



THE OCCUPATION OF THE AMERICAN MIND

ISRAEL'S PUBLIC RELATIONS WAR IN THE UNITED STATES

A DOCUMENTARY NARRATED BY **ROGER WATERS**

**“It doesn’t matter if justice is on your side.
You have to depict your position as just.”**

—Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel

Over the past few years, Israel’s ongoing military occupation of Palestinian territory and repeated invasions of the Gaza strip have triggered a fierce backlash against Israeli policies virtually everywhere in the world—except the United States. *The Occupation of the American Mind* takes an eye-opening look at this critical exception, zeroing in on pro-Israel public relations efforts within the U.S.

Narrated by Roger Waters and featuring leading observers of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and U.S. media culture, the film explores how the Israeli government, the U.S. government, and the pro-Israel lobby have joined forces, often with very different motives, to shape American media coverage of the conflict in Israel’s favor. From the U.S.-based public relations campaigns that emerged in the 1980s to today, the film provides a sweeping analysis of Israel’s decades-long battle for the hearts, minds, and tax dollars of the American people in the face of widening international condemnation of its increasingly right-wing policies.

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FILMMAKERS' STATEMENT

Over the past 25 years, the Media Education Foundation has produced dozens of educational films that examine how mainstream media narratives shape our understanding of the world. A number of these films have focused explicitly on mainstream news coverage of crucial policy issues. *THE OCCUPATION OF THE AMERICAN MIND* is the sixth film we've done to look specifically at mainstream media narratives about U.S. policy in the Middle East.

HIJACKING CATASTROPHE (2004) examined how mainstream media outlets uncritically disseminated false information from U.S. officials in the run-up to the war in Iraq. *PEACE, PROPAGANDA & THE PROMISED LAND* (2004), released the same year, revealed how U.S. news media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict downplayed the reality of Palestinian life under Israeli military occupation. *REEL BAD ARABS* (2006) explored how negative Arab stereotypes in American film and television shaped public attitudes about the Iraq war and other real-world events. *WAR MADE EASY* (2007) surveyed U.S. government war propaganda from Vietnam to Iraq, showing how U.S. news media have been complicit in disseminating it. And *BLOOD AND OIL* (2008) detailed how U.S. officials have used mainstream news media to conceal the role oil has played in multiple U.S. military interventions in the Middle East.

With *THE OCCUPATION OF THE AMERICAN MIND*, we decided to revisit news media narratives about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, guided by polls that show the American people have far lower levels of sympathy for Palestinians than for Israelis. We began by poring through hundreds of hours of U.S. news reporting on the conflict, carefully examining stories about everything from Palestinian terrorism and Hamas extremism to Israel's ongoing occupation of Palestinian land, its illegal settlement expansion, and its siege, blockade, and successive military invasions of Gaza. When we started out, we fully expected to find pro-Israel bias in these stories given the U.S. alliance with Israel, American interests in the region, and how corporate news media tend to reproduce the official government line. But the level of imbalance we found was even more dramatic than we anticipated.

In story after story, Israeli spokespeople far outnumbered Palestinian spokespeople. U.S. political leaders *of both parties* uniformly and uncritically repeated official Israeli talking points. And American news media commentators repeatedly did the same, with very few exceptions failing to question the official line or provide even the most basic and uncontroversial rendering of Palestinian grievances. At the same time, we discovered that when Palestinian spokespeople *did* appear in mainstream news coverage, they were routinely subjected to harsh questioning and even vilification, treatment pro-Israel spokespeople rarely if ever experienced. When we compared what we were seeing in U.S. news media to coverage of identical events in Great Britain and other democratic countries, we saw nothing approaching this level of pro-Israel bias.

In an attempt to make sense of what we were seeing, we were led deep into the history of pro-Israel public relations efforts in the United States, a four-decade campaign to manage negative perceptions of Israeli human rights violations. *THE OCCUPATION OF THE AMERICAN MIND* tells the story of these PR and propaganda efforts – detailing how they work, how they developed, whose interests they serve, and why they have been so successful in shaping media coverage of the conflict here in the U.S.

