Teaching Said: Culture Discourse Meets Culture Critique

Carl Davila
The College at Brockport, cdavila@brockport.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/hst_facpub

Part of the Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons

Repository Citation
Davila, Carl, "Teaching Said: Culture Discourse Meets Culture Critique" (2010). History Faculty Publications. 7.
https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/hst_facpub/7

Citation/Publisher Attribution:
Counterpoints: Edward Said's Legacy,
Edited by May Telmissany and Stephanie Tara Schwartz
This book first published 2010 Cambridge Scholars Publishing

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the History at Digital Commons @Brockport. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @Brockport. For more information, please contact kmymrs@brockport.edu.
Counterpoints:
Edward Said’s Legacy

Edited by
May Telmissany and Stephanie Tara Schwartz

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS PUBLISHING
In the Fall 2007 at The College at Brockport, I brought together a committee of fellow faculty and graduate students in the Department of History to begin planning a conference on the work of Edward Said, *Reconsidering ‘the Orient’ and ‘the Occident’ in the 21st Century*, which was held in April of 2009. The aim of that conference was, first of all, to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of Edward Said’s book *Orientalism* (1978) and to convene a group of scholars to share ideas about the continuing relevance of the language and concepts Said pioneered in that book. Given all that has already taken place in this young century, it seemed to us that Said’s work had only increased in significance, both within the academy and outside of it. Ultimately, we were very honored to host scholars — graduate students and faculty — from a number of fine institutions in North America and the Middle East.

But in addition to that more obvious purpose, I saw in the conference an opportunity to explore the challenges and possibilities of making Said’s work the focus of a course at the undergraduate level. It seems to me that, for all its problems and despite the critiques that have been leveled against it (some legitimate, some merely vitriolic) *Orientalism* challenged and continues to challenge us to confront serious questions about the nature of cultural discourses in the West, questions that we cannot afford to ignore in this era of globalizing information systems, an era that bears witness to the proliferation of a hybrid, corporatized, globalized cultural system — a veritable machine for the production of pre-digested cultural discourses.

The ability of the global information system to generate *truthiness* in the place of analysis was never more evident than in the weeks and months following the attacks of 11 September, 2001. Like scenes nicked from bad
Sly Stallone movies, the image of the burning World Trade Center was thrust up against stock (occasionally even fabricated) images of raucous Palestinian crowds allegedly cheering bin Laden, of bearded men screaming at television cameras, of shrouded, benighted women “obviously” under the thumb of their male masters, and so on. All of these images were, of course, presented denuded of their cultural and historical content — a movement made all the easier by the remarkable power of electronic media to decontextualize any event. Even worse, pseudo-experts like Gerald Posner were being paraded before the public to offer carelessly rehashed truisms and generalizations of exactly the sort so carefully catalogued in Orientalism. The power of many of these discursive constructions lay partly in their composite character (juxtaposing the “burning Us” with the “fanatic Them”) and partly in the unspoken links they evoked to pre-existing classical Orientalist tropes of the Eastern Other ensconced in the American subconscious. All this made possible a rush of sordid, anxious appeals to patriotism and righteousness that ultimately helped to sell, not just two wars, but indeed an entire foreign policy driven as much by the desire for profit as for “justice”. The reappearance of these tropes at this time was disturbing, and yet predictable, given the uncritical reliance of so many in the U.S. on this corporate information system and their generally low level of knowledge about the Middle East.

In short, the demonization of the Islamic Other had been “an easy sell”, and so I saw in the upcoming conference an opportunity to plant some seeds of change. Just as Said offered in his groundbreaking book an analysis of the processes of cultural production that come to saturate our understanding of the very cultural forms that they produce, so too I felt it incumbent upon us as educators to find ways to equip the next generation of students with intellectual tools and sufficient background to think critically about the discursive formations that frame the dominant worldviews of the society in which they live. There is no question that Edward Said pioneered crucial language and concepts that, properly taught and judiciously used, can help undergraduate students recognize that the natural-seeming duality of a “West” (conceived as “us”) and an Islamic “East” (conceived as “them”) is always in fact culturally constructed and laden with history and relations of power.

