

HORSES CAN COUNT

One *20/20* program (American Broadcasting Company) caused a great Arab protest, charging that it was *anti-Arab*, and was the focus of a recent ruckus at San Francisco State University. Another *20/20* television program, viewed last week, caused a protest charging that it was *anti-Israel*. If that is what the TV industry calls "balance," the concept needs a little re-examination.

The first *20/20* program was on international terrorism, and featured the central role of the PLO. Pro-Israel groups obtained copies of the program, and showed it wherever they could. When a Jewish student group showed it at San Francisco State University, just before the winter recess, a group of Arab and pro-Arab students attempted to disrupt the showing.

At the request of the Jewish students and of Hillel, the JCRC was immediately in touch with the University administration on behalf of the total community, in order to insure that such disruptions would not take place again, and the administration responded positively. The students scheduled another showing of that *20/20* program for last week. Another meeting was held with administration officials by the students, the JCRC, the ADL and Hillel to pin down security arrangements. The showing of this fine program was held peacefully and with a larger audience.

Later that week, *20/20* aired a program on the afflictions of the Palestinian Arabs in Judea and Samaria, the "West Bank." There were many inaccuracies, but those Arabs *do* have afflictions, they *are* in an unhappy situation. First of all, they have aspirations for some national identity, an aspiration which all Zionists will understand. They had never had political independence, having lived under the Turks, and then under the British mandate. When the British prepared to withdraw, the UN proposed a state for them there, alongside the Jewish state. The Israelis accepted the proposal, but the Arab nations rejected it, and instead invaded. Jordan ended up in control of that area -- in temporary control, according to the armistice.

Jordan is itself a Palestinian Arab state, in terms of the majority of its population. But the rulers are not Palestinian Arab, they are Hashemite. They did not grant rights or political identity to the Palestinian Arabs on the "West Bank," but reigned with an iron hand. Political freedom? None. Autonomy? None. Poverty? Overwhelming.

The Israelis have been in control of that area since 1967, when the Jordanian assault on Israel was rebuffed. The PLO is dominant in the area, having eliminated any moderate leaders who emerged. Israel cannot allow the area to become a staging area for war and terrorism. It is a war-time situation.

The *20/20* program highlighted (and exaggerated) the disadvantaged political conditions under which Palestinian Arabs live, without placing it in a war-time context ... and without comparing it to the political oppression under the Jordanians .. or without ascribing any responsibility to the hard-line Arab nations which have maintained that war-time situation. That is responsible journalism?

Further, the *20/20* program featured the real poverty and health problems of the Palestinian Arabs without indicating that their living standards and health standards are higher under the Israelis than they ever have been in their history -- and higher than those of any other Arab population, except those who are Israeli citizens. That is responsible journalism?

The *20/20* people apparently felt that, if they devoted 30 minutes to a show with anti-Arab implications, they could then "balance it out" by devoting 30 minutes to an anti-Israel show, never mind the quality or the content. That arithmetic approach to journalism is infantile, and fills one with dismay about the industry. Horses can count, but you would not want to put one in charge of the evening news. National Jewish agencies are even now in session with ABC and the producers of *20/20* , trying to make that distinction-- and your letters to ABC's *20/20* might help make the point.