We made this film for a very simple reason: because we believe government officials and mainstream media elites are denying the American people the basic information they need to make sense of one of the most consequential conflicts in the world. Regardless of where the American people stand on this conflict, we believe they deserve better. We believe American democracy deserves better. And we believe in the democratic imperative of holding our political leaders — and our news media — accountable. Given the huge stakes in the region, and the sheer amount of military, economic, and diplomatic support the United States gives Israel, we believe the American people have a right and a responsibility to make up their own minds about this conflict.

Loretta Alper and Jeremy Earp, Co-Directors
Sut Jhally, Executive Producer

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THE FILMMAKERS

THE MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION produces and distributes documentaries about the social, political, and cultural impact of American mass media.

LORETTA ALPER (co-director, co-producer, co-writer) has produced and/or directed several documentary films for the Media Education Foundation (MEF), including *Captive Audience: Advertising Invades the Classroom*; *Class Dismissed: How TV Frames the Working Class*, and *War Made Easy: How Presidents & Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death*. In addition, she heads up MEF's media research team. Prior to joining MEF in 2000, she was a high school English teacher in Amherst, Mass., worked for a number of independent print and radio outlets, curated an independent film series, and was a 35-mm film projectionist.

JEREMY EARP (co-director, co-producer, co-writer) has produced and/or directed several documentary films for the Media Education Foundation (MEF), including *Hijacking Catastrophe: 9/11, Fear & the Selling of American Empire*; *The Mean World Syndrome: Media, Violence & the Cultivation of Fear*; *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*; *Not Just a Game: Power, Politics & American Sports*; *Tough Guise 2: Violence, Manhood & American Culture*, and *Blood & Oil*. He has been the Production Director at MEF since 2004. Prior to joining MEF, he taught at New School University and Parsons School of Design in New York City, at the Art Institute of Boston and Northeastern University in Massachusetts, and worked as a news and sports reporter for a daily newspaper outside of Boston.

SUT JHALLY (executive producer) is the founder and Executive Director of the Media Education Foundation (MEF), a documentary film company that looks at issues related to U.S. media and public attitudes. He is the producer, director, or executive producer of dozens of MEF films, including *Peace, Propaganda & the Promised Land: U.S. Media & the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*; *Hijacking Catastrophe: 9/11, Fear & the Selling of American Empire*; *Dreamworlds: Desire, Sex & Power in Music Video*; *Advertising & the End of the World*; *Wrestling with Manhood: Boys, Bullying & Battering*; and *Tough Guise: Violence, Media & the Crisis in Masculinity*. He is also professor of Communication at the University of Massachusetts, a leading scholar on advertising, public relations, and political propaganda, and the author of several books, including *The Codes of Advertising*, *Enlightened Racism*, and *The Spectacle of Accumulation*.

JASON YOUNG (editor, co-producer) has edited and co-produced several documentaries for the Media Education Foundation, including *Guyland: Where Boys Become Men*; *Not Just a Game: Power, Politics & American Sports*; *Tough Guise 2: Violence, Manhood & American Culture*; *White Like Me: Race, Racism, and White Privilege in America*; and *Consuming Kids: The Commercialization of Childhood*.

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CREDITS

Executive Producer **SUT JHALLY**

Written, Produced & Directed by **LORETTA ALPER & JEREMY EARP**

Edited by **JASON YOUNG & JEREMY EARP**

Co-Produced by **JASON YOUNG**

Associate Producer **GEORGE MATTA**

Sound Mix & Color **RIKK DESGRES, PINEHURST PICTURES & SOUND**

Camera **KATE GEIS, TAYLOR GENTRY, DANIEL MARRACINO, DAVID MELLO,**

DAVID RABINOVITZ, TOM ROBERTSON, STUART VOSE

Motion Graphics **TOM PAPPALARDO, STANDARD DESIGN**

Additional Graphics **JASON YOUNG**

Music **LAYAALI ARABIC MUSIC ENSEMBLE, SIMON WILKINSON,**

PETER McISAAC MUSIC, JASIRI X

UNITED STATES • 2016 • 82 mins • 55 mins, Int'l Broadcast Version • HD
Color • NTSC • Aspect Ratio 16:9 • Stereo • In English/English subtitles

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FEATURING

ROGER WATERS, the narrator of *The Occupation of the American Mind*, is an English rock musician, singer-songwriter, and composer. He is best known as the bass player, co-lead vocalist, lyricist, and principal songwriter in the rock band Pink Floyd. Over the last few years, he has emerged as a prominent advocate for Palestinian human rights.