Although the refrain, “Everything changed on September 11,” has absurd, even narcissistic aspects as used in the United States today, the years since 11 September 2001 have amply demonstrated that in some ways the world has indeed changed, albeit not necessarily in the way it was generally imagined to have at the time. Certainly, America’s relationship with some parts of the world has worsened dramatically — as
Teaching Said

much through choices made by our leadership as through actions labeled “terrorist” by those same leaders. Be that as it may, there has never yet been a time in the U.S., since the end of Native resistance,\(^1\) when discourses on the cultural Other were more fraught with cultural and political baggage, never a time when representations of Others who “cannot represent themselves” (to echo Said's borrowing from Marx) have been more charged with negative cultural, political and even economic significance.

I find that undergraduates today often express an awareness of serious problems inherent in the cultural-economic apparatus that generates most of the raw material from which they develop their worldview. An oppositional stance among the younger generation certainly is nothing new, but of course, knowing that a problem exists is not the same as being able to define that problem clearly and deal with it effectively. Typically, these students lack two important elements: a perspective, a place to stand intellectually that will allow them to see the tropes of their own cultural system in meaningful historical terms; and even more important, language with which to analyze these representational themes. High schools are not providing them with either of these. Far from it: the world outside the academy allows little time for reflection upon the recurring themes in, for example, our relations with the cultural Other. Moreover, there are powerful economic and political forces outside the academy that inhibit and deflect this crucial cultural self-critique, and worse, attack the academy in the U.S. for daring to offer it — defaming the messenger, perhaps in the hope that the message might not get through. The politico-religious organizations that actively resist this critique themselves lie parallel to, and do not interfere with, the consumer-oriented corporate system that has robust reasons for avoiding it, as well. Clearly, a cultural critique like that represented by Said’s work reaches much deeper than youth rebellion of the sort experienced in the sixties and the seventies, because it challenges the basis of the information system itself, and so cannot easily be commodified for profit or power, as was the case with so many aspects of that earlier movement.

Indeed the academy, in which our undergraduates receive their intellectual formation, stands virtually alone as an environment in which individuals can distance themselves sufficiently to begin to see their society within a critically-informed historical and cultural frame. It is absolutely essential that we, as educators, strive to provide them the means to develop this intellectual distance so that, for example, when presented with the topic of “Islamic terrorism” in public discourse, they are able to see not only the surface levels of the problem (people killing other people,
allegedly in the name of religion), but also how the tone of the reportage itself has a history that tends to obscure the deeper and more significant issues that generate and feed "terrorism". (A similar approach can and should be taken with regard to other hot-button topics in Western perceptions, such as "Islamic despotism", the plight of the Palestinians, and the "woman question". Such issues are deeply interwoven with our collective fund of traditionally-accepted knowledge, and therefore are particularly susceptible to oversimplification that bears the stamp of verisimilitude). Undergraduates must be given sufficient tools and knowledge base to allow them to interrogate their sources of information and think critically about what they encounter in these public discourses. The corporate media system will not provide them with tools, and they will never develop spontaneously.  

Thus, teaching Said is a highly relevant and unavoidably political act. Even if we confine ourselves to the most abstract and theoretical aspects of his work, still we must use concrete examples to make his ideas comprehensible, and doing so draws us irresistibly into areas of cultural critique that ultimately force any serious student to make a choice: either to deny the whole project and remain at the level of superficial and comfortably dehistoricized categories, or to accept the obvious fact that the relations of power Said so carefully illuminated are real and do in fact shape the way we in the "West" speak, write and think about the "East".

In the broadest sense then, teaching Said allows us to introduce a number of historically informed cultural issues that in this time of increasingly problematic relations between the U.S. and the Orient defined by Said really should have some place in the undergraduate curriculum in history, anthropology and political science at least, if not in art history, sociology, journalism and business, as well — all areas outside Said’s own field of comparative literature and literary criticism. The range of fields which Said’s insights touch upon is as good a measure as any of the significance of his work and the importance of exposing undergraduate students to it.

Despite the widely-acknowledged influence of Said’s critique of Western cultural and political discourses, nevertheless it often is poorly represented in undergraduate curricula outside the elite Research I institutions. Undergraduates at Columbia and Berkeley may be exposed to Said, but what about students outside the centers of cultural production? This oversight simply must be addressed. Whereas Samuel Huntington’s dubious and ahistorical Clash of Civilizations commonly finds its way into course syllabi in political science and history, Orientalism rarely intrudes into the undergraduate world. Surely, if Huntington can get a hearing, why
not Said, who I would argue is far more deserving of serious attention. Indeed, whereas Said's chief effort in *Orientalism* is to construct cultural-historical context for framing the discourses of Orientalists, Huntington's thesis utterly fails to pass muster on either historical or cultural grounds, since it erases the rich history of interactions and mutual influences among the allegedly discrete "civilizations" he identifies and substitutes instead a superficial gloss on history and society.

