

ROUGH DRAFT: *THE SEIGE*

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INTRODUCTION

When you see someone of Arab descent, do you think terrorist?

Many pro-Arab and pro-Muslim groups think that a vast majority of the public feels this way about Arabs and Muslims.

They believe this is due to the influence by films such as *The Siege*, directed by Edward Zwick, where Arabs and Muslims are cast as terrorists who hate the United States.

(Thesis) Although many Arab and Muslim groups say that *The Siege* was stereotypical and racist toward Arabs and Muslims, I found the film to be vacant of these stereotypes and racist tones.

(Argument 1) First of all I believe the film *The Siege* not to be stereotypical or racist toward Arabs and Muslims because the film separates these groups as a whole from the terrorist attacks.

(Argument 2) Second, I find that Zwick is not attacking Arab and Muslim groups, but instead he attacks the cruel and evil tactics used by the United States government against these minorities, some of whom were American citizens.

(Argument 3) Finally, after reading statements about the films production, I believe Zwick has no intention of being stereotypical toward these groups, but instead tries to show what problems can arise when a society has such discriminating views about a certain minority.

BACKGROUND

The film *The Siege* shows what would happen if the United States was faced with a multitude of terrorist bombings within its own borders.

In the movie, Denzel Washington plays Anthony Hubbard, who is head of the counter-terrorism branch of the F.B.I.

His job, along with the help of Frank Haddad, played by Tony Shalhoub, and other agents, is to discover who is behind these bombings in New York City.

Also trying to find out who is behind the bombings is a woman who works for the C.I.A. named Sharon, played by Annette Benning.

Sharon is interested in the case because she along with other members of the C.I.A. trained Arab and Muslims how to make these types of bombs.

The reason for teaching them how to build these bombs was so they would use them against the United States' enemies in the Middle East.

It is now years later, and these same people that they trained are using these tactics against the United States.

The tricky part for the F.B.I. is that the terrorists work in cells that are not affected by the outcomes of the others, unlike the usual terrorist cells.

As a result, when they killed the members of one of the cells, it did not stop the rest of the cells from carrying out their attacks.

To add a twist to the story, Sharon's Palestinian informant who supplies her with information on the movements of terrorists groups is actually the last terrorist cell.

In an attempt to stop these terrorists the U.S. government institutes Marshall Law on New York City.

This basically means that the U.S. Army, which is led by General William Devereaux (Bruce Willis), is allowed to use force and any other means necessary to weed out the terrorists.

Unfortunately, the use of Marshall Law was found unconstitutional when former Abraham Lincoln invoked the use of this procedure during his presidency.

Even with all these measures put out to stop the terrorists, they will stop at nothing, because they believe that they are doing the work of Allah.

BACKGROUND

The problem that has arisen after the movie was made is that pro-Arab and pro-Muslim groups have found the movie to be stereotypical and racist.

They feel that this movie is like many others in that it only casts Arabs as American-hating terrorists.

They believe that if these trends continue, it will lead Americans to be stereotypical and racist toward their Arab ethnicity.

Also pro-Muslim groups view this movie as anti-Muslim because during the bombing scenes, they show the Islamic terrorists practicing their religious rituals before an attack.

These rituals include the ceremonial washing of the body and wearing Egyptian silk that is worn for an individual's burial ceremony.

Members from both the pro-Arab and pro-Muslim groups suggested that Zwick change the film and make the whole Arab and Muslim connection to the bombings a mysterious cover-up by the government.

Other members have asked for apologies from Zwick, and others have asked for the sequences of the religious rituals to be cut out of the movie.

ARGUMENT

One of the most convincing arguments in defending Zwick is that in *The Siege* he makes it clear that these terrorist groups do not represent Arabs and Muslims as a whole.

Throughout the film there are various scenes and lines in the movie that helped support this argument.

A majority of these lines from the film come after the terrorists attack and they play what people on the radio feel about the situation in New York.

