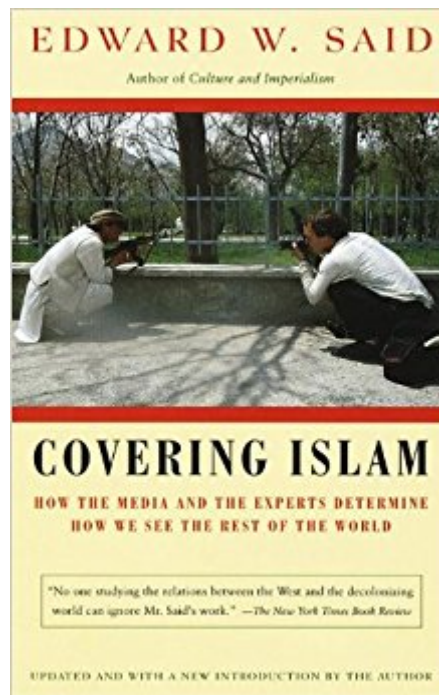




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# Covering Islam: How The Media And The Experts Determine How We See The Rest Of The World



## Synopsis

In this classic work, now updated, the author of *Culture and Imperialism* reveals the hidden agendas and distortions of fact that underlie even the most "objective" coverage of the Islamic world. From the Iranian hostage crisis through the Gulf War and the bombing of the World Trade Center, the American news media have portrayed "Islam" as a monolithic entity, synonymous with terrorism and religious hysteria. At the same time, Islamic countries use "Islam" to justify unrepresentative and often repressive regimes. Combining political commentary with literary criticism, *Covering Islam* continues Edward Said's lifelong investigation of the ways in which language not only describes but also defines political reality.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

While the 16 years that have passed since the first edition of this book hit the stands have been marked by an increase in sensitivity toward many ethnic, racial, and sexual minorities, the easy acceptance of stereotypes and prejudices in the portrayal, depiction of, and reporting about Islamic peoples has remained largely constant. In this updated version of this rigorous but engaging volume Edward Said looks at how American popular media has used and perpetuated a narrow and unfavorable image of Islamic peoples, and how this has prevented understanding while providing a fictitious common enemy for the diverse American populace. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"No one studying the relations between the West and the decolonizing world can ignore Mr. Said's work." --The New York Times Book Review "Edward Said is a brilliant and unique amalgam of scholar, aesthete, and political activist. . . . He challenges and stimulates our thinking in every area." --Washington Post Book World

This is an important book. Actually, more important today than when it was first published in 1981. My copy is the updated '97 edition, however. It's more important today because it directly addresses our current voguish blather (thanks for the borrow, Arthur jr) concerning the predominance of fake news in a forthright fashion well before the existence of Breitbart, HuffPo, or even the Internet. The focus of media fraud in this book is not on the presidential election, or even American politics, but rather the American media's foreign coverage on all things Islamic. Said states that mostly all of the news coverage concerning "Islam" has been quite thoroughly, and often quite intentionally, fake. Said unpacks why the western media usually reports Islam the way it does, why it (Islam) is otherwise completely ignored as news worthy, and how most of the material offered concerning it that's fit to mislead is picked up and propagated by many newspapers of the finest reputation and all major television news networks of that time. Said states current (70s, 80s, 90s) media coverage of Islam is mostly restricted to elucidating events of crisis only, typically just as it may directly relate to western interests. Selecting only times of crisis for exploring Middle Eastern society reinforces an image of a land with only inherent and unresolvable problems. As the Islamic religion is inextricably attached onto this real estate and its nettlesome problems, an unfortunate trinity of negativity takes root from the so-called western perspective. An old stock of myths, prejudices, and self-serving stereotypes find vigorous, if not rigorous, use in constructing a grand news narrative which makes certain to affix "hero" and "villain" statuses strategically, upon the United States and Islam respectively. Said uses the Iranian revolution (again, this was written and updated before 9/11) as his primary example of how the news media constructs and promulgates false news. Importance as to what's added (the stereotyping of Muslims as all violent religious nuts against education, modernism and technology) is only second in importance to what's excluded (the Shah's oppressive regime that flouted human rights, engaged in extensive social engineering, and attempted to subvert and destroy all connections with past traditional culture). Said alternates between errors committed by the western media out of prejudicial ignorance (explaining present events with jaundiced interpretations of values and history from a distant past, or an inexcusable inability to speak the language, or a lack of knowledge as to what is actually happening in the society reported on), and the more blatant pandering to businesses, government policy, or immediate commercial interests.