AMIRA HASS is the correspondent for the Occupied Territories for Haaretz, Israel's oldest daily newspaper. As the correspondent for the territories, Hass spent three years living in Gaza, which served as the basis for her widely acclaimed book *Drinking the Sea at Gaza*. She has lived in the West Bank city of Ramallah since 1997.

M.J. ROSENBERG was a Congressional aide for 15 years and worked on the staff of the America Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the largest pro-Israel lobbying group in the United States, before becoming a fierce critic of U.S. policy in the Middle East. He has worked for the media watchdog group Media Matters, writes a weekly column for the Huffington Post, and runs a popular blog that looks at issues related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

STEPHEN M. WALT is Professor of International Affairs at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and the author of numerous books on U.S. politics and international affairs, most notably *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. He has also been a Resident Associate of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, a Guest Scholar at the Brookings Institution, and has served as a consultant for the Institute of Defense Analyses, the Center for Naval Analyses, and the National Defense University.

NOAM CHOMSKY is a leading U.S. political theorist and activist, and institute professor of linguistics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is the author of dozens of books on political propaganda and U.S. policy in the Middle East, including *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* and *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*. The New York Times has called him "the most important intellectual alive."

RULA JEBREAL is a foreign policy analyst, journalist, novelist, and screenwriter with both Israeli and Italian citizenship. Jebreal became the first foreign anchorwoman in the history of Italian television, winning a Media Watch award for her coverage of the Iraq war, and by age 33 earned the highest European journalism award, the International Ischia Award for Best Journalist of the Year. She was also a commentator for MSNBC.

HENRY SIEGMAN is a research professor in the Middle East Program at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, a Senior Fellow on the Middle East at the Council on Foreign Relations, and former national director of the American Jewish Congress. He was ordained as an Orthodox Rabbi, and was awarded the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart for his service as a chaplain during the Korean War.

RASHID KHALIDI is one of the world's foremost scholars on modern Middle East history. He is currently Edward Said Professor of Modern Arab Studies at Columbia University, and the author of numerous acclaimed books on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* and, most recently, *Brokers of Deceit: How the U.S. has Undermined Peace in the Middle East*.

RAMI KHOURI is the Director of the Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut, as well as a columnist at the Beirut-based *Daily Star* newspaper. He is a Palestinian-Jordanian and U.S. citizen and resides with his family in Beirut and Nazareth.

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YUSEF MUNAYYER, a political analyst and writer, is Executive Director of the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation. Previously he was the Executive Director of the Jerusalem Fund and Palestine Center, and served as a policy analyst for the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC). He writes on matters of foreign policy in the Arab and Muslim world and civil rights and civil liberties in the United States, and is a frequent commentator on CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, NBC, CBS, Al-Jazeera English, and C-Span.

NORMAN FINKELSTEIN is an American political scientist, activist, and author of numerous books on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* and *Image and Reality of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. He was also the subject of the critically acclaimed 2009 documentary *American Radical: The Trials of Norman Finkelstein*.

MAX BLUMENTHAL is an award-winning journalist for *The Nation* magazine and *New York Times* bestselling author of several books on right-wing politics and the Middle East conflict, including *Republican Gomorrah: Inside the Movement that Shattered the Party*, *Goliath: Life and Loathing in Greater Israel*, and, most recently, *The 51-Day War: Ruin and Resistance in Gaza*. His on-the-ground video reports about right-wing pro-Israel sentiment within the U.S. and Israel have generated millions of hits on YouTube.