Moreover, as Said himself pointed out, Huntington's thesis serves the end of reifying perpetual conflict and misunderstanding, rather than opening avenues for dialogue and mutual understanding:

"The core of Huntington's vision, which is not really original with him, is the idea of an unceasing clash, a concept of conflict that slides somewhat effortlessly into the political space vacated by the unremitting war of ideas and values embodied in the unregretted Cold War, of which Huntington himself was a great theorist. I don't think therefore it is inaccurate to suggest that what Huntington is providing in his work, especially since it is addressed primarily to influential opinion and policy makers, is in fact a recycled version of the Cold War thesis ... a very aggressive and interventionist attitude toward other civilizations, to get them to be more Western ... A brief look at the people and opinions he quotes suggests that journalism and demagoguery are his main sources, rather than serious scholarship or theory."  

The reasons for Said's relative invisibility outside the major research institutions are not hard to find. First of all, whereas Huntington digests his version of history for the reader in a familiar, political-science idiom that is easily grasped by laypersons, and does not engage with the wonderfully messy nuances of culture, Said hits the reader with literature and philosophy and does not try to meet you halfway. If you do not know much about French literature — if you don't know who Ernest Renan or Gustav Flaubert was — then you are likely to find *Orientalism* slow going. French literature, British colonial scholars, Herder, Foucault, Gramsci — for these and other essential elements of Said's argument most undergrads need a guide who knows the terrain and is able to walk them through it. And given the time constraints inherent in any undergraduate teaching format, that walk typically needs to be rather brisk, giving only the most cursory gestures at the main points of Said's argument while making a beeline toward the gist. (Another way to think about it is to consider that we do not yet have an adequate gloss of Said that does sufficient justice to his argument, the way we do for Marx, for example.)

Second: Said's work is controversial in the U.S. in a way and to a degree that Huntington's simply is not. Whereas Huntington writes from
the familiar Western viewpoint (and therefore steadfastly resists a thoroughgoing critique of the categories and assumptions that lie behind that viewpoint), Said asks us to step back from our “civilizational commitments” and explore the ways that our cultural predispositions have themselves created fields of knowledge and orientations that appear natural, but of course are in fact constructed, artificial. This is very subversive of the existing cultural and even political discourses — and understandably uncomfortable for many to face. Add to this Said’s vehement critiques of U.S. policy in the Middle East, and his work can become, not untouchable perhaps, but in some contexts a point of contention … again, in a way that Huntington never is.

In particular, in the U.S., while it certainly is possible to talk about Said and his work, to go to the next level and teach the changes in perspective implied in it can be difficult, since some of those necessary changes touch upon sacred cows of American political culture: American exceptionalism, unquestioned support for the State of Israel, unquestioned opposition to “terrorism” as defined by the White House after the September 11 attacks, and the generally shallow quality of discourses on Arabs, Islam, and anything Middle Eastern. There are, of course, exceptions. The wave of academic hiring in the fields of Middle East history and anthropology, Arabic Studies, and Near East/Middle East Studies that took place after September 11, 2001, testifies to the American academy’s welcome (if belated) realization that these fields have important contributions to make. But of course, hiring new faculty, and in some cases starting new programs, does not necessarily equate to transforming the curriculum in those fields.

This is not to say that one cannot speak of and advocate for a contrary stance on these problematic issues — certainly one can — but if you do so too loudly or too effectively, you risk a hue and cry of anti-Semitism (still, today, in the 21st century!) and/or something conveniently obscured by the labels “liberal bias”, “support for terrorism” and so on — all this despite the avalanche of pro-Israeli, pro-American policy viewpoints that dominate the discussion in the media and in the academy, as well, which are never labeled “conservative bias” and whose obvious role in perpetuating the “terrorism” that they claim to oppose are scarcely ever talked about. Instead we see bogus accusations thrown at first-class scholars like Joseph Massad and even efforts to destroy the careers of respected academics like Norman Finkelstein.4

Teaching Said in the undergraduate setting entails more practical problems, as well, including the conceptual difficulties inherent in the theoretical framework of Orientalism, the richness of its evidence drawn
Teaching Said

from the (sadly neglected) canon of Western literature, and the material's relative distance from the typical undergraduate's experience. When it is dealt with at all, Said's work usually leads either to consternation on the part of students, or else to radical abridgement by instructors seeking to distill works like *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) into digestible chunks. Even Said's reassessments of his own work, such as his essay, "Orientalism Reconsidered" (1985), at many points require familiarity with a cast of scholarly characters in order to be understood. These issues must be addressed if one is to develop an academic framework for presenting Said and his significance to undergraduates not well versed in either the Orientalist discipline or the broad swath of literature Said draws upon. How do you do it in a way that is both digestible and yet comprehensive enough to do justice to the debate Said has spawned?

