

Honorary Degree Ceremony 2010
AUB President Peter Dorman's Speech

Distinguished guests, faculty, staff, students, and friends: I bid you a warm welcome to this 16th ceremony of conferring honorary degrees at AUB. This year, we are privileged to award honorary doctorates to three prominent and worthy individuals who have not only excelled in their chosen fields, but have addressed issues of import and concern to this region.

The fundamental purpose for the establishment of this 'American' university in Lebanon was to engender an enlightened and responsive impact on the region. This continues to be our essential objective: to serve the peoples of the Middle East and beyond through excellence in education, the advancement of knowledge through research, and a commitment to civic engagement.

The three honorands we celebrate today have each exerted a profound impact of their own. Through popular art that reaches and speaks to the concerns of the average Arab citizen; through scholarship and public advocacy that illuminates the history of Palestinians and their current struggle; and through journalism and commentary that analyzes and elucidates the issues of the modern Middle East for Western audiences.

We honor these individuals for outstanding contributions in the arts, sciences, media, and diplomacy and for their inspiring engagement in social issues. Confronting inequality and intolerance is rarely an easy path to take. It requires courage to follow one's deepest convictions and it is this commitment that we hope and desire our students—indeed all of our community members—to embrace. Thank you all for joining us today in this celebration of the life and achievements of these three inspiring individuals.

Dourade Al Lahham

Dourade Al Lahham has entertained generations of audiences throughout the Arab world with his distinctive characters and incisive wit. His inspirational life journey—from relative poverty to academic success, stardom on stage and screen, and years of committed public service—speaks volumes about what can be accomplished given the right combination of talent, opportunity, and determination.

From his university days through his early professional life, Al Lahham pursued numerous artistic interests: dancing the *dabkeh*, playing the clarinet, performing in the theater, and being involved in the local arts community. But when he chose to give up his career as a university instructor in chemistry to pursue acting full-time, his family strenuously objected. This courageous decision to follow his passion has proven a boon to the thousands who have enjoyed his artistry over the past fifty years on television, film, and the stage

Best known for creating the character *Ghawar al-Toushi*, Dourade Al Lahham acted for many years with his partner, Nihad Qali. The comedic duo of “Dourade & Nihad” worked together from the very dawn of Syrian television in 1960, beginning with the mini-series *Sahret Dimashq* (Damascus Evening).

Al Lahham’s acting career has encompassed traditional comedy as well as more serious social criticism and political satire. The slapstick antics of *Ghawar & Husni* in numerous productions spanning a decade had Al Lahham playing the wicked prankster *Ghawar*, to the mild-mannered and long-suffering character of *Husni al-Burazan*, played by Nihad Qali. Following Qali’s retirement due to illness, Al Lahham joined with political playwright Mohammad al-Maghout, and turned *Ghawar* into a more serious character, expressing the “worries of the Arab citizen.” Popular not only in Syria, but across the region, his films and plays addressed issues such as the Arab-Israeli war of 1973, the problems of pan-Arabism, and Arab emigration to the West.

Dourade Al Lahham has also shown a commitment to humanitarian causes throughout his life. He has used his celebrity and his craft to lobby for those less fortunate and to speak out against injustice. His commitment to protecting the rights of children is evidenced in several of his plays, television shows, and the 1990 film *Kafroun*. In recognition of his children's productions, Al Lahham was named UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador for Children's Affairs in Syria in 1992 and served as UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador for Childhood in the Middle East and North Africa from 1999 to 2004.

Regional conflicts and strife have also affected him deeply and he has responded through his art and through personal involvement. Especially because his mother hailed from South Lebanon, he was greatly distressed by the 2006 war between Lebanon and Israel, as well as by the Arab defeat of 1967, and the continuing Arab-Israeli conflict. In 2009, he initiated a visit to the besieged Palestinians in Gaza with other regional stars and international human rights activists. The group never reached its destination due to the Rafah border crossing being closed, but even efforts that are not realized can make a difference, as recent events on behalf of Gaza have shown.

