

religious, national, or cultural group . . . has been so massively and consistently vilified."

In a public opinion survey published in the Spring 1981 issue of the *Middle East Journal* (the quarterly of the Middle East Institute), Americans described Arabs as "barbaric and cruel," "treacherous," "warlike," "rich," and as "mistreaters of women." Only a tiny minority of those surveyed held positive images of Arabs.

Americans tend to forget or ignore the magnificent culture and civilization that Arabic-speaking peoples created. Instead of seeing Arabs as people who have contributed to the development of human civilization—and to the *civilizing* of civilization—most insist upon viewing Arabs and Arab-Americans only through the distorted lens of negative stereotypes. (Americans also cling to misconceptions: Iran—just to clear up a common one—is not an Arab country.)

Historically, education has played an important role in countering stereotypes, erasing misconceptions, and thus easing the tensions of pluralism. Education affirms the value of cultural diversity and celebrates the beauty and richness of the many traditions making up the cultural mosaic that is America. The classroom remains the place where tolerance and appreciation of diversity can be encouraged.

But this potential has not been realized, at least with respect to the Arab world. If anything, what happens in many classrooms seems to reinforce negative stereotypes about Arabs.

Most textbook treatments of the Arab world equate Arabs with nomads and associate them with desert life. These texts ignore Arabic city life and consistently omit, for example, the fact that the Arab world of North Africa and Southwest Asia produces as much wheat as the United States. Minor matters? Perhaps. But they are indicative of a pattern of distortion.

Relying on U.S. textbooks, no student