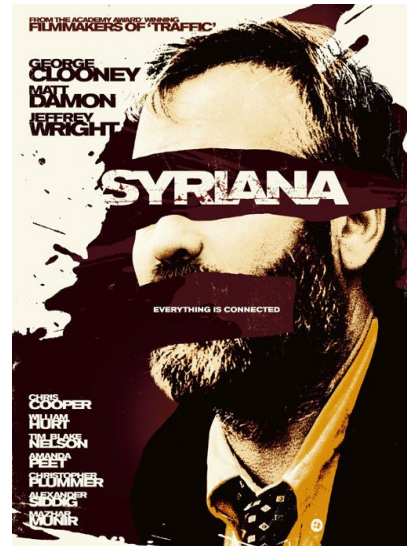


Discussion Questions **SYRIANA** September 1, 2006



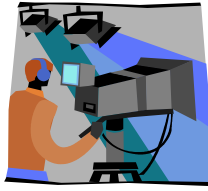
1. Among other topics, the movie *Syriana* is about morals, principles, business ethics, and heroes. As Americans, what principles, morals, and ethics do we cherish?
2. Whom might we place on a list of historical figures, political leaders, and captains of industry who uphold or embody these qualities?
3. Which characters in the movie appear to uphold these values? In other words, which characters seem heroic?
4. Which characters in the movie seem out of sync if not in conflict with American values and principles?
5. What motivates particular characters in the movie? What reasons or principles drive their actions?
6. Why is the younger brother, the callow Prince Meshal, selected to rule his country instead of the reform-minded Prince Nasir?
7. Given the events that unfold in the film, is the Emir's choice of succession wise? Why?
8. What values or morals seem at odds or in conflict with one another in the movie? Could we group these morals and principles into "liberal" values and "conservative" values? Do some principles crossover political, cultural, and international distinctions? Are some truths self-evident regardless of political, cultural, religious, or national affiliation?
9. Some have accused *Syriana* of being a "liberal" film. Is it? How so?



For Further Viewing

If you enjoyed this film, here are some suggestions for further viewing:

Traffic (2000)
The Insider (1999)
The Corporation (2004)
City of God (2003)
The Bourne Identity (2002)



Film Extras

Characters in the film (a "cheat sheet" for the intertwining plots!) -

Bob Barnes (George Clooney) – veteran CIA agent

Prince Nasir (Alexander Siddig) – reform-minded Gulf Prince, next in line to become Emir of his country

Prince Meshal (Akbar Kurtha) – Nasir's younger, more callow brother (and 2nd in line to the throne)

Bennett Holiday (Jeffrey Wright) – Washington attorney at Sloan Whiting law firm, investigating the Connex-Killen merger

Bryan Woodman (Matt Damon) – Energy analyst at an energy trading company

Wasim (Mazhar Munir) – Young migrant worker from Pakistan trying to find work with his father in the oil field's of Prince Nasir's country. He and his father were recently ladi off from Connex oil fields when the Prince granted drilling privileges to a Chinese corporation.

Farooq (Sonnell Dadral) – Wasim's friend; they both start hanging out at a local madrassa and catch the eye of a dangerous recruiter.

Jimmy Pope (Chris Cooper) – owner of Killen Oil, a small Texas oil company

Dean Whiting (Christopher Plummer) – head of Sloan Whiting law firm (and Bennett's boss); as a member of CLI (Committee to Liberate Iran) he is trying to undo Prince Nasir's deal and put Nasir's younger brother in control

Tommy Thompson (Robert Foxworth) – President of Connex Oil, a powerful Texas oil company

Trivia from the film -

- George Clooney gained 35 pounds on a pasta-heavy diet to play CIA operative Robert Barnes. However, the actor refused to shave his head for fear of it not growing back.
- The real Robert Baer (author of *See No Evil*, on which this screenplay is based) plays "CIA Security Officer #2."
- Due to the weight he gained for the film, Clooney suffered a spinal injury during a stunt that caused him severe migraine headaches (which prevented him from doing publicity for *Ocean's Twelve* (2004)), and had him bedridden for a month. This injury was eventually corrected with surgery, and Clooney has since called his weight gain "pretty stupid".
- "Syriana" is a term used by Washington think-tanks to describe a hypothetical re-shaping of the Middle East.
- Harrison Ford was the original choice to play the role given to Clooney of the disillusioned spook. However, he turned the role down, a decision which he told *Empire Magazine* in a interview in the March 2006 issue, that is one of the few in his movie career that he has regretted.
- When Bob Barnes meets with Hossein Hashimi, Hashimi compliments Bob for his fine Arabic, yet in fact, Bob only speaks the first word in Arabic, then mumbles the rest in non-Arabic.
- Academy Award Winner for Best Supporting Actor (George Clooney) and an Academy Award Nomination for Best Original Screenplay (Stephen Gaghan).

Websites of interest -

www.imdb.com

www.syrianamovie.warnerbros.com

www.participaate.net/oilchange