PHYLLIS BENNIS is a writer, activist, and policy analyst on Middle East and UN issues. She is currently the Director of the New Internationalism Project at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington D.C., and helped found the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation. She writes and speaks widely in the U.S. and around the world, is a frequent commentator on the conflict in U.S. news media, and is the author of several books, including *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer* and *Ending the War in Afghanistan: A Primer*.

NORMAN SOLOMON is a journalist, media critic, and the author of more than a dozen books on U.S. news media and political propaganda, including *War Made Easy: How Presidents & Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death* and *Unreliable Sources: A Guide to Detecting Bias in News Media*. He also founded the alternative news source The Institute for Public Accuracy and the online activist group RootsAction.org, and in 2012 was a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives in California.

MARK CRISPIN MILLER is professor of media studies at New York University and one of America's foremost authorities on advertising, public relations, and political propaganda. He has made frequent appearances in documentaries about U.S. media culture, and is the author of several books, including *Boxed In: The Culture of TV* and *Cruel and Unusual: Bush/Cheney's New World Order*.

PETER HART is the communications director for the National Coalition Against Censorship. Previously he was the activism director for the media watchdog group Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), a writer for FAIR's magazine Extra!, and was a co-host and producer of FAIR's syndicated radio show CounterSpin. He is also the author of *The Oh Really? Factor: Unspinning Fox News Channel's Bill O'Reilly*.

SUT JHALLY is professor of Communication at the University of Massachusetts, a leading scholar on advertising, public relations, and political propaganda, and the author of several books, including *The Codes of Advertising* and *Enlightened Racism*. He is also the founder and Executive Director of the Media Education Foundation, a documentary film company that looks at issues related to U.S. media and public attitudes. He is the producer and director of dozens of documentaries about U.S. politics and media culture, including *Peace, Propaganda & the Promised Land: U.S. Media & the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*.

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PRAISE FOR THE FILM

"Amazing! Brilliantly exposes how American media is an active partner in the ugly and illegal occupation of Palestine. By promoting inaccurate narratives of self-defense and disguising the true stakes of the crisis, the State of Israel is able to garner sympathy and solidarity at a moment where it deserves outrage and critique. This is a must-watch documentary for anyone interested in understanding the truth of the Occupation and the failures of Western journalism."

—Marc Lamont Hill, CNN political analyst and host of HuffPost Live

"I wish every American would watch this powerful documentary. Not only every person of conscience, but every taxpayer, must see it — and then ask themselves if the status quo is acceptable and can continue deep into the 21st century."

—Gideon Levy, columnist for *Haaretz* newspaper of Israel

"Harrowing and incendiary! A vital and unmissable film."

—Dave Zirin, *The Nation* magazine

"A stunning exposé on how propaganda drives public opinion and, in turn, our understanding of reality. Here's the story of how American perceptions of the Middle East — as well as resulting legislation and military strategy — are engineered: from focus group to talking points to mortar fire."

—Douglas Rushkoff, Professor, Media Theory, CUNY, and Media Commentator for CNN

"One of the most compelling and important documentaries in recent years, because it helps us make sense of the lies, mayhem, and injustice in the heart of the Middle East: Palestine. Never has propaganda, or 'public relations', been such a lethal weapon as it is in the hands of Israel, its apologists, and manipulators. To reach behind the facade that is 'news', watch this film."

—John Pilger, journalist and filmmaker



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"This hard-hitting, fact-based documentary is a must-see for anyone who wants to understand the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and its distorted coverage in the corporate media — and how the American public has been systematically lied to again and again. An indispensable resource for both the novice and the expert."

—Deepa Kumar, Associate Professor, Media Studies, Rutgers University

"A remarkable achievement. Anyone who wishes to understand the deeper reasons for America's utter failure to bring peace to the region should begin by watching this powerful film."

—Avi Shlaim, Professor Emeritus, Oxford University

"A superb documentary that makes a devastatingly persuasive case that the U.S. public is being systematically subjected to disinformation from its media on the Israel-Palestine conflict. For audiences who have relied on U.S. television and the press, the reality of Palestinian life under Israeli occupation shown in this film is likely to be deeply shocking."

