmly, coldly; gathering great latent power but avoiding the temptation to expend it one instant before the proper time."⁶⁰ They traveled everywhere in the Arab world, affecting disguises and hiding among the sympathetic masses.⁶¹ Wahabbism, the puritanical Islamic reform movement in Arabia was sometimes interpreted the same way. One hysteric, a Frenchman, believed that Ibn Saud was the new Mahdi leading the Muslim conspiracy.⁶² At the time, Ibn Saud was busy uniting the feuding Arabian tribes and posed absolutely no threat to anybody.

After the mid-1930s the European dictators began making strong overtures to Pan-Arabist sentiments and some Arabs took the bait. A few Saudi Arabian attended the Nuremburg Racial Congress and came home believing that Hitler and his entire staff were converts to Islam.⁶³

The Mufti, claiming spiritual leadership of all Islam, moved beyond Palestine and became symbolic of what Pan-Arabism infused with fascism might mean for the civilized world. His totalitarian brand of Pan-Arabism might have swept through the Arab world and 'performed the coup de gras in the act of slaughtering civilization.'⁶⁴

That was an extreme view, but only in its clarity of expression, and since it was written after the war it was also an exercise in imagination. That was the most intriguing thing about American perceptions of Pan-Arabism--they were always exercises in imagination, or more correctly, self-imposed journeys into paranoia. Despite their own assertions that Pan-Arabism was an impossibility, a myth, and despite abundant proof that their interpretation was correct, reporters and the informed public continued to suspect that the Arab unity was possible, and they continued to see it in colors of blood-red.⁶⁵

As far as Americans were concerned the nationalism that began growing in the Arab countries in this century was disturbing and frightening. It seemed a negative force, anti-western and fanatical at its core. Mob violence and terrorism were its tactics and too many of its leaders were dangerous demagogues. Arab nationalism's most hopeful proponents, the Young Effendis, were too few and fighting an uphill battle against Islamic reactionaries and westernized radicals. And increasingly after World War I, Americans were able to compare the barren accomplishments of Arab nationalism with the dynamic efforts of the Zionists in Palestine. The Arabs always came up short in such comparisons.⁶⁶ While the Jews built cities and a brilliant cultural

life, and did so in a democratic manner, the Arabs continued to stagnate, periodically roaring into violence and then subsiding into apathy. As John Gunther said, the Jew was an automobile and the Arab was a camel.⁶⁷

World War II confirmed the worst images of Arab politics and government. Pro-Nazi and fascist sentiment flared in every Arab country and Nazi sympathizers even staged a briefly successful Nazi revolt in Iraq. The best that could be said for the Arabs was that they stayed officially neutral throughout the conflict. The war experience proved the Arabs to be poor allies and the images of Arab treachery, deceit and fanaticism all seemed to be confirmed.

The Arabs' absence of support for the allied war effort was doubly damning when compared to the Jews' wholehearted contribution and it had an impact on American public opinion about a Jewish state in Palestine. In 1944 Congress held hearings on the subject and Congressmen and experts trooped to the microphone to endorse the idea; and a number of them cited Jewish loyalty and Arab perfidy as motivating factors.⁶⁸ That was only one of several reasons why Americans supported Zionist aspirations. The dormant doctrine of vacuum domicilium, the common law concept that the land belonged to the man that best used it, also played an unspoken part in many people's reasoning. Harry Truman evidently shared the view that the Jews were so advanced, and the Arabs so backward, that the Jews would improve the region to everyone's benefit. They would bring technology and democracy and regenerate the land that the Arabs had so badly abused.⁶⁹ American criticized

the Arabs for two centuries for the way they wasted and destroyed their environment and in their support for the nascent Jewish state that image came to its political fruition.

How much American images of Arabs affected Truman's decision to support Israel cannot be known, but public opinion was clearly favorable to Israel at the end of the war and America's images of Arabs were at a serious low. Scholars have usually interpreted the pro-Israel public opinion in terms of a sympathetic image of Jews. It is easy to understand why that would be so considering the condition of world Jewry at the time. Yet it is also easy to detect an anti-pathetic image of Arabs in American public support for a Jewish homeland. That cannot be proven but it is fairly certain that American feelings would not have been as strongly pro-Zionist if the Jews were being given a homeland in Belgium.

The American decision to support Israel began the modern era of American-Arab contact on a sour note. That was unfortunate because the two peoples were going to find their fates increasingly tied to one another in the decades that followed. As the leader of the Free World the United States found it had interests all over the globe, but the Middle East was especially important. The Cold War, Israel and oil made it so. The Arab's strategic location made them both a target for Soviet penetration and a link in America's chain containment. When the Arabs became front-line participants in the Cold War it added new importance to American conceptions of Arab loyalty and their dedication to democracy and progress. The extra-

ordinary development of Middle Eastern oil gave that problem a special urgency because Arab oil was crucial to postwar European reconstruction and American industrial expansion. The American commitment to Israel and the ongoing Arab-Israeli war also focussed attention on the region and its people, although the resulting images were usually unfavorable to Arabs.⁷⁰

All those factors led to a higher level of involvement with Arabs. For the first time Arabs were important as potential allies (and as potential enemies) and as trade partners. Personal contact also increased in recent decades and for the first time the travelers went both ways. Americans continued to visit the Arab world but the significant change was in the number of Arabs coming to the United States. Oil revenue brought thousands of robed tourists and many more thousands of Arab students to colleges all over the country so Americans and Arabs met face to face more than ever before.

The new era of American-Arab contact is but three decades old and did not occur as a matter of choice. Only mutual need brought the disparate peoples together. When the modern era began, after World War II, Americans held a number of pejorative images of Arabs, images which were far older than America itself and which had been reinforced over the years by countless missionaries, travelers and government officials. Contemporary events and personalities have often confirmed those ancient ideas. Opulent oil sheiks and frenzied terrorists are new figures, but they are familiar types with antecedents thousands of years old. It is conceivable that prolonged political and

economic ties and more personal contact will someday overcome those images and replace them with a more balanced view, but only passing time and a new generation of historians will tell.

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