

FILMMAKERS' STATEMENT

Over the past 25 years, the Media Education Foundation (MEF) has produced dozens of educational films that look at how mainstream media narratives shape people's attitudes and ideas about the world. A number of these films have focused explicitly on mainstream news coverage of crucial policy issues in the U.S. and abroad. *THE OCCUPATION OF THE AMERICAN MIND* is the sixth MEF film 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 official distortions designed to drum up support for a succession of American military interventions. And *BLOOD AND OIL* (2008) detailed how U.S. officials have used mainstream news media to conceal the role oil has played in multiple American military interventions in the Middle East while deflecting attention away from the U.S. alliance with brutal authoritarian regimes like Saudi Arabia.

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 continue to express 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 the longstanding tendency of corporate news media 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, American political leaders of both parties uniformly and uncritically echoed official Israeli talking points, and American news media commentators did the same – repeatedly failing to question the official line or to 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 U.S. government propaganda, American news media's overwhelming reliance on official government sources, and Israel's four-decade campaign to manage American public perceptions of its policies. The result is *THE OCCUPATION OF THE AMERICAN MIND* – a detailed, research-based look at how all of these forces have combined to shape U.S. news media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and consequently American public opinion.

We made this film for a very simple reason: because we believe U.S. government officials and mainstream media elites have a responsibility to provide the American people with the basic information they need to make sense of how U.S. policies in the Middle East have affected the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Given the huge stakes in the region, and the sheer amount of military, economic, and diplomatic support the United States gives Israel despite its illegal occupation of Palestinian land, we believe the American people have a right and a responsibility to make up their own minds about this conflict.

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