—Jonathan Cook, journalist, author of *Disappearing Palestine: Israel's Experiments in Human Despair*

"A powerful film that exposes an infuriating reality. You cannot watch this film without grieving for the Palestinians, for the propaganda we've been subjected to, for the terrible mistakes we've made supporting horrific Israeli policies that have caused such suffering."

—Medea Benjamin, co-founder of Code Pink

"Not only land, but also minds can be colonized. The brilliance of this documentary is that it manages to tell the story of both forms of colonization simultaneously. The first story reveals how Palestinian land was colonized and how the Palestinian people have been struggling for self-determination ever since. The second story uncovers how the American media has colonized the minds of its audiences and inverted the concrete relations of subjugation by transforming Israelis into victims and Palestinians into oppressors. The Occupation of the American Mind is a must see for anyone who is against colonization."

—Neve Gordon, Professor of Politics, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel



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"One of the most brilliant and important documentaries I have ever seen. If a student wishes to understand how powerful interests manipulate the news and politics in a 'free' society, and have turned the Palestinians into a non-people who have no rights and deserve no justice, this powerful film is mandatory viewing. It will change the way you understand the world."

—Robert W. McChesney, co-author, *People Get Ready: The Fight Against a Jobless Economy and a Citizenless Democracy*

"Why is Israel/Palestine the world's most intractable conflict? One key part of the answer is U.S. public support for the Israeli occupation of Palestine. This incisive film explains how Israeli public relations and a compliant U.S. media keep the American people confused and co-opted, derailing a serious debate about international law and moral principle. The Occupation of the American Mind not only lays out the case for mainstream media malfeasance but also provides a clear and concise explanation of the history and contemporary politics behind the Israeli occupation of Palestine."

—Robert Jensen, Professor, School of Journalism, University of Texas at Austin, and author of *Arguing for Our Lives: A User's Guide to Constructive Dialog*

"As courageous as it is informative, brilliantly produced and faithful to its search for the truth, The Occupation of the American Mind makes clear how the current right-wing government in Israel has weaponized knowledge, eviscerated a range of critical interpretations, and obliterated the voices of reason in the interest of controlling the media and public relations apparatuses in the United States. Everyone should watch this film, debate its assumptions, and test its insights against the issue of what education and public relations should look like in a democracy."

—Henry Giroux, McMaster University

"Every American needs to watch this film in order to understand how the culture industries and the political pundits have shaped a one-sided narrative of the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and erased the basic human dignity of the Palestinians from the American media landscape. The Occupation of the American Mind seeks to restore that dignity for American viewers. It is an essential film."

—Vijay Prashad, editor of *Letters to Palestine: Writers Respond to War and Occupation*



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"Compelling, revealing, and chilling. Not only demonstrates how hasbara — Israeli propaganda — became American common sense, but it offers one of the best accounts of Israel's violent dispossession and occupation of Palestinian lands. For over half a century, Americans drank the Kool-Aid concocted by the Israel lobby, the U.S. media, and virtually all elected officials because there were no alternatives. This film — like the movements that inspired it — is the antidote."

—Robin D. G. Kelley, author of *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*

"A cutting, carefully argued expose of the decades-long campaign of Israel and its defenders to deceive the U.S. public about the historical roots and present realities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. ... The film also offers a measured analysis of the role of the pro-Israel lobby in forming U.S. Middle East policy and the complicity of the United States in the perpetuation of the conflict. Let's hope the filmmakers are right that the tide of public opinion is turning in favor of equal rights for all and that U.S. policy will eventually be forced to follow suit."

—Chris Toensing, Executive Director and Editor, *Middle East Report*

"This terrific and memorable film comes at just the right time, when the lockstep mentality that promotes Zionist sympathies in the U.S. is eroding fast. The Occupation of the American Mind lays bare the fictions that underpinned this mentality for so long, and shows us why these fabrications are now being challenged so confidently."

—Andrew Ross, New York University