Introduction

**Jack Bauer (Counter Terrorism Unit Agent):** How long have you been planning this operation? Two years? Five years? Ten? All this planning for one day. You do realize that if all the reactors melt down, hundreds of thousands of people will die?

**Dina Araz (Terrorist):** Every war has casualties.

**Jack Bauer:** These people do not know about your war. These people are innocent.

**Dina Araz:** No one is innocent.

**Jack Bauer:** You really believe that?

**Dina Araz:** As strongly as you believe in what you believe. So I won’t waste your time or mine trying to explain something you can never understand.

—24, ”Day 4: 3–4 p.m.”

**Reverend Camden (To Neighbors):** I know everyone is boycotting that party tonight because they think the Duprees are French, but they’re not. The Duprees are from Glen Oak.

**Neighbor 1:** Well, that’s good to know.

**Rev. Camden:** And they’re Muslim. [Long pause by neighbors.] I had to see it with my own eyes.

**Neighbor 2:** See what?

**Rev. Camden:** Prejudice, narrow mindedness . . . racism.

—7th Heaven, ”Getting to Know You”

On September 11, 2001, nineteen Arab Muslim men hijacked four airplanes and flew them into two of the greatest icons of power in the United States—the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Nearly three thousand people were killed. In response, the U.S. government, under President George W. Bush, initiated the self-proclaimed War on Terror—a military, political, and legal campaign targeting Arabs and Muslims both in the United States and around the world.

After this tragic event, and amid growing U.S. American’ rancor toward the Arab world and violence against individuals with brown skin, I was surprised to find an abundance of sympathetic portrayals of Arabs and Muslims on U.S.
television. My surprise was twofold. First, at such an opportune moment for further stereotyping—a moment of mourning, fear, trauma, anger, and presumably justifiable racism against the entire Arab and Muslim population—this wave of sympathetic representations seemed both unprecedented and unlikely. Demonizing the enemy is so common during times of war—a brief list, just over the last century, would include the Japanese during World War II and the Russians during the Cold War—I assumed that 9/11/01 and the War on Terror would ignite the blanket demonization of all Arabs and Muslims. Second, given that the U.S. media has stereotyped and misrepresented Arabs and Muslims for over a century, with very few exceptions, I couldn’t believe that sympathetic portrayals would appear during such a fraught moment.

Like many others in the days and weeks (and then months and years) after September 11, I remained glued to my television. I watched the endless clips of the planes crashing, of the towers falling, of people pressing photos of the missing toward the news cameras, of the photos of the nineteen Arab Muslim men responsible for the attack. I grieved for all those who lost loved ones and simultaneously grieved in anticipation for the backlash that was to come against us as Arabs and Muslims. In the midst of the flurry of news reports, my amazement grew. I watched President Bush reassure Americans, taking pains to distinguish between Arabs and Muslim “friends” and “enemies.” He stated, “The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them.” I watched news reporters interview Arab and Muslim Americans, seemingly eager to include their perspectives on the terrorist attacks, careful to point out their experiences with hate crimes. I watched dozens of TV dramas in which Arab and Muslim Americans were portrayed as the unjust target of hate crimes.

Certainly, xenophobia and outright racism flourished on the airwaves; the pundits of FOX News were always a reliable source of antagonism. At the same time, a slew of TV dramas cashed in on the salacious possibilities of Arab or Muslim terrorist threats and assured viewers with depictions of the U.S. government’s heroic efforts to combat this new, pulse-quickening terrorism. These shows, from network and cable channels alike, include—but are not limited to—24, Sleeper Cell, NCIS, JAG, The Grid, The Agency, LAX, Threat Matrix. The series 24, from which the first of this chapter’s epigraphs is drawn, is a culture-shaping action drama centered on Jack Bauer, the ubiquitous counterterrorism agent who, season after season, races against the clock to disrupt terrorist plots in the United States. Amid his debate with Dina Araz, Bauer subverts a nuclear attack by apparent “Middle Easterners” partially orchestrated by the Araz family, which has lived in the United States for years, secretly conspiring
with others to attack this country and murder hundreds of thousands of innocent Americans. The reasons for these attempts are never fully explained, leaving open two opposed possibilities: we don't need a reason—isn't terrorism what Arabs and/or Muslims do, after all?—or any such rationale would be incomprehensible to Americans.