The difficulty of Said's theoretical frame for undergraduates is perhaps unavoidable, and yet it is the heart of *Orientalism*, the tool that opens the whole Pandora's Box of cultural critique. Even more: Said's combining Foucauldian discourse theory with Gramsci's class analysis of cultural production is the conceptual movement that most distinguishes *Orientalism* and ultimately makes it so useful across disciplines. At the same time, this theoretical construct is rarely dealt with effectively in the surrounding literature, so it is essential that we find ways to stress its analytical power (and limitations) — however superficially. For many undergraduates in the 21st century, Gramsci's notion that state coercive power can lie in ideas generated and perpetuated by a particular class of people does not represent a significant challenge, so used have we become to the globalization of consumerism and its concomitant manipulations via advertizing. From there it is not a great leap to recognizing that the world of scholars can exert tremendous hegemonic power over everyday notions of the cultural Other, and the same can easily be understood for the media system if "corporate" is substituted for "state". Foucault is the difficult part for most undergraduates to grasp: "discourse" is one of those concepts that are not easily described...and yet we know it when we see it. I have found focusing upon the discursive linkage between "America" and "democracy" a useful example. Even young people today who maintain a healthy skepticism about the notion of democracy as bandied about in American media understand perfectly well that many Americans have difficulty separating the two concepts.

Next, there is the question of time. *Orientalism* can, of course, be introduced at a most basic level to advanced undergraduates in a single class meeting. I have done this myself by focusing on the three definitions
of Orientalism Said provides at the beginning of the book. I then offer students an opportunity to discuss real-world examples they encounter in media reportage — standard images being the veiled woman and the bearded fanatic. Highlighting how such real-world examples compare with the long-lived tropes Said outlines (the Orient as feminine, violent, fanatical, ungovernable, etc.) at least allows us to begin to historicize some aspects of public discourses. In this framework, students are often struck by the fact that some of these images come to us virtually unchanged from Aeschylus, as Said documents.

But if the student is to grasp the larger implications of Said’s work properly, he or she must wrestle with the range of material that provides the backdrop for Said’s analysis. For this, Orientalism requires a full semester of work by advanced undergraduates to be appreciated, thanks to the complexity of the theoretical material it deploys and the range of critiques and spinoffs it has spawned. The approach I adopted was first to define and explore the notion of Orientalism itself, before delving into the scholarly critiques (and critiques of critiques) that then set the intellectual stage for Said and the literature his work has stimulated.

It is very important to begin from the beginning when teaching Said, because students in the increasingly image-driven 21st century cannot always fully appreciate the cultural significance of Orientalism and Orientalist imagery at earlier points in Western history. Saturated by a culture that purveys and transforms images of distant places and people with remarkable speed and agility, students can have difficulty in recognizing that representations — whether visual or literary — have genealogies that extend across time. They need to encounter cultural and scholarly Orientalism as historical phenomena in order to understand the discursive power that “classical” Orientalism held in the 19th and 20th centuries. Putting these discourses into more recent media contexts helps bring the point home. After introducing them to the roots of Western study of the Orient (Sir William Jones, Napoleon, Edward William Lane and so on), I present them with the paintings of Delacroix and Ingres. From there, the stepping stones are the “Street in Cairo” and Little Egypt’s dance performances on the Midway Plaisance at the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893, and the host of Orientalist advertising themes that emerged from that. At that point Figures 1 and 2, which are slides from one of my presentations, become comprehensible as illustrations of classical Orientalist representations operating in American popular culture.
20th-Century Orientalisms

Figure 1: Romantic and scheming — two sides of the "Hollywood Arab"