In interviews, Al Lahham has questioned the ability of art to realize social or political change. At one time, he said, "We had thought that artwork could shock and change. But no, artwork, at the end of the day, even if it is critical, is entertainment." This may be true, but I believe it can and does do more. Art does not necessarily create change, but it can create the possibility for change. Art can help shape our beliefs about the world and inspire us to consider new possibilities. It can motivate, instigate, arouse, and energize. Dourade Al Lahham's work has surely entertained; but in addition to making us laugh, he has also made us think.

Many awards and honors have been bestowed on this beloved writer, director, and actor. These include the Medal of the Syrian Republic, Excellence Class; and medals from the president of Tunisia and from Libya's president Mu'ammar al-Qadafi. In 1997, AUB was proud to host Mr. Al Lahham at the invitation of the Syrian Culture Club. During this event, Lebanese President Emile Lahhoud presented Al Lahham with the Order of

Merit of the Lebanese Republic. We are now delighted to have this opportunity to bestow upon Dourade Al Lahham an honorary doctorate from the American University of Beirut in recognition of his significant contributions in the field of arts.

I now invite Mr. Al Lahham to step forward.

Walid Khalidi

As one of the most influential Palestinian intellectuals of the twentieth century, Walid Khalidi has served as the voice of his people. With a striking balance of eloquence and vehemence, Khalidi has been a leader in chronicling and analyzing the Arab-Israeli conflict and the current problem of Palestine, as well as its history and rich cultural heritage.

Born in Jerusalem, he comes from an old and well-respected family whose members have been leaders in the religious, political, and academic realms of Palestinian society for generations. Among the many notable achievements of Walid Khalidi's forebears, his grandfather established the Khalidi Library in Jerusalem in 1900. This Library now houses the largest Palestinian collection of Islamic manuscripts and Walid Khalidi has devoted himself to preserving and upholding this venerable institution.

Forced to leave their ancestral homes following the *nakba*, the Khalidi family continues to be influential; producing prominent intellectuals, scholars, and activists as part of the Palestinian diaspora. AUB is proud to have an abiding connection with the Khalidis, a number of whom have come here to study and to teach, including Walid's cousin, the Middle East historian Rashid Khalidi; and his brother Tarif, who currently holds the Shaykh Zayid Chair in Arabic and Islamic Studies at AUB.

Walid Khalidi's record of scholarship is extensive and has helped to portray and illuminate the plight of Palestinians before, during, and after the defining war of 1948. Through exacting research prose in his seminal work, *Why Did the Palestinians Leave?*,

he helped to destroy the myth that Palestinians left their homes and villages voluntarily, laying bare historical facts regarding the Israeli planning behind the forced expulsions and ensuing occupation. He was also one of the first to present a solid argument for the “two-state solution,” now widely accepted as the only viable solution to this decades-long conflict.

Khalidi’s academic background began in the best schools of Jerusalem and continued in the U.K., where he earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of London and Oxford. He remained at Oxford for five years, lecturing in Islamic Studies and continuing his research on Islamic philosophy, until he resigned in protest following the invasion of Egypt in 1956 by Israeli forces supported by Britain and France.

Oxford’s loss became AUB’s boon, as Walid Khalidi continued his academic career in our Department of Political Studies and Public Administration. His tenure at AUB from 1957 to 1982 was a prolific time for him as a researcher and writer, and his teaching motivated and inspired generations of students, many of whom went on to illustrious careers. As his scholarly work gained international acclaim, Khalidi eventually left AUB for a position at Harvard’s Center for Middle East Studies where he remained until retiring in 1997.

His keen sense of integrity and personal responsibility compelled him on many occasions to undertake duties in the public sphere, serving as an advisor to the Iraqi delegation to the UN following the Arab-Israeli war of 1967; and later as a member of the Arab summit delegation to the British government and special advisor to the secretary general of the Arab League. He also brought his considerable talents to bear in mediating conflicts and easing tensions between Palestinians and Arab nations, as well as to internecine quarrels among the Palestinians, often been behind the scenes.