Often, however, these very same TV dramas narrated stories about innocent Arab and Muslim Americans facing unjust post-September 11 hatred. In the years after the attacks, shows as diverse as *The Practice, Boston Public, Law and Order, Law and Order SVU, NYPD Blue, 7th Heaven, The Education of Max Bickford, The Guardian, and The West Wing* all featured Arab and Muslim Americans as hardworking, often patriotic, victims. The second epigraph, for example, is from an episode of *7th Heaven*, a family drama about Reverend Camden and his wife and their seven children. In this episode, a Muslim American family moves to the neighborhood and the Camden family plans a party to welcome them. The other neighbors decide to boycott the party because they erroneously assume the new residents are French, and since France did not support the U.S. government's decision to invade Iraq as part of the War on Terror, they, like many Americans, are boycotting anything and everything French. When the neighbors realize that the new residents are not French but Muslim American, their impulse to boycott the party is reaffirmed. After Reverend Camden articulates his deep disappointment at the nationalist strand of racism he has witnessed from his neighbors, they reflect on their assumptions about and attitudes toward Muslims, see the error in their ways, and decide to join in welcoming their new Muslim American neighbors.

On another episode of *7th Heaven*, twelve-year-old Ruthie takes a principled stance and quits her private school because the school board refuses to admit her Muslim friend. On *Boston Public*, two innocent Arab American students are investigated by the FBI for connections to terrorism and harassed by their classmates. The principal assembles the student body and gives a speech stating that when we terrorize Arab and Muslim Americans out of fear and prejudice, “we” are the terrorists. On *The Education of Max Bickford*, after a Muslim student receives a note under her dorm room door stating, “Muslim bitch, keep your family off our campus or die,” Professor Haskel devotes a week of class time to discussing the impact of September 11 on everyday life, including a debate on the racial profiling of Arab Americans. Typical of the broad gamut of quality in American television, some of these episodes were incredibly moving, others near nausea-inducing in their sentimentality. Nevertheless, the message was clear: we should not resort to stereotyping and racism; we should not blame our innocent Arab and Muslim neighbors for something they had nothing to do with.
Something else besides the increase in sympathetic representations of Arab and Muslim Americans in the U.S. media after 9/11 puzzled me: certain friends and colleagues expressed pride and relief. They claimed that Americans were at the dawn of a new era. They stated that racism against Arabs and Muslims after 9/11 was “not so bad” because we were not rounded up and placed in internment camps, as was done with Japanese Americans during World War II. Often at on-campus teach-ins and other public forums, they expressed nationalist pride that the U.S. government was not repeating past racism by indiscriminately demonizing an entire ethnic group. Sympathetic representations—whether Bush’s speeches, TV dramas, news reports, or public service announcements—were cited as examples of a new era of multicultural sensitivity. The case of Arabs and Muslims post-9/11 was discussed as a symbol of racial progress. I, too, felt comforted by these TV dramas that evoked sympathy for Arab and Muslim Americans, yet wondered to what extent we had really “progressed” as a nation. I wondered, how were these sympathetic representations being consumed amid the dominant meanings that were circulating about Islam as a threat to U.S. national security? How were sympathetic representations of Arabs and Muslims in government discourses and media representations during the War on Terror projecting this presumed new era of multicultural sensitivity?

Such optimism was quickly tempered by a more complex reality. At the same time that sympathetic portrayals of Arab and Muslim Americans proliferated on U.S. commercial television in the weeks and months after 9/11, hate crimes, workplace discrimination, bias incidents, and airline discrimination targeting Arab and Muslim Americans increased exponentially. According to the FBI, hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims multiplied by 1,600 percent from 2000 to 2001.\(^1\) In just the first weeks and months after 9/11, Amnesty International, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, and other organizations documented hundreds of violent incidents experienced by Arab and Muslim Americans and people mistaken for Arabs or Muslim Americans, including several murders. Dozens of airline passengers perceived to be Arab or Muslim were removed from flights. Hundreds of Arab and Muslim Americans reported discrimination at work, receiving hate mail, physical assaults, and their property, mosques, and community centers vandalized or set on fire.\(^2\) Some communities organized escorts to accompany Arab and Muslim Americans in public in the hope of protecting them from hate crimes. And some non-Muslim women even began wearing the hijab (head scarf) as an act of solidarity.\(^3\) Across the decade after 9/11, such racist acts have persisted.

As individual citizens were taking the law into their own hands, the U.S. government passed legislation that targeted Arabs and Muslims (both inside and outside the United States) and legalized the suspension of constitutional
The USA PATRIOT Act, passed by Congress in October 2001 and renewed in 2005, 2006, 2010, and 2011 legalized the following (previously illegal) acts and thus enabled anti-Arab and Muslim racism: monitoring Arab and Muslim groups; granting the U.S. Attorney General the right to indefinitely detain noncitizens whom he suspects might have ties to terrorism; searching and wiretapping secretly, without probable cause; arresting and holding a person as a “material witness” whose testimony might assist in a case; using secret evidence, without granting the accused access to that evidence; trying those designated as “enemy combatants” in military tribunals (as opposed to civilian courts); and deportation based on guilt by association (not on what someone has done). Other measures included the Absconder Apprehension Initiative that tracked down and deported 6,000 men from unnamed Middle Eastern countries, in most cases for overstaying a visa. In the weeks after 9/11 at least 1,200 Muslim men were rounded up and detained without criminal charges. The National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), required males from twenty-four Muslim countries to be photographed and fingerprinted and to register their addresses with the Immigration and Naturalization Service every few months; anyone who refused would face deportation. Under this “Special Registration” approximately 80,000 men complied, 2,870 of whom were detained and 13,799 placed in deportation proceedings within two years after 9/11. The government submitted young Arab and Muslim men to a “voluntary interview” program, based on the assumption that they would have information about terrorism because of their religion, gender, and national origin. Nearly 200,000 Arab and Muslim men were interviewed. Many Muslim charities were either closed by the government or “voluntarily” shut down because Muslims feared that they would be investigated if they continued to engage in charitable giving.