Figure 2: Oriental sex and magic in televisionland.
When one lays out these threads clearly, many students have a kind of "Aha! experience". They know intuitively that something is not right with how we talk about the Middle East, for example, and often articulate this with a variation on "I knew there was something wrong with what I see on TV..." But when the history of the tropes and stereotypes is drawn for them, they can begin to see the true dimensions of the issue. It becomes possible to tie classical Orientalism to a variety of phenomena that they experience in their own lives. Moreover, once the students have acquired a working familiarity with the roots and branches of classical Orientalism, and the representational themes which emanate from it, they are better prepared to wrestle with two difficult aspects of the topic: Said’s theoretical frame and the early critiques of Orientalism. The theoretical material we have dealt with above as well as the critiques of Orientalism that paved the way for Said are a much easier matter. These early critiques of the Orientalist project by Anouar Abdelmalik⁵ and A.L. Tibawi⁶ do not present the problem in a richly theoretical manner. The important points are the historical and intellectual contexts in which these authors were writing, and the reactions their work stimulated from Orientalists like Francesco Gabrieli⁷ and others. Happily, there is an excellent reader that captures these and other essential texts of this discussion very well, called not surprisingly Orientalism: A Reader edited by A.L. Macfie, 2001. This slim volume is a particularly valuable tool for course design, because it covers major salvoes from both sides of the debate, both before and after Orientalism, including famous ripostes by Michael Richardson (pp. 208-216) and Bernard Lewis (pp. 249-271), as well as Said’s own reevaluation of his work, “Orientalism Reconsidered” (pp. 345-363). It thus serves very well as a companion textbook. Later in the course, when considering responses to Orientalism by more recent authors like Bernard Lewis, the groundwork laid in discussing the early phases of the debate pay off, as it becomes easier to see that the negative reactions to Said do not differ much in substance or form from those leveled at Abdelmalik and Tibawi.
Arming students with this level of contextual frame makes teaching Said much easier and is essential nowadays, considering the decayed state of our high school curricula and the devastation wreaked upon our cultural self-awareness by television. Only with a foundation like this can students come to terms with the complexities they encounter in Orientalism. Undergraduates then can read large parts of Said’s argument and place the material in a meaningful context, which helps them understand and follow Said’s argument once its main themes have been presented and linked to familiar representations of the Orient. For example, the political transformations in Orientalist discourses outlined in the closing chapter, “Orientalism Now”, become more comprehensible when they can be connected conceptually to Hollywood representations of the Arab world so eloquently distilled in Planet of the Arabs (Figure 3).

The semester’s work can then conclude with a quick tour of the vast body of literature that has adopted Said’s terminology. The list of these works is long and overwhelming. At best, selected readings can survey the terrain to give the student some measure of the influence Said’s work has had. This is where we address post-colonial studies, an area whose debt to Said is strongly maintained by some, and just as vehemently denied by others.8 Undergraduates, properly prepared, are at least able to appreciate
the major themes and dimensions of this otherwise vast and difficult theoretical material.

The course can then conclude with readings from recent books on “American Orientalism” such as those by Malini Johar Schueller (U.S. Orientalisms, 1998), Christina Klein (Cold War Orientalism, 2003) and Douglas Little (American Orientalism, 2008), which draw attention to themes in U.S. history that lead naturally toward the sort of cultural critique implied in Orientalism, but within a much more familiar frame of reference. Studies of gendered representations also have engaged with Said-based critiques of Orientalism, with books by Reina Lewis (Gendering Orientalism, 1995) and Linda Street (Veils and Daggers, 2000) leading the way, though they borrow from Said in very different ways. Undergraduates need not read more than the introductions to these works in order to recognize Said’s towering influence on their conceptual frames — even when, as in Lewis’ case, the work itself is meant as a partial critique as well as an amplification of Orientalism. Alongside these books, there is a vast array of potential teaching materials that owe a debt to Said, from which one can choose any number of topics from the visual (such as Igor Zabel’s powerful “Women in Black”, 2001), to the sexual (Joseph A. Boone’s “Vacation Cruises, or the Homoerotics of Orientalism”, 1995), to the almost whimsical (nearly anything on the subject that comes from the mouth of Bill O’Reilly or Michael Savage). Even the “Danish Cartoons” flap9 can serve as useful illustration at this point in the course.

Obviously, a curriculum like this is a semester-long project. But I would argue that, for advanced undergraduates, the effort is more than worthwhile. The students’ papers that emerged from this seminar presented worthy and interesting views of Orientalist traces in popular culture, each paper in its own way suggesting or implying just the sort of cultural self-reflection that is so critical for Americans to engage in these days.