Oil pops up for Said as a nasty bogey bringing upon the Middle East western harassment and subjugation. Said recognizes limitations placed upon the commercial media by the competence of its audience, also those placed by interests who pay for advertising space, or the bare government pressure exercised on media and research institutions alike. Specialists find their employment may interfere with an ability to simply report "truth" without making expected accommodations to vested interests in a public forum. Those who attempt to do so despite obstacles can at best count on substantial frustration as reward for their efforts. I remember watching a specialist on Middle East terrorism practically pull out his hair as he repeatedly tried to explain how El Qaeda might have had nothing to do with Benazir Bhutto's assassination. The CNN interviewer not only couldn't follow the complexity of the various groups perhaps involved in potential insurrectionary activities in Pakistan at the time, she couldn't bring herself not to use the label El Qaeda, despite persistent corrections. Reduction of a complicated problem to its simplest explanation is a very common error, according to Said. Said would ask that journalists and reporters maintain a critical stance against any possible myth purveying, conscious or otherwise. Said provides examples of some journalists he considers to be knowledgeable, critical, and objective. Two Frenchmen, Maxime Rodinson & Eric Rouleau, and one American, I.F. Stone, are singled out for special praise. The first two were communists, while the latter flirted with it for much of his life. One can hardly dispute that their perspective on the Iranian revolution would be different than, say, Ted Koppel's. Though one could retort that their smuggled assumptions were just more palatable to the ardent anti-capitalist Said. Another intriguing feature to Said's commentary on western perceptions of Islam is his abject disdain for the west's consistent tendency for reducing Islamic people and events into negative ontological symbols. Said would claim this dehumanizes authentic subjects. Said also points in turn to the ontological symbolism of the Embassy hostages for the new Iranian Republic while acknowledging their basic innocence. At times, this feels like an offsetting game that really reduces into standard power politics. At times, it feels as if Said is really only upset at the amount of media power the west has at its command. If so, it reminded this reader nothing is more off-putting than a whiny Nietzschean. Still, Said does accurately hit his target when he states that quantity of news coverage indicates little to nothing of its quality. Reporting necessarily involves interpretation of facts. This process is never neutral. Because of this reality, Said warns us that we must all be aware of any potential prejudices, biases, deceptions, and even outright fraud, not only in our news consumption, but in our personal judgement. Said accuses the American media of mostly perpetrating the latter when it informed an hungry American public looking for answers during the hostage crises that insane zealots beyond any reasonable discourse were only ones available to blame. This was a narrative that was all too

easy to write up, which also utilized convenient, though bigoted, sources from past and present, but was also often misleadingly simplistic, uninformative, and frequently false. Because of this simplistic media assessment and the following public judgement, the media on the whole dropped Iran as a focus of scrutiny after the hostages were released, seldom acknowledging it again outside the briefest mention as a state still in support of terrorism until the beginning of the twenty-first century. The media mostly failed to convey an appropriately intricate and informed examination of the events leading to, during, and after the Iranian revolution, despite an apparent professional journalistic obligation to do so on behalf of its public. Most hardly cared, especially after the hostages were released; though Said did and made it the topic of arguably his best book. Sadly, an assault on America's "fake news industry" would have to wait until it finally inflicted injuries much, much closer to home. In fact, inside its very TV parlor...

Can't go anywhere in the Middle East without it.

In *Covering Islam*, Edward W. Said makes some vitally important points that remind us that our relationship with many countries (and not just in the countries/cultures/peoples who are Arabic or Islamic or in the Middle East) is informed by a media that does not always do justice to the people they cover -- in many cases, the media generalizes and demonizes. Making one of the most important points in the book, Said reminds us that Islam (like "Christendom" or "the West" or any broad cultural category) is not a monolithic homogeneous structure, but that many journalists, pundits, spokespeople, and citizens see and portray it as such. Said cites many examples of journalists (and academics) who fall into lazy habits when looking at and writing these cultures. Unfortunately, it seemed to me that Said makes many generalizations himself, about American media and journalists (although, to be fair, he does give some examples in the last chapter of academics and writers who he believes have a more broad and insightful and accurate viewpoint) which made it harder for me to stay engaged with the book. Finally, I wanted to know his solutions and suggestions, not just the problem. If everything an American journalist or academic touches in a country such as Iran or Iraq or Afghanistan is tainted by post-colonialism and oil and government, how can the average person learn about that part of the world in a genuine manner? What information is trustworthy? Said has told us the problem, or part of it, but did not seem, in this book anyway, to offer solutions.

As valuable for its insights today as when it was published. Now, it also reads as a history of the

heavily biased ideas about Islam and Islamism that have been churning through our imaginations.

Any rational person who values the truth and covets intellectual freedom for his or herself should read this book. This examines the greatest propaganda campaign presently assaulting the American psyche. You can continue with Edward Said, or go on to Naomi Wolfe and Noam Chomsky if you don't buy everything they're selling you on the tube.

The book provides readers not only with a different view on Islam, but also, with criticism on Orientalism. For those who like to broaden their minds, it is an excellent choice.

very eye opening!

Received on time an excellent read

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