Post-9/11 government measures had a psychological impact on Arab and Muslim Americans, causing depression, sadness, and shock. Arab and Muslim Americans reported being fearful and censoring their behavior in public to avoid ethnic or religious markers. The trauma of the terrorist attacks coupled with the increased suspicion and hostility from the public led many Arab and Muslim Americans to feel excluded from the process of grieving in the United States because they were associated with the enemy. As a result, many Arab and Muslim Americans isolated themselves; they stayed home, they stopped attending their mosques, all to protect themselves from potential harm. Thousands of Pakistani Muslims were so fearful of being targeted by these government policies that they “voluntarily” returned to Pakistan. Nadine Naber writes that some Arab Americans experienced “internment of the psyche,” psychological distress due to the fear that one might be considered guilty by association or secretly monitored.
Ironically, though often seen as the enemy, Arab and Muslim Americans were not alone. Fear was evident across the United States, often stoked by the rhetoric and policies of the Bush administration, news reports, and other cultural productions that reminded the public of an ever-present, unresolved, and often-mysterious threat. The Homeland Security Advisory System—the much-derided, color-coded terrorist alert system—still in place ten years later, has for many epitomized this state of endless fear. President Bush justified these policies, contending that securing the nation was imperative. The U.S. government therefore “secured the nation” domestically by legalizing heightened surveillance measures and reenforcing anti-immigration laws. Abroad, “securing the nation” was achieved through all-out war in Iraq and Afghanistan. To put it mildly, the explicit targeting of Arabs and Muslims by government policies, based on their identity as opposed to their criminality, contradicts claims to racial progress.

These racial policies have been heatedly debated. The political right has often argued that government measures, such as the USA PATRIOT Act, are needed for national security and accuse the left of being willing to risk national security in order to be racially or culturally sensitive. Michelle Malkin, advocating for racial profiling, writes, “When our national security is on the line, ‘racial profiling’—or more precisely, threat profiling based on race, religion or nationality—is justified. Targeted intelligence-gathering at mosques and in local Muslim communities, for example, makes perfect sense when we are at war with Islamic extremists.” The political right tends to diminish concerns about advancing racist policies through accusations of political correctness. One Republican congressman put it most succinctly when he stated that “political correctness kills,” arguing that political correctness intimidates Americans from speaking out against a potential threat because they do not want to be perceived as racist. He claims that political correctness is destroying the nation. In contrast, the political left has often argued that these measures not only amount to racial profiling, but compromise civil liberties for Arab and Muslim Americans, are ineffective in fighting terrorism, and afford the government excessive power by promoting a culture of fear. Anti-Arab racism continues to be acceptable and legitimizined in conservative circles and beyond, often by people who claim that the United States is multicultural and beyond racism.

The question of whether or not, or the extent to which, the U.S. government was institutionalizing racism was far less important to some after the terrorist attacks. More visceral questions, and knee-jerk reactions, ruled the day. Many Americans asked, “Why do they hate us?” The U.S. government offered a decisive answer that had the power to frame and hijack the system of meaning during the War on Terror: “They hate us for our freedom.” This question and
answer—which was in turn widely circulated in television and print journalism, and before too long in television dramas as well—effectively foreclosed the many other possible conversations. Public discourse rarely focused on debating the impact of U.S. foreign policies on human life around the globe or the U.S. government’s involvement in proxy wars, including their own role, during the Cold War, in the creation of Al Qaeda.29

While the focus of my exploration is on the War on Terror portrayed by television shows and news reporting, and not specifically about the ways that the U.S. government has portrayed recent history, the two are inextricably linked. As a result, I refer to interrelated “government and media discourses”; I see them together forming a hegemonic field of meaning. As a crucial aspect of the War on Terror—particularly in our information-soaked age—the Bush administration needed to frame the ways that people across the country thought about and talked about the events of 9/11, and the ways that we should respond to such events. The “they hate us for our freedom” discourse provided the logic and justification needed to pass racist foreign and domestic policies and provided the suspicion needed for many citizens to tolerate the targeting of Arabs and Muslims, often without any evidence that they were involved in terrorist activities. As I consider the government’s ongoing effort to shape the national conversation, the media can be seen as a similarly ongoing attempt to process or negotiate a new political reality. In the days and weeks following 9/11, the government’s overt propaganda of war was palatable to many citizens on edge and regarded with suspicion by others. As such propaganda has become less effective and more controversial, the production and circulation of “positive” representations of the “enemy” has become essential to projecting the United States as benevolent, especially in its declaration of war and passage of racist policies. TV dramas have become essential, though often unwitting, collaborators in the forming of a new postrace racism.

Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. Media before 9/11

The significance of increased sympathetic representations of Arab and Muslim identities must be understood in relation to the lengthy history of Orientalist tropes of Arabs. Across the twentieth century, Arabs have most often been seen as rich oil sheiks, sultry belly dancers, harem girls, veiled oppressed women, and, most notably, terrorists. The trajectory of Arab representations in television mirrors that in film. Early silent films that represented the Middle East, such as Fatima (1897), The Sheik (1921), and The Thief of Bagdad (1924), portrayed the region as faraway, exotic, and magical; a place reminiscent of biblical stories and fairy tales; a desert populated by genies, flying carpets, mummies,
belly dancers, harem girls, and rich Arab men living in opulent palaces (or equally opulent tents). This trend continued into the era of Technicolor and sound, as can be seen in films such as *Arabian Nights* (1942), *Road to Morocco* (1942), and *Harum Scarum* (1965), to name but a few. These films, made at a time when parts of the Middle East were colonized by European powers, reflect the fantasies of the colonizer and a logic that legitimizes colonialism. It was not unusual for both “good” and “bad” Arabs to be represented and for a white man to save the day—saving the good Arabs from the bad Arabs, freeing the female Arab slaves from their captors, and rescuing white women from Arab rapists.

The year 1945 figures as an important historical moment, marking the decline of European colonialism at the end of World War II, the beginning of the Cold War, the creation of Israel in the shadow of the Holocaust, and the emergence of the United States as a global power. As the United States began its geopolitical ascendancy, representations of the “foreign” contributed to the making of American national identity; the projection of erotic and exotic fantasies onto the Middle East began to shift to more ominous representations of violence and terrorism. Representations of Arabs as terrorists emerged with the inauguration of the state of Israel in 1948, the Arab-Israeli war and subsequent Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories in 1967, and the formation of Palestinian resistance movements. As Jack G. Shaheen writes:

> The image began to intensify in the late 1940s when the state of Israel was founded on Palestinian land. From that preemptive point on—through the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1967, and 1973, the hijacking of planes, the disruptive 1973 Arab oil embargo, along with the rise of Libya’s Muammar Qaddafi and Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini—shot after shot delivered the relentless drum beat that all Arabs were and are Public Enemy No. 1.

From the late 1940s into the 1970s and 1980s, images of Arab men shifted from lazy sheikhs reclining on thrones to new images of rich, flashy oil sheikhs who threaten the U.S. economy and dangerous terrorists who threaten national security. As for representations of Arab women, before World War II they were represented as alluring harem girls and belly dancers. In the first decades after World War II images of Arab women became largely absent from the representational field, but in the 1970s they reemerged as sexy but deadly terrorists and in the 1980s as veiled and oppressed.

Significant shifts toward portraying Arab and/or Muslims as terrorists in the 1970s are evident not only in Hollywood filmmaking but also in U.S. corporate news media. Melani McAlister argues that Americans’ association of the Middle East with the Christian Holy Land or Arab oil wealth shifted to a place of Muslim terror through news reporting on the Munich Olympics (1972), the Arab oil embargo (1973), the Iran hostage crisis (1979–80), and airplane
hijackings in the 1970s and 1980s. The news media came to play a crucial role in making the Middle East, and Islam in particular, meaningful to Americans as a place that breeds terrorism. This genealogy of the emergence of the Arab terrorist threat in the U.S. commercial media reveals that while 9/11 is a new historical moment, it is also part of a longer history in which viewers have been primed by the media to equate Arabs and Muslims first with dissoluteness and patriarchy/misogyny and then with terrorism.

