



If Olaya Street Could Talk -- Saudi Arabia: The Heartland of Oil and Islam

John Paul Jones

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If Olaya Street Could Talk is a portrait of Saudi Arabia and its people, encompassing a 25-year period during the era of its dynamic transformation from being one of the poorer countries in the world to becoming a state with a modern physical and economic infrastructure. It is also a story about the western expatriates who worked and lived in the country--from the "free and easy 70's"--to the period when they became specific targets for execution by certain religious fundamentalists. The book addresses western perceptions of the country and how those perceptions were formed, from TE Lawrence and Wilfred Thesiger to NY Times columnists Thomas Friedman, Maureen Dowd and David Brooks. The book's fundamental purpose is to examine the issue which dominates today's headlines: the "Islamic-Western cultural divide" and places this concept within the context of American issues, such as the experience with the black-white cultural divide as well as America's last significant conflict, the Vietnam War. It is in parts a travelogue, a sociological examination, a historical documentary, a love story, health care development and political commentary. The author is one of few Americans to have lived in the country during this period of time who had access to Saudis at all levels of society and freely traveled throughout a large portion of the country. No other book, in English or Arabic, covers this period of Saudi Arabia's transformation to a modern nation, the period from 1978 to 2003. The motivation for writing the book was to render a realistic image of the people of Saudi Arabia, as well as to examine some of the basis for the American misperceptions of this country and region, in the hope that it will inspire others to take steps towards ending the current policy of war without end.

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