Despite some legitimate criticisms leveled at it, Said’s work generally — and Orientalism in particular — is every bit as important to the contemporary academy as it was when first published, perhaps even more so, given the current political and cultural climate in the U.S.10 Orientalism represents an extremely important perspective that no well-rounded undergraduate curriculum should ignore. Despite the challenges that confront teaching Said to undergraduates, it can open a door for undergraduates to ask questions and propose possible answers about subjects that otherwise would remain invisible because the student lacks the language to frame the question. This is perhaps Said’s most significant
contribution: the gift of a language that can reframe discussion from a non-Euro-American perspective — if only for a moment — and thereby invite a critical spirit to emerge in the student. Anyone acquainted with the work of the British linguist George Orwell will recognize just how crucial this is!

Works Cited


Image Credits

Figure 1:
Rudolf Valentino romances Vilma Bánky in *Son of the Sheik* (1926)
http://cache.viewimages.com/xc/2642662.jpg?v=1&c=ViewImages&k=2&d=4176526AFF7345879BEA597981BB792EA55A1E4F32AD3138
(accessed 1/20/2008)

Walter Slezak conspires with Maureen O'Hara in *Sinbad the Sailor* (1947)
http://www.users.qwest.net/~aknot/swashbuckler.htm
(accessed 1/20/2008)

Figure 2:
Barbara Eden tries so hard to please her astronaut master, Major Nelson, in *I Dream of Jeannie*
http://www.fiftiesweb.com/tv/i-dream-jeannie.htm
(accessed 1/20/2008)

Figure 3:
Stills from Jacqueline Salloum's grimly funny *Planet of the Arabs* (2003)
http://www.jsalloum.org/videos.html

Notes

1 The massacre at Wounded Knee, SD, on 29 December, 1890, is generally held to have signaled the end of the so-called "Indian Wars" and thus the final subjugation of the North American natives to U.S. control. Although negative stereotypes of the First Peoples certainly continued as cultural tropes throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the natives themselves were no longer perceived as a serious threat to the nation. Only in the late 1960s, with the appearance of the American Indian Movement, and especially after the incident at Wounded Knee in 1973, did native resistance return to public awareness, but of course with only a shadow of its former political and cultural potency.

2 While Said's work clearly merits a place at the graduate level, the emphasis here is on undergraduate education for two reasons. First, Said's work is already present in graduate curricula in the U.S. to a much greater extent than at the undergraduate level. Second, the undergraduate level, where students first begin to develop critical thinking skills, is populated by a much less specialized audience that is generally less likely to pursue careers in academe. Thus I would argue that this kind of work is more likely to bear long-term fruit outside the academy, where it is most needed.

In 2004, Joseph Massad, Associate Professor of Modern Arab Politics and Intellectual History at Columbia University, was targeted by the David Project for his anti-Israeli opinions and his critiques of the concept of anti-Semitism. A review by an Ad Hoc Grievance Committee exonerated him of nearly all the charges, and eyewitness testimony has since emerged that the actions for which he was reprimanded by the Committee never took place. Finkelstein, a widely-respected historian, and critic of the Israeli nationalist narrative and of what he terms the “Holocaust industry”, was denied tenure at DePaul University in 2007, in violation of the University’s own rules for the tenure process, apparently at the instigation of Alan Dershowitz, a prominent supporter of Israel of whom Finkelstein has been sharply critical.


For example, see the selections by Dennis Porter (“Orientalism and Its Problems”, 150-161) and Aijaz Ahmed (“Orientalism and After”, 162-171) in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory, a Reader.*

A reference to the 2005 publication by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* of a set of cartoons satirizing the Prophet Muhammad, which set off a firestorm of protest across the Islamic world. A Said-inspired analysis of these images can be fruitful material for discussion.

The election of Barack Obama as President of the U.S. since this paper was presented has not substantially changed my opinion on this subject, although it certainly is a hopeful sign. Conceptions of the cultural Other do not change in elections, and Obama’s actions are not likely to alter the underlying discourses on the Islamic world overnight. Rather, I see this as merely one step away from American exceptionalism and toward a more realistic, internationalist point of view in foreign policy. This is a positive thing, but it does not really affect the political science orientation of U.S. foreign policy that has proven so unsustainable and damaging to American interests in the longer term. I do not expect those factions of the government most heavily invested in American global hegemony to yield the field gladly. And as they are also the people most responsible for sustaining the careers of irresponsible men like Glen Beck and Michael Savage, the discursive machinery will remain in place for the foreseeable future. This of course only argues for the continuing importance of teaching Said.