The Iran hostage crisis was an important moment in conflating Arab, Muslim, and Middle Eastern identities. Though Iran is not an Arab country, during the hostage crisis Iran came to stand in for Arabs, the Middle East, Islam, and terrorism, all of which terms came to be used interchangeably. It is commonly assumed that Iranians and Pakistanis are Arab and that all Arabs are Muslim and all Muslims Arab, despite the fact that there are 1.2 billion Muslims worldwide and that approximately 15 to 20 percent of them are Arab. The majority of the world’s Muslim population is concentrated in Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, with sizable populations in Senegal, Uzbekistan, China, and Malaysia. Why are these categories interchangeable when most Muslims are not Arab and when none of the most populous countries are Arab? This conflation enables a particular racial Othering that would not operate in the same way through another conflation, such as, for example, Arab/Christian, Arab/Jew, or Indonesian/Muslim. The result is particularly damaging, since it reduces the inherent—and enormous—variety of the world’s Muslim population, projecting all Muslims as one very particular type: fanatical, misogynistic, anti-American. This recurring conflation, advanced by U.S. government and media discourses at this historical juncture, serves a larger narrative about an evil Other that can be powerfully and easily mobilized during times of war. The Arab/Muslim conflation is strategically useful to the U.S. government during the War on Terror because it comes with baggage. It draws on centuries-old Orientalist narratives of patriarchal societies and oppressed women, of Muslim fundamentalism and anti-Semitism, of irrational violence and suicide bombings. With this conflation established, it is easy to conceptualize the United States as the inverse of everything that is “Arab/Muslim”: the United States is thus a land of equality and democracy, culturally diverse and civilized, a land of progressive men and liberated women.

Casting for TV dramas and films has historically contributed to this conflation. TV dramas participate in the construction of a phenotype and the fiction of an Arab or Muslim “race” and hence the notion that Arabs and Muslims can be racially profiled. In Sleeper Cell, the lead terrorist is Arab/Muslim but portrayed by an Israeli Jewish actor, Oded Fehr, who has played Arab roles before, most notably in The Mummy films (1999, 2001). In season 2 of 24, the
Arab terrorist is played by Francesco Quinn, who is Mexican American (his father, Anthony Quinn, has often played Arab characters). During the fourth season of 24, Marwan Habib, the Arab/Muslim terrorist, is played by Arnold Vosloo, a South African actor who also featured (as an ancient Egyptian) in The Mummy (1999, 2001). Nestor Serrano who is Latino, Shoreh Aghdashloo who is Iranian, and Jonathan Adhout who is Iranian American play the terrorist sleeper cell family—mother, father, and teenage son. The other terrorists include Tony Plana who is Cuban American and Anil Kumar who is South Asian. In the sixth season of 24, Alexander Siddig, who is Sudanese British, plays Hamri Al-Assad, the reformed terrorist who helps CTU in its investigation. The “good Arab American” CTU agent, Nadia Yassir, is played by Marisol Nichols, who is Mexican-Hungarian-Romanian. The villains are played by Kal Penn and Shaun Majumder and Adonis Maropis, South Asian Americans and Greek American respectively.

Most of the actors who play Arab/Muslim terrorists, at least in the past decade, are Latinos, South Asians, and Greeks. The point here is not that only Arabs should portray Arab characters but rather that casting lends itself to the visual construction of an Arab/Muslim race that supports the conflation of Arab and Muslim identities. This construction of a conflated Arab/Muslim “look” in turn supports policies like racial profiling; even if unintentional, it does the ideological work of making racial profiling seem like an effective tool when it is in fact an unrealistic endeavor.

Such representations make it difficult to disentangle the Arab/Muslim conflation and to speak with more precision. Thus, when referring to representations in which the identity could be either Arab or Muslim and to refer to the conflated identity, I use “Arab/Muslim.” When there is a distinct identity to designate, whether Arab, Muslim, Arab American, or Muslim American, I use that particular term. More often, I use the term “Arab and Muslim identities” to capture that the identity in question could be either American or not. This is especially significant given that immediately after 9/11, it seemed that Arab and Muslim Americans would be represented sympathetically and Arabs and Muslims would not. However, as the “sleeper cell” threat permeated, all Arab and Muslim identities came to be suspect, and the “good” Arabs and Muslims became those who would help the United States fight Arab/Muslim terrorism—whether or not they were American.

Many of the representational modes examined in this book began in the late 1990s and then became common after 9/11. The shift around 9/11 is not one in which Arabs are represented solely as terrorists to one in which Arabs are represented sympathetically. It is from a few exceptional, sympathetic representations of Arabs and Muslim identities to a new representational strategy
whereby sympathetic representations are standardized as a stock feature of media narratives. A few films in the late 1990s—The Siege (1998) and Three Kings (1999) in particular—challenged the trend of representing Arabs and Muslims as one-dimensional stereotypes; these films offered a multidimensional terrorist character and included a “good” Arab or victimized Arab American when representing an evil Arab. During the era of the multicultural movement, when these films were produced, these strategies were considered “new” and “exceptional.” After 9/11 these strategies, especially that of including a “good” Arab American to counteract the “bad” or terrorist Arab, came to define the new standard when representing Arabs.

Post-9/11 as Post-Race?

