(Mis)representation:
How The Media Gets Between Us

This workshop will screen two clips that show stereotypical representations of Arabs and Muslims, and that of African Americans, in the mainstream corporate media. These clips will allow us to find common modes of marginalization and how media can be used as a tool of resistance by those communities.

Goals:
1) Participants will analyze the role of mainstream corporate media in both creating and exposing perceptions of and attitudes toward Arabs and Muslims.
2) Participants will explore the similarities and differences between representations of Arabs and African Americans in U.S. mainstream corporate media.

Time: 70 minutes

Materials:
> Projection and sound equipment for showing Internet video clips
> "Planet of the Arabs" by Jackie Reem Salloum: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mi1ZNEjEarw
> Closing montage from "Bamboozled" by Spike Lee: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C45g3YP7JOk
> Large pieces of paper and markers for writing questions and recording responses
> Paper and pencil for students notes and responses

Recommended Age Range: 14 years and up

Number of Participants: 5-25

Preparation:
- Make sure video/sound equipment is set up and functional.
- Queue "Planet of the Arabs" and closing montage from "Bamboozled" (see Materials for links).
- *See the end of this lesson for an important note on issues that could come up and strategies for responding/holding the space.**

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Sequence of Activities

Setting up a Safe Space for all people in and out of the room (5 minutes)

1. Create norms for a Safe Space for all those in and outside the room. Have students come up with suggestions of how to create this kind of space.
2. Also use suggested guidelines from PEP Facilitators' Guide.

Introduction (15 minutes)

1. Write the phrase "mainstream corporate media" on the board or large piece of paper.
2. Participants brainstorm together what that means to them.
3. Facilitator explains that (from Wikipedia), "**Corporate media**" is a term which refers to a system of mass media production, distribution, ownership, and funding which is dominated by corporations and their CEOs. Looking at the students' brainstorms and this definition, we can see the connection between the money and power that is invested in the media we all consume and are familiar with, which is an idea we will come back to.
4. Write the word "Arab"* on the board or large paper.
5. Participants brainstorm the first images and thoughts that come to mind, either anonymously on pieces of paper, or aloud (emphasizing that this is not necessarily what we believe, but are words we have heard associated with Arabs).
6. Facilitator explains that we will return to this initial list at the end of the session to reflect on whether there is anything we would change or add.

Planet of the Arabs (25 minutes)

About the film: "Planet of the Arabs" is a trailer-esque montage spectacle of Hollywood's relentless vilification and dehumanization of Arabs and Muslims, inspired by Dr. Jack Shaheen's book Reel Bad Arabs and directed by Jackie Reem Salloum. www.jsalloum.org

1. Facilitator explains that the images participants are about to view are all taken from Hollywood films and American TV shows, mainstream corporate media, and have been compiled by a Palestinian-American filmmaker.
2. Facilitator suggests students take notes while they are watching the film, about the kinds of images they see and how Arab and Muslim people are portrayed.
3. Screen "Planet of the Arabs."
4. After the film, have the students do a brief 1-2 minute freewrite about what they

just saw.

5. Discuss. These are some possible discussion questions. You can choose a variety of the questions that seem relevant to the themes your students are raising:

    How are white Americans portrayed in these films?

    How are Arabs portrayed in these films?

    How are women portrayed?

    What do students think positive and negative depictions look like or how are they classified as such?

    If you were doing research on Islam and used just these films, how would you define Islam?

    What does this video montage help us understand about U.S. attitudes towards Arabs and Muslims?

    Are the ways that movies/TV portray Arabs, Muslims, and the other folks we've discussed connected to government policies, economy, and other societal issues?

    Note that this was all pre-9/11. What movies/images have participants seen since then?

    What are some other examples of a certain group of people being portrayed in negative ways in US media?

    How are people from your community portrayed; what roles do they play in movies and on TV?

6. A statistic to offer after students have made their own observations: "Out of 1000 films that have Arab & Muslim characters (from years 1896 to 2000), 12 were positive depictions, 52 were even-handed and the rest of the 936 were negative." (from *Reel Bad Arabs* by Jack Shaheen) (Numbers should be represented visually, particularly with numbers so big!)

Bamboozled (20 minutes)

1. Explain that *Bamboozled* is a film by Spike Lee, an African-American film maker, exploring how African-American people have been portrayed in American mainstream corporate media.
2. Ask if anyone has seen this film, and share briefly what it is about, about the kinds of images we'll see and how African-American people are portrayed.
3. Screen the last scene in the movie, a montage of images of African-American people in American cinema.
4. Have students free write for 1-2 minutes about what they just saw.
5. Group discussion questions:

    How are African American people portrayed in this montage?

    How are women portrayed?

These images are all from media from a long time ago. Have things changed? How? What images/stereotypes do we see now?

6. Break into pairs and have students discuss how this piece connects to "Planet of the Arabs."

7. Come back as a group together and discuss ("Would anyone like to share some of what you discussed with your partners?")

How does media shape our perceptions of others and of ourselves?

What do you see as the effects of all of these images throughout the years on all of us but specifically how African-American and Arab and Muslim and people have been treated?

How can we counteract these images and effects?

Facilitator share that both film clips were made by individuals from the groups that were being "(mis)represented." What is the significance of this?

Closing (5 minutes)

Go around and have everyone share one thing they are taking away from this workshop today.

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*As we've facilitated this workshop, participants have sometimes used the term "Ay-rab" while discussing "Planet of the Arabs".   Although often not coming from a hostile place, this language is one of the ways anti-Arab racism manifests in U.S. culture. Similar to other ways marginalized groups have been labeled, the use of "Ay-rab" has a history of "othering" or dehumanizing individuals and communities. (A recent example of this is the Busta Rhymes 2008 track "Arab Money", filled with stereotypical, clownish images of money hungry "Ay-rabs").

When the term "Ay-rab" comes up in class, it may be along a spectrum of awareness of the term's negative connotations. Regardless, it is important to address and can become an educational moment. Should this language come up in the context of a workshop you are facilitating, the following rap track ["The Real Arab Money"] and blog post ["Explanation of Arab Money"] both by Iraqi-Canadian rapper The Narcicyst, are good resources that provide a context for these types of terms and feature an engaged artist speaking firmly and respectfully to what he identifies as problems with this kind of language, and how he prefers to self-identify.

An extra piece of context: A term that has a similar history is "haji" which began being used by US soldiers in 2003 to describe Iraqi civilians, and was often paired with terms of violence, as in "haji hunting" (see the Urban Dictionary's entry here.)