During Walid Khalidi’s time in Beirut, he co-founded the Institute for Palestine Studies, a fully independent research organization devoted to the documentation and study of Palestinian affairs and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Through the IPS, Khalidi has edited a massive photographic history of the Palestinians prior to 1948 and oversaw a project to

research, map, and photograph Palestinian villages destroyed during and after 1948. Other non-profit groups that Khalidi has helped found include the Royal Scientific Society in Amman, The Center for Arab Unity Studies in Beirut, the Palestinian Welfare Organization, and the Center for Christian and Muslim Understanding at Georgetown University.

Throughout his career, Khalidi has been honored with numerous prizes and awards from such institutions as the Palestinian Heritage Foundation, the Arab Culture Club of Beirut, Birzeit University, and the Palestinian National Authority; The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has awarded him the Order of Al Istiqlal (First Class); and in 1994 he was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Now we join this long list to honor Walid Khalidi's eminent scholarly career and history of public advocacy and diplomacy on behalf of Palestinians. For his pioneering research and adept chronicling of the history, culture, and politics of Palestine and of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and in particular his attempts at addressing the cause of peace, we are privileged to welcome Walid Khalidi back to AUB and to acknowledge his significant contributions in academic scholarship with an honorary doctorate from the American University of Beirut.

I invite Professor Khalidi to step forward.

Eric Rouleau

Throughout his life and career, Eric Rouleau has exhibited an enormous depth of understanding about the current events and history of the Middle East and North Africa and great empathy for its people. Born and raised in Cairo, Rouleau moved to Paris in 1951 and has succeeded in a variety of professional paths—as a journalist, author, academic, and diplomat—always maintaining his strong connection to this land.

For over thirty years, Eric Rouleau was a special correspondent and chief Middle East editorial writer at the prominent French daily, *Le Monde*. He is highly respected in the field of journalism and serves as a role model for foreign correspondents. David Hirst, a British writer and journalist, has said that it is not just that Rouleau gets a story right and ahead of others, it is “the knowledge, depth, and authority” which he brings to the interpretation of it.

Writing for *Le Monde* from 1955 to 1985, Rouleau covered this region during very heady times; from the rise and fall of Arab nationalism, to the escalation of hostilities and subsequent negotiated treaties between Israel and various Arab countries, as well as the role of Western powers in the region. He continues to write and contributes regularly to *Le Monde Diplomatique* among other newspapers worldwide.

In addition to his impressive portfolio of articles and editorials, Eric Rouleau has authored numerous books, several of which have focused on the continuing Israeli-Palestinian struggle and Arab-Israeli relations. With his expansive knowledge of the MENA region, Rouleau has served as a consultant to the French television channel TF1 and has appeared frequently on U.S. television and radio shows.

Following on the success of his journalistic career, Eric Rouleau was tapped by French President Francois Mitterand to head a diplomatic mission to Libya in 1984 and subsequently served as Ambassador to Tunisia and Turkey and as ambassador-at-large for the French government. During this time, he interfaced with regional leaders and governing bodies including Mu’ ammar Al-Qadhafi, Yasser Arafat, and the Arab League.

Rouleau has been a distinguished visitor at various academic institutions and international think-tanks and has lectured extensively throughout North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Australia. Following the events of September 11, 2001 and the “global war on terror,” Rouleau’s experience and expertise has been particularly pertinent. A vocal critic of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, he has also railed against Western bias towards Muslims and advocated for broader understanding and tolerance.

His commitment to human rights and dignity can be seen throughout his extensive body of work, and is best evidenced by his unflagging support of the Palestinian pursuit of peace and justice. Writing at length on the many aspects and angles of this most complex issue, he also serves as a member of the recently established Russell Tribunal on Palestine which was launched in Brussels to address the injustices done to the Palestinian people.

I now invite Mr. Rouleau to step forward.