While many associate the declaration of a postracial society with the 2008 election of Barack Obama, the first black president of the United States, the first pronouncement of a postracial society can be traced to shortly after the Civil War. Eighteen years after slavery was abolished in 1865, the Supreme Court, having made great strides to remedy racial inequality, was ready to declare the United States a postracial society and therefore requiring no further legal measures to combat racial discrimination. Postracial discourses have reappeared at landmark moments of racial contest, for example, at the end of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, after the multicultural movement in the 1990s, and after Obama’s election. Each time it has gained more and more momentum and cultural credibility. Such discourses consist of a set of beliefs that converge to posit that the United States has made such notable racial progress that racial discrimination has become rare and therefore governments should no longer consider race in their decision making. It perceives progress since the times of slavery, Jim Crow laws, and Japanese American internment as complete and has cross-ideological appeal, holding resonance for those who identify with the political right and left. This way of thinking was carried into the post-9/11 moment in which some citizens perceived the TV dramas and government speeches that portrayed Arabs and Muslims favorably as signaling, or even confirming, a postracial era. Some (i.e., the political right) even went as far as to say that racial profiling had nothing to do with racism and everything to do with national security. Racist policies and practices are advanced often through the very stance that purports to disavow it.

This move toward advancing a post-race ideology is linked to a co-optation of movements for racial equality. The civil rights movement led to a shift in U.S. government approaches to race and racism, from institutionalized white
supremacy to recognition of racial inequality as a problem and to institutionalizing antiracist policies.\textsuperscript{46} Howard Winant argues that while on the surface institutions implemented policies that advocated racial equality, in practice a repackaged version of white supremacy in the guise of color blindness was produced.\textsuperscript{47} In this notion of color blindness, racial inequality persists by “still resorting to exclusionism and scapegoating when politically necessary, still invoking the supposed superiority of ‘mainstream’ (aka white) values, and cheerfully maintaining that equality has been largely achieved.”\textsuperscript{48} Within this new racial formation that Jodi Melamed calls “neoliberal multiculturalism” and that Eduardo Bonilla-Silva calls “color-blind racism,” “racism constantly appears as disappearing according to conventional race categories, even as it takes on new forms that can signify as nonracial or even antiracist.”\textsuperscript{49} These new antiracist forms are aptly apparent when Guantanamo Bay prisoners are provided with copies of the Qur’an and time to pray as evidence of the cultural sensitivity of their captors; or when the USA PATRIOT Act contains a section that condemns discrimination against Arab and Muslim Americans. Such gestures attempt to subvert the focus from the violation of civil and human rights in favor of highlighting multiculturalism and racial sensitivity.\textsuperscript{50} The emergence of sympathetic representations of Arabs, Muslims, Arab Americans, and Muslim Americans similarly deflects attention from the persistence of racist policies and practices post-9/11.

While the civil rights movement focused on rectifying centuries of institutionalized racism, the multicultural movement, which began in the 1960s and culminated in the 1990s, sought to highlight and challenge the patriarchal, Eurocentric ideologies endemic to U.S. culture. These perspectives had become utterly normalized, and were evident in everything from educational curricula to media representations to everyday speech that, for example, referred to humans as “man” and figured white men as the standard identity. The multicultural movement of the 1990s shed light on how language and representations appeared to be neutral while in fact powerfully naturalizing inequalities. It influenced education by multiculturalizing curricula and influenced the media by multiculturalizing representations. It succeeded in shifting what was considered publicly acceptable language by introducing neutral language and practices regarding women, minorities, and differently abled people.

The efforts of multicultural activists, not surprisingly, were fiercely challenged and resisted by conservatives who dubbed the multicultural movement the “politically correct” (PC) movement. They claimed that multicultural activists were jeopardizing free speech by insisting on “politically correct” language and objected to being called racist or sexist if they expressed themselves freely. They also objected to curricular changes, claiming that multiculturalism posed a threat to a unified national identity that emerged from studying the history
of achievements of white men. Most important, they insisted that the goals of equality had been reached and that antiracist policies were no longer needed. They used a post-race argument against affirmative action policies in the 1990s, resulting in a series of legal cases that ended affirmative action in some states.\textsuperscript{51} Despite the racial progress that has undoubtedly been made, post-race declarations tend to deny the ongoing persistence of racism and “allows opponents of race-based remedies and programs to seem noble rather than racist.”\textsuperscript{52}

Just as the objectives of the civil rights movement were co-opted and diffused through government policies, the objectives of the multicultural movement were co-opted by the media, corporations, education, and government in the guise of “progressive gestures in the name of ‘diversity.’”\textsuperscript{53} The U.S. government, during the 1991 Gulf War, redefined its global image in representations of the military as racially diverse, ideologically united, and winning the war in Iraq. McAlister demonstrates how the U.S. government and media strategically portrayed the U.S. military as a force for multiculturalism and democracy while unresolved and heated debates over multiculturalism continued at home, providing the United States with a mandate to intervene globally. Similarly, television, news reporting, and film adopted the discourse of multiculturalism and diffused it, for example, by projecting a multicultural society (e.g., a black and white duo of cops fighting crime together) without addressing the persistence of structures of inequality (e.g., criminals are bad people, as opposed to being shaped by structures of inequality). As a result of the media’s co-optation of multiculturalism, explicit war propaganda, demonizing the enemy, and stereotyping are no longer the order of the day. Yet demonizing the enemy during times of war is not a thing of the past. Rather, it has assumed new forms.

