

Bios for "Middle East Representations in the Media"

Panelists



William Nix

Moderator

William Nix is the Chairman of the Creative Projects Group, which operates as a creative incubator for the development and production of motion pictures, television programs, music, interactive videogames, live entertainment, multimedia installations and events. He is an Adjunct Professor at Pepperdine's Straus Institute, as well as Industry Advisor to its Entertainment, Media & Sports Project and a lifetime voting member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, as well as a member of the Television Academy and National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences.

Will has been a producer of a number of multi-cultural, multi-national films over the course of the last decade. He was the Executive Producer of *Firedancer*, a dramatic feature film about the Afghan Diaspora in the U.S. , which was the first Afghan feature film to be submitted for Oscar consideration. The film had its world premiere in Kabul and its U.S. premiere at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York. He served in the same capacity on the companion documentary, *Return to Afghanistan*, which premiered at the U.N. Film Festival in New York. He was the Executive Producer of the Spanish-language documentary feature, *!Ya Basta!*, about the abduction phenomenon in Mexico, which premiered at SXSW in Austin, Texas.

He is an Executive Producer of the "globally collaborative" animated feature film entitled *Kahlil Gibran's The Prophet*, which tapped the creative talents of Oscar and other award-winning animators, narrators (including Liam Neeson, Alfred Molina, Frank Langella, John Krasinski and Quvenzhané Wallis), composers and musicians (Gabriel Yard, Glen Hansard, Lisa Hannigan, Damian Rice, Yo Yo Ma), including Producer/Actor, Salma Hayek and overall animation Director Roger Allers (*Lion King*, *Beauty and the Beast*). It is due for global theatrical release in July 2015. Serving as its Producer, he is currently developing *Gibran*, a biographical feature film based upon the life and works of the philosopher, poet and artist.



Jack Shaheen

Author/Professor

Dr. Jack G. Shaheen has dedicated his career to identifying and contesting damaging stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims in American media. He has connected their development to the portrayals of other marginalized groups including Jews, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos, and African Americans. His research analyzes the origins of these visual caricatures, reveals their very real ramifications for innocent people, and presents solutions to counter them effectively.

Powerful, accessible and compelling, *A is for Arab*, which features images from The Jack G. Shaheen Archive at New York University (NYU), reveals and critiques the stereotypical portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in U.S. popular culture. Providing historical context about these images which range from film stills to comic books to editorial cartoons, this traveling exhibition aims to educate and stimulate discussion about the impact of stereotypes on both individual perceptions and national policy.

Professor Shaheen is the leading expert on Arab stereotypes in Hollywood films, television shows and elsewhere in popular culture. He is the author of four books: *Nuclear War Films*; *Arab and Muslim Stereotyping in American Popular Culture*; *The TV Arab*; and the award-winning book and film *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*. He is a member of the AANM's National Advisory Board, and co-hosted Arab Images on Film on cable TV's Turner Classic Movies in June 2011.



Lorraine Ali

Senior Writer, Los Angeles Times

Lorraine Ali is a senior writer for the *Los Angeles Times*' Calendar section where she covers film, TV, music, media and just about anything else that isn't sports. Ali is an award-winning journalist and Los Angeles native who has written in publications ranging from *Rolling Stone* to the *New York Times*. She's was formerly The Times' music editor and before that, a senior writer covering culture with *Newsweek* magazine. Her byline has also appeared in a diverse roster of publications including The New York Times, Newsweek, GQ, Esquire, Harper's Bazaar, Ladies Home Journal, Rolling Stone, SPIN, Option, the L.A. Weekly and The Village Voice.

Along the way she's lived on both coasts, won several awards, and traveled extensively. Her current projects include writing a book about the Iraqi Diaspora by recounting the plight of her extended family in Baghdad.

Ms. Ali was awarded a Hedgebrook fellowship in 2010, Best Online Feature from the New York Association of Black Journalists in 2007, an Excellence in Journalism Award in 2002 from the National Arab Journalists Association and was listed in Da Capo "Best Music Writing 2001" for her story "West Bank Hard Core." She was voted 1997's Music Journalist of the Year. In 1996, she won Best National Feature Story honors at the Music Journalism Awards.

Her television appearances include: Oprah, Charlie Rose, Today Show, Good Morning America, NBC News, CBS News, CNN, FOX News, MSNBC, Al Jazeera, BBC, MTV, VH-1, and Fuse.



Rob Shalhoub

Screenwriter / Producer

Rob Shalhoub is a screenwriter and producer with representation at Creative Artists Agency and a first-look producing deal with Sony Television. Rob has written several feature length screenplays, most notably *Gibran* – a biographical film about famed artist-poet Kahlil Gibran. *Gibran* is currently being developed as an independent feature film, along with a 360 degree wrap-around, transmedia property.

In 2010, Rob co-founded Trend Media – a boutique digital studio that has sold several projects to major studios and television networks including Sony, CBS, and Style. In 2012, Trend Media launched a creative agency division, where he produces multi-platform content for medium-sized organizations such as Meyers / Kennedy Wilson, Total Beauty Media, City Year, the Boston Architectural College, and President Bill Clinton. Rob's work has earned three Telly Awards for outstanding quality.

