

Valentino's Ghost finds peace in Dallas



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In 1921, Arab men were depicted in Hollywood as romantic heroes when Rudolph Valentino played *The Sheik*, a Famous Players-Lasky movie that led millions of women to turn Valentino into a heartthrob, while many fainting at the initial showing of the film. Ninety years later, the Arabs have evolved from the loveable heroes to the despicable villains: What has happened? *Valentino's Ghost* is back, lifting the veil with bitter, yet factual eye-openers.

On March 10th, Michael Singh's Productions' *Valentino's Ghost: Images of Arabs/Muslims in the American mainstream media* premiered in Dallas at the Angelika Film Center and Café. The 93 minutes documentary takes the viewers back in time into a chronological journey showing images of Arabs and Muslims over a century as represented by mainstream media. Hence, the fantasies of romantic sheiks, golden palaces, exotic lands, snake charmers, belly dancers, Arabian nights and flying carpets eventually changed into portrayals of fanatics and terrorists, flying planes into death. Today, Americans overwhelmingly have negative views of Arabs and Muslims.

Indeed, there is nothing passionate in the tone of *Valentino's Ghost* narrative: Narrated by Mike Farrell, the famous "M*A*S*H" star; the documentary illustrates in exquisite detail the negative and persuasive nature of the American media's and Hollywood's representation of Islam, Muslims, and Arabs. Notable scholars and journalists like Robert Fisk, Niall Ferguson, Melanin McAlister, John Mearsheimer, and the late Anthony Shahid, among others present the issue. In addition, the documentary entertains viewers with clips from stand-up comic performers, like Maz Jobrani, Aron Kader, and Ahmed Ahmed, who present the irony of being Arab or Muslim in America.

The documentary relates the changing image of Arabs and Muslims in the American media to the changing agenda of America's foreign policy in the Middle East. Hence, with the establishment of Israel in the Middle East, the discovery of Arab

oil, the Iran crisis, and the several wars that America engaged in the Middle East, the media's representation also shifted to portray Arabs and Muslims as the "others" who hate "us." On the other end of the T.V. receiver was the American viewer, spoon-fed with these images; never having the means to see the "other's" side of the story. *Valentino's Ghost* gives a unique opportunity to the ordinary American to see and hear just that.

If you missed the premiere event, you still have an opportunity to either watch another screening, or to host your own screening at reasonable prices. Check [Valentino's Ghost website](http://www.valentinosghost.com/content/screenings) (<http://www.valentinosghost.com/content/screenings>) for details.

Unfortunately this valuable documentary could not be broadcast nationally for reasons that prove the film's message. Four year ago, director and producer Michael Singh and his associate producer Catherine Jordan who have produced successful documentaries about controversial issues first proposed the idea of *Valentino's Ghost* to Public Broadcast System. After an initial grant of \$40,000 from PBS as a "Frontline" documentary, PBS withdrew their support after watching preliminary trailers. However, this didn't stop honest and sincere journalism as the producers succeeded to bring the film to life. The premiere in Dallas was made possible by several sponsors like North Texas B.D.S., One Democratic State, and the [Dallas Peace Center](http://dallaspeacecenter.org/) (<http://dallaspeacecenter.org/>) which is a group that uses research, education, and dialogue to generate non-violence action for peaceful causes.

Despite the lack of mainstream media's reviews of *Valentino's Ghost*, American intellectuals and scholars have endorsed and commended this controversial presentation. William Beeman, Professor and Chair, Department of Anthropology, University of Minnesota, President, Middle Eastern Section of the American Anthropological Association, Author of *The Great Satan vs. the Mad Mullahs*, said: "An extensive, carefully prepared compendium of American media images of the Middle Eastern Islamic world highlighting negative stereotypes of the people of the region...Many U.S. citizens--even those who see themselves as open-minded and non-prejudiced--will come away from this film with a new realization of how badly they have been misled into genteel bigotry in their judgments about this part of the world...I

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widely."



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