\section*{Beyond Positive Representations}

The notion that the United States has overcome racism, while tantalizing, is deceptive. If we take these positive portrayals at face value, if we believe that complex characterizations of terrorists and valiant portrayals of patriotic Muslims do solve the problem of stereotyping, then racist policies and practices will persist under the guise of antiracism. A diversity of representations, even an abundance of sympathetic characters, does not in itself demonstrate the end of racism, nor does it solve the problem of racial stereotyping. As Ella Shohat, Robert Stam, Herman Gray, and other cultural studies scholars have shown, focusing on whether or not a particular image is either good or bad does not necessarily address the complexity of representation.\textsuperscript{54} Rather, it is important to examine the ideological work performed by images and story lines. Shohat and Stam write:
The focus on “good” and “bad” characters in image analysis confronts racist discourse on that discourse’s favored ground. It easily elides into moralism, and thus into fruitless debates about the relative virtues of fictive characters (seen not as constructs but as if they were real flesh-and-blood people) and the correctness of their fictional actions. This kind of anthropocentric moralism, deeply rooted in Manichean schemas of good and evil, leads to the treatment of complex political issues as if they were matters of individual ethics, in a manner reminiscent of the morality plays staged by the right, in which virtuous American heroes do battle against demonized Third World villains.55

The critical cultural studies approach that I employ strategically privileges the analysis of ideological work performed by images and story lines, as opposed to reading an image as negative or positive, and therefore gets us beyond reading a positive image as if it will eliminate stereotyping. If we interpret an image as either positive or negative, then we can conclude that the problem of racial stereotyping is over because of the appearance of sympathetic images of Arabs and Muslims during the War on Terror. However, an examination of the image in relation to its narrative context reveals how it participates in a larger field of meaning about Arabs and Muslims. The notion of a field of meaning, or an ideological field, is a means to encompass the range of acceptable ideas about the War on Terror, including highlighting the ideas that are on the margins and are therefore deemed unacceptable.

A critical cultural studies approach moves beyond linear race rehabilitation theories that suggest both that representations of Arabs in U.S. popular culture are following a trajectory from negative to positive images and that other racialized groups have followed this trajectory as a rite of passage toward assimilation.56 There is indeed a process of rehabilitation taking place, but it is one in which images of acceptable Arab and Muslim Americans are produced through the figure of the Arab American patriot or victim of post-9/11 hate crimes. This process of rehabilitation is certainly not unique to Arab and Muslim Americans. Native American images in Hollywood, for example, shifted from savages to noble savages in the 1930s, best typified by the Lone Ranger’s Native American sidekick, Tonto.57

The representational mode that has become standard since 9/11 seeks to balance a negative representation with a positive one, what I refer to throughout this book as “simplified complex representations.”58 This has meant that if an Arab/Muslim terrorist is represented in the story line of a TV drama or film, then a “positive” representation of an Arab, Muslim, Arab American, or Muslim American is typically included, seemingly to offset the stereotype of the Arab/Muslim terrorist. This feature of post-9/11 representations is consistent with Mahmood Mamdani’s claim that the public debate since the terrorist
attacks has involved a discourse about “good” and “bad” Muslims in which all Muslims are assumed to be bad until they perform and prove their allegiance to the U.S. nation. What makes a Muslim “good” or “bad” in this paradigm is not his or her relationship to Islam but rather to the United States. Though rare in U.S. history, after 9/11 this mode of representing “the enemy” became standard.

The result of the good/bad coupling is startling: at its most effective, the strategy creates a post-race illusion that absolves viewers from confronting the persistence of institutionalized racism. This reflects Gray’s argument that representations of the black middle-class family in television sitcoms of the 1980s and 1990s contributed to an illusion of racial equality. Gray acknowledges The Cosby Show for successfully recoding blackness away from images of the welfare queen and the drug dealer while simultaneously noting that it participated in rearticulating a new and more enlightened form of racism and contributed to an illusion of “feel-good multiculturalism and racial cooperation.” Sympathetic images of Arabs and Muslims after 9/11 give the impression that racism is not tolerated in the United States, despite the slew of policies that have targeted and disproportionately affected Arabs and Muslims.