Rob graduated from Tufts University with a Bachelor's Degree in International Relations. He is an active trustee of Chatsworth Hills Academy.



Renee Tajima-Pena

Documentary Filmmaker, [Professor and Director of UCLA's Center for EthnoCommunications](#)

Professor Renee Tajima-Pena is an Academy Award-nominated filmmaker whose work focuses on Asian American and immigrant communities, race, gender and social justice. Her directing credits include the documentaries, *Calavera Highway*, *Skate Manzanar*, *Labor Women*, *My America...or Honk if You Love Buddha* and *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* Her films have premiered at the Cannes, Sundance and Toronto film festivals, and she has received the Peabody Award, Dupont-Columbia Award, Alpert Award in the Arts, USA Broad Fellowship and a Guggenheim Fellowship.

Her current works are a documentary and transmedia project, *No Mas Bebes Por Vida (No More Babies For Life)* about the sterilization of Mexican-origin women at Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center during the 1960s and

70s, and a transmedia project which is an interactive history documentary, *Heart Mountain 3.0*, using the Minecraft video game.

Professor Tajima-Pena has been deeply involved in the Asian American independent film community as an activist, writer and filmmaker. She was the first paid director at Asian Cine-Vision in New York and a founding member of the Center for Asian American Media (formerly National Asian American Telecommunications Association). She was a film critic for *The Village Voice*, a cultural commentator for National Public Radio, and the editor of *Bridge: Asian American Perspectives*.



Ahmed Ahmed

Actor/Comedian/Producer/Director

Egyptian-American actor, comedian, producer, and director Ahmed Ahmed is one of the most diverse, multi-faceted talents in the entertainment industry today. In 2014, he can be seen starring as *Ahmed* on TBS' hit comedy series *Sullivan & Son*. Executive Produced by Vince Vaughn, the show follows Steve Sullivan [Steve Byrne], a corporate lawyer who surprises his parents when he leaves his job to take over a bar owned by his father in Pittsburgh. Ahmed made his first appearance as unlucky in love, tow-truck driver [and best friend to Steve] "Ahmed" in season one, and joined the cast as a series regular in season two, quickly becoming a fan favorite. Ahmed is currently the only Arab-American actor playing a non-stereotypical role on a comedy sitcom, today.

Born in Helwan, Egypt and raised in Riverside, California Ahmed immigrated to the U.S. when he was one-month old with his family. When he was 19 years old he made the move to Los Angeles to pursue a career in the entertainment industry, and attended the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. His first big break was in the suspense, action film *Executive Decision* alongside Kurt Russell, Steven Segal, and Halle Berry in 1996. Ahmed went on to appear in a handful of blockbuster and cult hit features including *Swingers*, *Iron Man*, and *You Don't Mess With The Zohan*. On the television front, Ahmed has appeared on top series such as *Tracy Takes On*, *Weeds*, and *Roseanne* to name a few.

In 2011, Ahmed made his directorial debut with his groundbreaking documentary *Just Like Us*. The film premiered at Tribeca Film Festival, and went on to be selected at 30 international film festivals, winning several "Best Director" and "Best Documentary" awards. The documentary, a celebration of culture and comedy, follows Ahmed and ten American comedians through Dubai, Egypt, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia, performing in front of over 20,000 Arabs and Muslims across the region. *Just Like Us* garnered Ahmed attention on the political front, and he was invited to the White House to have dinner with President Obama, and was also invited to the U.S. State Department to have dinner with Hilary Clinton- as they commended him on creating a project that made an effort to break down barriers and encourage cross-cultural dialogue. Ahmed is currently in post-production on *Just Like Us Too*, which takes place in Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Oman.

While working in film and television Ahmed's profile in comedy continues to rise, being handpicked by Vince Vaughn for his *Wild West Comedy Tour* [2005-present]. Vaughn is currently producing the first ever Wild West comedy festival in Nashville, TN where Ahmed will hold the roll of Comedy Ambassador, performing and hosting shows. In 2005, Ahmed cofounded and performed in the *Axis of Evil Comedy Tour* which aired on Comedy Central as the first ever Middle Eastern standup comedy special. Ahmed is also the winner of the first annual Richard Pryor Award for Ethnic Comedy at the Edinburgh Comedy Festival in Scotland.

Ahmed is currently a paid regular performer at the world famous Comedy Story in Hollywood, The Laugh Factory, and the Comedy Cellar in New York City. He regularly tours nationally and internationally, and in summer 2014, Ahmed will hit the road for the *Sullivan & Son Comedy Tour* with his cast mates from the series, hitting 20+ markets across the country. Ahmed is a true believer that laughter heals, and that comedy can bridge the gap between communities across the world.

He has appeared in several films and television shows such as *Swingers*, *Tracey Takes On...*, *Roseanne*, *JAG*, *Tough Crowd with Colin Quinn* on Comedy Central, and MTV's *Punk'd* with Ashton Kutcher. He has also appeared on CNN, *The View*, and National Public Radio, and was featured on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal* in December 2001, as well as in *Newsweek*. He was featured in the PBS television documentary *America at a Crossroads* series in "STAND UP: Muslim American Comics Come of Age", an episode about Muslim American comedians.