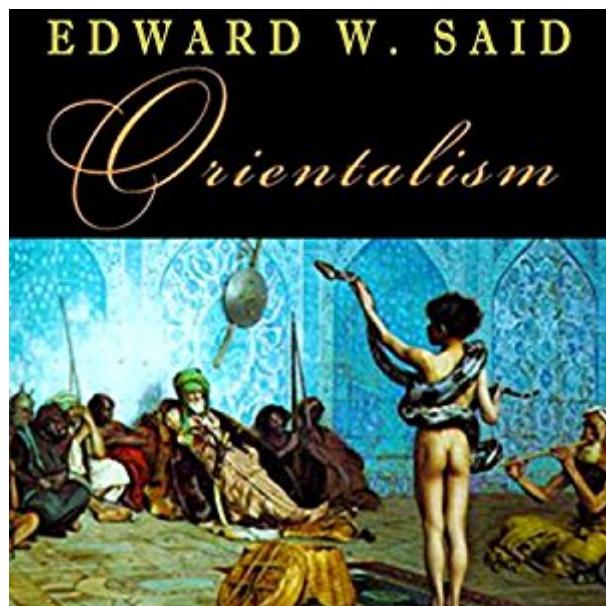


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Orientalism



Synopsis

This landmark book, first published in 1978, remains one of the most influential books in the Social Sciences, particularly Ethnic Studies and Postcolonialism. Said is best known for describing and critiquing "Orientalism", which he perceived as a constellation of false assumptions underlying Western attitudes toward the East. In Orientalism Said claimed a "subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and their culture." He argued that a long tradition of false and romanticized images of Asia and the Middle East in Western culture had served as an implicit justification for Europe and the US' colonial and imperial ambitions. Just as fiercely, he denounced the practice of Arab elites who internalized the US and British orientalists' ideas of Arabic culture. Peter Ganim's narration gives the work an elegant and knowledgeable voice.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is an academic work, not for everyone's interests or tastes. But still it is a revolutionary look at how Western scholarship "invented" the Orient from its own political and psychological needs to create a dehumanized "Other". Few books explain so well the intellectual origins of popular and academic stereotypes of the Middle East. Few books explain so well the failure of Western academics to accurately study other cultures in a useful way conducive to mutual understanding.

I found myself frustrated that the author raises so many problems with few solutions. Once I finished the book it was clear that his intent was never to offer solutions, only shed light on historical

misrepresentations. This is a good work, if a bit dense at times.

Said's frustration with what he considers as the West's misrepresentation of the "Orient" or Islamic culture is palpable. As he suggests, the connection between the power and the production of knowledge has been apparent in the "Orientalist" discourses, including the discourses on the East-Asian cultures and societies, throughout the human history. As a person who was born and raised in one of the Oriental societies, I understand Said's frustration and resentment. However, I am also aware that all knowledge is formed from a particular perspective, which may be contradicted by a different perspective. Knowledge is not identical to the "truth." Knowledge is made, remade, and destroyed constantly (from the perspective of the human history) depending on the need and desire of its users. Knowledge is not forever. In a way, I feel Said's work, originally published in 1979, is indicative of the changing mood of a particular historical time when the OPEC nations began to exercise their power over the oil-hungry nations. Nevertheless, I believe Orientalism, though at times repetitive, is an important work in the intellectual history of the West. One last issue that I want to mention here is a glaring inaccuracy in his discourse regarding an incident in Japanese history. On page 73, Said wrote: "Islam excepted, the Orient for Europe was until the nineteenth century a domain with a continuous history of unchallenged Western Dominance. This is patently true of the British experience in India, the Portuguese experience in the East Indies, China, and Japan, and the French and Italian experiences in various regions of the Orient. There were occasional instances of native intransigence to disturb the idyll, as when in 1638 - 1639 a group of Japanese Christians threw the Portuguese out of the area..." This passage is so inaccurate that I did not initially recognize what he was talking about. (The Portuguese were never "dominant" in Japan. They were driven out of Japan by the Tokugawa Shogunate. A "group of Japanese Christians" revolted against the Tokugawa Shogunate that banned Christianity in Japan, but were defeated in a horrible manner. It is called the Shimabara Revolt.) I wish Said had been more attentive to the accuracy of his discourse.

This book is a classic which should be read as a corrective for Western perceptions of the Middle East. Said is a well known scholar on the subject of colonialism.

Edward Said's most well known work is well known for a reason. This book forms the basis for most modern "ethnic studies" programs, which focus on exploring cultures without the same hegemonic paternalism and "exoticizing the other" which categorized much of western history.

Very technical. One must have a desire to understand Multiculturalism and Transnationalism in relation to the West and Western ideologies.

Orientalism by Edward Said has been translated into most other lanuages. there is a reason for this. This book should be in everyones library.

Said is a great scholar and knows his subject better then most, if not all, politicians and their staff in Washington. Every American should read it to understand the "orient" better.

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