Television dramas are critical sites for understanding the cultural politics of the War on Terror. The TV dramas I examine are a sampling of the broad genre of prime-time TV dramas. Nielsen ratings indicate that during these prime-time hours on any night of the week somewhere between 18 million and 30 million viewers will likely tune in to any given program on a major television network (ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX). The majority of these programs are sitcoms, “reality” shows, and dramas. Of these three prime-time genres, dramatic series are considered more likely to be “quality” television—a disputed category, needless to say, in itself—because they address controversial, realistic issues that either reflect current news stories or fundamental cultural, historical, or emotional conflicts. By analyzing prime-time TV dramas, their intersections with news reporting, and also nonprofit advertising, the parameters of the War on Terror’s ideological field is revealed. Nonprofit advertising, moreover, provides an important contrast to the commercial media’s representations of Arabs and Islam during the War on Terror.

A range of media, from the news and talk shows to TV dramas and even nonprofit advertising, have since September 11 engaged in debates on which measures were appropriate or justifiable in securing the nation—from racial profiling at airports to wiretapping telephones to indefinitely detaining or deporting Arab or Muslim men. Amid the increase in hate crimes and government policies that targeted and criminalized Arab and Muslim identities, and amid public support for such policies, how can we understand the proliferation
of sympathetic representations of Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. commercial media after 9/11? The discrepancy between the proliferation of sympathetic images about Arabs and Muslims and the simultaneous enactment of racist policies and practices that criminalized Arab and Muslim identities is the central problematic of this book. I am particularly concerned with the standardization of “positive,” sympathetic representations of Arab and Muslim identities during—and the myriad significance of these representations for—the Bush administration’s War on Terror, from September 11, 2001, to the end of his term in January 2009.

These seemingly positive representations of Arabs and Muslims have helped to form a new kind of racism, one that projects antiracism and multiculturalism on the surface but simultaneously produces the logics and affects necessary to legitimize racist policies and practices. It is no longer the case that the Other is explicitly demonized to justify war or injustice. Now, the Other is portrayed sympathetically in order to project the United States as an enlightened country that has entered a postracial era. This is accomplished through the following mechanisms: deploying seemingly complex story lines and characters that are in fact predictable and formulaic (chapter 1); evoking sympathy for the Arab/Muslim American plight while narrating the logic of exception (chapter 2); eliciting an excess of affect for oppressed Muslim women (chapter 3) while regulating sympathy for Muslim men (chapter 4); and producing narratives of multicultural inclusion that reproduce restrictive notions of Americanness and acceptable forms of Muslim American identity (chapter 5).

The book is organized in three parts: logics, affects, and challenges. Chapters 1 and 2 focus on the dual process of producing multicultural representations while advancing exclusionary logics. Chapter 1 explores how writers and producers of TV dramas deployed numerous representational strategies to circumvent reinscribing the stereotype of Arab/Muslim terrorists. I also examine how the debate about torture during the War on Terror often took place through debates about representations in TV dramas, demonstrating that TV dramas have been important sites that mediate the War on Terror. Chapter 2 examines representations of the Arab American plight in post-9/11 TV dramas, stories in which Arab Americans are victims of hate crimes and viewers are positioned to sympathize with their plight. I show how these sympathetic representations can reproduce logics of exception that are central to the War on Terror and justify the denial of rights to Arabs and Muslims.

Chapters 3 and 4 argue that the logics central to the War on Terror are not possible without their accompanying affects, showing how certain Muslim identities are designated as worthy of feeling while others are not. Chapters 3 and 4 are mirror images of each other, exploring the ways in which the boundaries of
feeling are policed differently in the case of Muslim women and Muslim men. Chapter 3 examines how Muslim women have for the most part become sites of public sympathy and moral outrage, and chapter 4 examines how Muslim men have become sites of moral disengagement. In the case of women, I pay special attention to the ways in which discourses of multiculturalism and feminism are co-opted by the government and media during the War on Terror. In the case of men, I trace how some journalists have located the causes of 9/11 in the dispositions of Muslim men, showing how sympathy toward Muslim men is strictly regulated through coding race, gender, religion, and sexuality.

Chapter 5 and the epilogue turn to the efforts of nonprofit organizations, civil rights groups, and sitcom writers and producers to challenge ideas that Arab culture and Islam are incompatible with and oppositional to the United States. Chapter 5 demonstrates how the government, a nonprofit organization, and a civil rights group used nonprofit advertising campaigns after 9/11 to mobilize a version of multiculturalism that I term “diversity patriotism.” I examine the ways in which public service announcements narrated Islam and the United States as compatible in an effort to inspire national unity during a time of crisis. The epilogue assesses the representational terrain almost a decade after 9/11 under the Obama administration. It considers whether there have been any changes since the Bush administration’s War on Terror and reviews recent sitcoms that present alternative representations of Arab and Muslim identities. In the book as a whole, I examine the role of the government and media in producing ideas about race, gender, sexuality, religion, civilization, and violence in the making, unmaking, and remaking of the War on Terror.