A great example of this is when you hear a man of Arab descent call in and say, “People must understand that the word Arab is not synonymous with the word terrorist. Islam is a religion of peace, the people defile the holy Koran.”

Obviously Zwick did not want people to think that every Arab or Muslim is a terrorist.

He especially tries to make it clear through this in the film that Islam is not a religion of hate, but a religion of peace and good will toward others.

Another line that was heard on a radio talk show was, “This is the time for all of us to proclaim our brotherhood with these people.”

This clearly shows that Zwick is trying to promote people to come together, not to stereotype certain minorities.

Zwick also put a line in the film that shows how this type of treatment would not be tolerated if it was directed at any other race of people, “American Arabs are a vulnerable, visible population and they have no power.

Critics say this is a racist decision and the government would not dare do this to any other segment of the population.”

It seems to me that Zwick put in this line to show how wrong it is for us to persecute and stereotype a minority, and he compares this treatment to what Japanese-Americans had to undergo during World War II.

He also makes a concerted effort to show that Arabs are American citizens who want the best for their country.

This is best seen when an Arab-American playing the role of a representative of the Arab Anti-Defamation groups says, “ . . . whatever injustices my people may be suffering at this very difficult moment, we will continue to show our commitment to this country.”

Through this quote from the film, he not only acknowledges that Arab-Americans are loyal to America, but also that they are being treated unfairly.

Another way in which Zwick separates Arabs and Muslims from the terrorist attacks is through the character of Frank Haddad.

Frank Haddad, who was played by Tony Shaloub, is an Arab-American working for the F.B.I. counter-terrorism group.

I find that this role clearly shows Zwick separating terrorism from your everyday Arab or Muslim.

Of the role Shaloub said, “I have never seen a role like this of an Arab-American that’s seen in such a positive light—a really well-rounded character with a sense of humor, a professional life, a family life. Not a goodie-goodie—a person who has his flaws and his shortcomings—but a real character, not a stereotype.”

Contrary to what these pro-Arab and pro-Muslim groups say about roles for Arabs in films, this role in *The Siege* seems to be one of the best all-around characters played by an Arab.

Through hearing what Shaloub had to say, it seems very evident that Zwick is not stereotypical, but shows multiple sides of a group, which is prevalent in any certain ethnicity.

The “family life” which Shaloub talks about is stressed throughout the film.

One scene that shows the pride Frank has for his son and his religion is when he brings his friends from the F.B.I. over to celebrate his son’s entrance as a man into the religion.

Not only does it show his family pride, but it also shows how Islam is not about violence and terrorism but about love and family.

His love and dedication for his family is also shown when he quits the F.B.I.

Even though he works for the F.B.I., they still put his son in a concentration camp for Arabs.

He feels that if working for the F.B.I. does not prove your dedication to this country what will.

I believe this role causes the audience to sympathize with Frank and see that the government is wrong here, not the Arabs or Muslims.

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Although these pro-Arab and pro-Muslim groups think that Zwick is being derogatory to their ethnicity and religion, I believe the group that Zwick attacks in this film is actually the U.S. government.

When I am speaking of the U.S. government, I am referring to both the C.I.A., who Sharon works

for, and the U.S. Army led by General Devereaux.

His major reason for attacking the C.I.A. is that they trained these terrorists how to build bombs in order for them to take down Sadaam Hussein.

These Islamic groups who were trying to revolt against Sadaam, were led by Sheik Ahmed Bin Talal.

When it came time for them to attack, the C.I.A. stopped supporting and training them so the Iraqis essentially slaughtered them.

Then to make these groups even more upset, the U.S. Army illegally kidnapped Sheik Ahmed Bin Talal, when he was thought to be responsible for the bombings in Kenya.

In order to protect one of these known terrorists, named Samir, they allowed him to come into the country.

Zwick adds this part in the film to show that these terrorists were consumed by revenge for the illegal kidnapping of their leader and for the U.S. leaving their side when they attacked Sadaam.

He also blames the C.I.A. for allowing a known terrorist to get into the country just to cover up their wrongdoing.

