

June 1, 1969

False Image of Arabs Challenged

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Summary:

It was following the Six-Day War of 1967 that Arab Americans began to seriously discuss, and be politically active in, questions regarding the Arab World and US government policy and US public mindsets towards it, as Salim Yacub's *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.-Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (2016) has argued.

This document consists of two letters that were reprinted in the June 1969 issue of the newsletter of the Association of Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG), a leading new Arab American organization founded following the 1967 war. The AAUG was directed by Ibrahim Abu-Lughod (1929-2001), a Palestine-born professor of political science at Northwestern University and a foremost critic of mainstream US views of the Arab world, who also edited the above-mentioned edited volume. He also is the author of one of the letters printed, a note sent to the president of Princeton University. The AAUG also printed Princeton's reply, written by assistant to the president David S. Thompson (1917-2007), a son of Presbyterian missionaries.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Transcript - English

**Association
Arab-American
University
Graduates, Inc.
newsletter**

[address redacted] Cambridge, Mass. 02138
Vol. 2 No. 2, June, 1969

[...]

FALSE IMAGE OF ARABS CHALLENGED

The denigration of Arab character and culture seems to be the favorite pastime in the West. The sad state of affairs has continued in the absence of protester challenge. However, something can be done about the problem – if we (each and every member) do our share. What follows is a good illustration of how responsible individuals can effectively fight racism against the Arabs in North America.

IBRAHIM ABU-LUGHOD, AAUG President, who is Associate Director of the Program of African Studies at Northwestern University, sent a letter of protest to Dr. Robert Goheen, President of Princeton University, concerning the false image of Arabs presented by a group of Princeton alumni in 1967. Here is Abu-Lughod's letter, followed by an offprint of the response from the Princeton administration.

“Dear President Goheen,

I am enclosing here with a copy of the special issue of *The Arab World* entitled ‘The Arab-Israeli Confrontation of June, 1967.’ I should like to draw your attention particularly to the lead essay by Dr. Edward Said, who is a Princeton graduate. The incident commented upon by Dr. Said is distressing to most people; those of us who have special reason to be proud of our Princeton Association find it more than distressing. I should hope that the incident in no way represents the succumbing of a distinguished university to the vulgar racist pressures to which most sectors of American society are being subjected.

I should also like to express my hope that the Princeton Administration will be more vigilant in the future so that obvious or subtle expressions of a racist nature will not be permitted by any component of the Princeton community.

Sincerely yours,

Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, Associate Director
Program of African Studies
Northwestern University”

[offprint follows]

(heading) Princeton University
ONE NASSAU HALL
DAVID S. THOMPSON, *Assistant to the President*

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY 08540

Professor Ibrahim Abu-Lughod
Program of African Studies
Northwestern University
1813 Hinman Avenue
Evanston, Illinois 60201

Dear Professor Abu-Lughod:

President Goheen has asked me to respond to your recent letter to him regarding the antics of our alumni reunion classed in the alumni P-rade of 1967 as described by Dr. Edward Said in an article of *The Arab World*.

As an alumnus of the graduate school, you are probably aware that thousands of alumni of the undergraduate college return to Princeton every June for class reunion, each class wearing a distinctive costume. These affairs are conducted by the alumni themselves, who are entirely responsible for the conduct of their classmates. Unfortunately, the behavior reuning alumni does not always display the maturity and discretion one would expect of adult graduates of this college, and the reputation of Princeton suffers in the minds of those who hold the University responsible for everything that takes place on this campus. I assure you that the University administration takes every possible step to avoid vulgarity in any form, especially evidences of racism, on the campus and that the poor taste described by Dr. Said is deeply regretted in Nassau Hall.

As one who was born and raised in Egypt (my father was on the faculty of Assuit College), I am particularly sensitive to the way in which many Americans, often subtly and unconsciously, conduct themselves so as to give insult to people of other nations and races. We make every effort to be alert to avoid such incidents on this campus, but regrettably we are not always successful.

President Goheen appreciates the spirit in which you brought this matter to his attention, and I shall convey your feelings to the alumnus who is chairman for reunions so that he may be aware of the unfortunate results of tasteless behavior by members of reuning classes.

Sincerely,

[signature]

David S. Thompson