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Reel Good Arabs
Givens Scholarship Proposal
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The power of film

With the inventions of film and television, people have been able to illustrate stories in their most authentic form with actual footage. With our own eyes, we can see how people live in far-away parts of the world. Unfortunately, these creations have been used to tell stories that inaccurately portray entire populations of people.

During an intensive Arabic immersion program, I remember watching *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, a documentary that explains how Hollywood films use propaganda to manipulate the views of Arabs. Film after film, it becomes obvious that Arabs are not only portrayed as the bad guys, but they are incompetent, over-sexed, and revenge-seeking. Women are either the stereotypical belly dancers or covered head to toe and silenced by men and can only be found wandering in the background of these films. The greatest injustice, however, was that committed against the Palestinian people. Films such as *Death Before Dishonor* and *True Lies* portray Palestinians as savage killers. In reality, the majority of Palestinians are refugees who have been forced from their homes by Israeli occupation. Dr. Jack Shaheen, the writer and narrator, asks the important question, "Is there an unwritten code in Hollywood saying we cannot and will not humanize Palestinians?"

My connection to Arab culture

As an American, I had never felt the depth of my own culture. The melting pot that is the United States, is so diverse that I never felt like I could "see" American culture. I never really experienced my African or "black" heritage enough to embrace it, as I grew up in a white area, and I didn't grow up particularly religious. Having and embracing a unique culture was something that I sensed was missing. Essentially, I felt what I call a "culture void." During the summer before my senior year, in the Arabic immersion program, I learned Arabic, but through my Arab professors, I had the chance experienced Arab culture. I found Arab culture to be so rich in religion, tradition, and history. I fell in love with eating on the floor, learning about Islam, and history that extends far beyond our country's two hundred years. For a long time, I thought I could fill the void with Arab culture, in a sense, by "becoming Arab", but I realized this was not genuine; it was form of "ethnic drag" or what some might call cultural appropriation. I realized that what I had experienced as a "culture void" could in fact be an asset. Because I do not align with one particular culture or religion, I am able to have an open mind about all other cultures and stand up for them.

My appreciation for Arabic created a bond between myself and Arab culture and people. My connection to Palestinians was formed following the viewing of this film and a lesson explaining the conflict. For the first time, I had felt the depth of my own ignorance to such horrific events in the world. Following my summer program, I was more knowledgeable about Arabs and felt a responsibility to stand up to stereotypes and judgements of Arab people, their culture, and their beliefs. The responsibility to stand up

for human rights overwhelmed me, but I have now embraced this as a focus of my studies and even my future career.

My proposal

With the Givens Fellowship, I would finally be provided with the opportunity to stand up for Palestinians. My dream is to travel to Palestine this summer to create a film that would show the side of Palestinians that I have learned about outside of the American political view. Because we are allies, the United States provides most of its military aid money to Israel. Therefore, we know and value Israel's story. My film, however, would give *Palestinians* an identity, a story, and put a face onto an issue that I know is overlooked by millions of Americans. Creating this film will allow me to do more than create an accurate representation of a marginalized group in society. I will be assuming the role of a "human rights liaison", as I plan to hold a screening of my film on campus and then distribute my film online and via social media. As a future leader in the arena of human rights it is important that I am capable of understanding a situation, promoting their rights, and analyzing possible solutions. This is something I can only do after being immersed in the culture.

While the focus of my proposal is the film that I would create, the opportunity for me to stay in Palestine has been made possible through a teach English volunteer program in the city of Hebron. There, I will be provided housing with host families from whom I will have a lot to learn about the local customs and way of life. Therefore, my project entails two parts; the exchange of culture through teaching and immersion in Palestinian daily life, which will give me the tools to make the film about Palestinians that will provide me with the next steps to taking a human rights activist role. I have contacted the IRB to ask whether I need to complete IRB training in order to film human subjects; I have not heard back but am fully committed to respecting the rights, privacy, and informed consent of the people I plan to film.

I would like to thank the Givens Scholarship committee for reviewing my proposal that would allow me to make a change in the world that otherwise may not be possible. I am thankful for the opportunity to apply and be considered for an award that allows for personal growth through personal interests and active engagement throughout the world.

Proposal Budget

Airfare Roundtrip (Cleveland and Tel Aviv)	\$1,700.00
Overnight stay in Tel Aviv	\$100.00
Transport to the West Bank	\$120.00
Program cost	\$450.00/ month = \$900.00
Health insurance	\$200.00
In country transportation	\$100.00/ month = \$200.00
Meals and Incidentals (State Department estimates \$135.00/ day) \$30.00/ day	\$1,800.00
Camera	\$500.00
Video editing software	\$200.00
Phone rental and service	\$150.00/ month = \$300.00
Total	\$6,020.00