It is clear that Zwick does not lay the blame strictly on the terrorists but also the government, which is mainly seen as being white.

Another part of the government he attacks is the United States Army and the way in which they limit and impose upon the rights of the Arab and Muslim minorities.

Throughout the film, Hubbard is amazed at how members of the U.S. Army, especially General Devereaux, can allow people's freedoms to be laid to the wayside.

This is best illustrated in a scene where the General and other members of the Army are deciding which would be the best method of torture to obtain information from a witness.

Hubbard cannot believe what he is hearing and says, "Are you people insane? What are you talking about? How about public executions? Bend the law, shred the Constitution just a little bit. Because if we torture him General, we do that, and everything that we have bled and fought and died for is over, and they have won."

I believe Zwick is saying, through the character of Hubbard, we cannot just torture someone or limit someone's freedom just because of his or her ethnicity or beliefs.

Also, the man they were torturing was a United States citizen and is entitled to all of the freedoms that everyone else in America enjoys.

Another fact, which I find to be key, is the film does not end with the killing of Samir, the last terrorist cell, but with Hubbard arresting General Devereaux.

This illustrates to me that Zwick wanted to show how important it was to him that this film was not about bashing Arabs and Muslims, but actually showing that the government must be held responsible for its actions.

Even though these terrorist attacks on innocent people are unjustifiable, what the General and the Army did by murdering a United States citizen and kidnapping the Sheik is also inexcusable.

ARGUMENT

Finally, because of statements by Edward Zwick on the making of the film, I believe Zwick had no intention of being racist or stereotypical toward Arabs or Muslims in this film.

Instead Zwick's reason for making the film was to see how far Americans would allow their rights to be pushed aside.

Concerning the purpose of the film Zwick said, "What the movie is most deeply about--it's about our own latent possibilities of repression, stereotyping and prejudice.

To see Americans rounded up in the streets, to see Americans put into stadiums, to see people held without habeas corpus--to have their rights violated in such a way is such a chilling and just terrifying thing to see--that is what one takes away, I believe, from this film."

It is obvious to me that his main goal in making the film was to show the dangers of an oppressive government to the freedoms granted to us as Americans.

The pro-Muslim and pro-Arab group says these films build these stereotypes, but I believe they break them apart because the audience sees how dangerous these stereotypes can become.

Also, his choice to choose Muslims as his terrorists is not unthinkable or unfair.

Since Islamic terrorist groups are responsible for three of the four international bombings leading up to the film, it is not surprising that Zwick chose a terrorist group of this type for his movie.

Zwick admits to this being an influence in choosing who would be the terrorist, "There have been bombings by extremists.

They are not representatives of Islam, they're not representative of the vast majority of people who love this country, but nonetheless, they exist. The response to that is what I am interested in."

He makes sure though that people understand he does not believe the actions of the terrorists to be representative of Muslims as a whole.

Lastly, I believe one of his best statements for showing what the real fear he has for America is, "Well, I think to see American troops in an American city is, you know, the sum of all of our fears."

His fear is not terrorism by American-hating, Islamic extremists, but the ability of the U.S. government to take away the rights of American citizens.

CONCLUSION

As with all good films, the director tries to stir up the emotions of his audience.

Obviously, Zwick was effective in accomplishing that task in his film *The Siege*.

Unfortunately, I believe many pro-Arab and pro-Muslim groups missed his true intentions for the film.

They believe this type of movies cause us to react negatively toward Arabs and Muslims, while I believe they help show Americans that all citizens' rights are of equal importance.

Many of these pro-Arab and pro-Muslim groups have good intentions, but I think they were too quick to judge this film.

When viewing this film as a whole, not just the bombing sequences, I saw that the movie was not racist or stereotypical.

Also, I believe he is not attacking Arabs and Muslims but the crimes committed by both the U.S. government and the terrorist cells.

I feel Zwick summed it up best by saying, "It is the job of an anti-discrimination organization to complain. Mine to make films."

THIS PAPER IS A ROUGH DRAFT. IT WAS LATER REVISED.