1   Challenging the Terrorist Stereotype

> Am I crazy or is attacking torture by lobbying the producers of 24
> almost as ridiculous as trying to make nuclear power plants safer by urg-
> ing the producers of *The Simpsons* to stop letting Homer play with
> plutonium in the lunchroom of the Springfield nuke plant?
> —Peter Carlson, *Washington Post*

> Intentionally or not—and for better and for worse—fiction can play a real role in the
> construction of political reality. Amid the global war on terror, those in Hollywood
> and those in Washington would do well to take heed of this fact about fiction.
> —Kelly M. Greenhill, *Los Angeles Times*

In 2004 the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) accused the TV drama 24 of perpetuating stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims.[1] CAIR objected to the persistent portrayal of Arabs and Muslims in the context of terrorism, stating that "repeated association of acts of terrorism with Islam will only serve to increase anti-Muslim prejudice."[2] CAIR's critics have retorted that programs like 24 are cutting edge, reflecting one of the most pressing social and political issues of the moment, the War on Terror. Some critics further contend that CAIR is trying to deflect the reality of Muslim terrorism by confining television writers to politically correct themes.[3]

The writers and producers of 24 have responded to CAIR's concerns in a number of ways. For one, the show often includes sympathetic portrayals of Arabs and Muslims, in which they are the "good guys" or in some way on the side of the United States. Representatives of 24 state that the show has "made a concerted effort to show ethnic, religious and political groups as multi-dimensional, and political issues are debated from multiple viewpoints."[4] The villains on the eight seasons of 24 are Russian, German, Latino, Arab/Muslim, Euro-American, and African, even the fictional president of the United States. Rotating the identity of the "bad guy" is one of the many strategies used by TV dramas to avoid reproducing the Arab/Muslim terrorist stereotype (or any other stereotypes, for that matter).[5] 24's responsiveness to such criticism even extended to creating a public service announcement (PSA) that was broadcast in February 2005, during one of the program's commercial breaks. The PSA featured the lead actor, Kiefer Sutherland, staring deadpan into the camera, reminding viewers that "the American Muslim community stands firmly beside

their fellow Americans in denouncing and resisting all forms of terrorism" and urging us to "please bear that in mind" while watching the program.[6]

CAIR is not the only organization that has lobbied 24 to change its representations. Whereas CAIR objected to stereotyping Arabs and Muslims as terrorists, the Parents Television Council, Human Rights First, and faculty from West Point Military Academy objected to 24's portrayal of torture as an effective method of interrogation. The Parents Television Council was concerned that children would become desensitized to torture; Human Rights First was concerned that viewers might come to perceive certain human beings as deserving of torture, not worthy of human rights; and the West Point faculty were concerned that some of their cadets believed torture was an effective method of interrogation because of 24's portrayal of it. Tony Lagouranis, former army interrogator, stated, "Among the things that I saw people doing [in Iraq] that they got from television was water-boarding, mock execution, using mock torture."[7]

Howard Gordon, one of the writers, responded by stating, "I think people can differentiate between a television show and reality."[8] The writers and producers of 24 explained that the show was fictional, that it was not intended as a documentary or military manual. They went on to say that the torture scenes are for dramatic, entertainment purposes only. Furthermore, the writers and producers of 24 stated that although the character Bauer uses torture and is a U.S. hero, torture is not glamorized because Bauer is traumatized by his use of torture. However, Joel Surnow, executive producer, defended the use of torture in the show, claiming, "We've had all of these torture experts come by recently, and they say, 'You don't realize how many people are affected by this. Be careful.' They say torture doesn't work. But I don't believe that. I don't think it's honest to say that if someone you love was being held, and you had five minutes to save them, you wouldn't do it." In contrast, Sutherland expressed concern about the "unintended consequences of the show." Fox Television network executive David Nevins admits that the show conveys a clear message on the War on Terror: "There's definitely a political attitude of the show, which is that extreme measures are sometimes necessary for the greater good. . . . The show doesn't have much patience for the niceties of civil liberties or due process."[9]

In November 2006 members of Human Rights First and West Point met with the writers and producers of 24 to address the potential impact of their representations of torture.[10] David Danzig, manager at Human Rights First, explained that the meeting was difficult for 24's writers and producers because "they have a hugely popular show, and we were suggesting to them that they do something actually a little bit risky, which is change their format. And there's obviously a lot of money at stake." Though the 24 crew insisted their depiction

of torture should not have an influence on its viewers, it is interesting to note that the story line of the next season (which debuted on January 13, 2008, fourteen months after the meeting) involved Jack Bauer being tried by the U.S. government for his illegal use of torture.

This chapter explores this slippery realm between representations and their potential impacts. Through each facet of this discussion, what arises is a fact that is utterly taken for granted: television mediates the War on Terror. Between 2001 and 2009 the fictional creations of a tiny number of artists and executives shaped the ways that viewer-citizens engaged with the very real war going on around us. As indicated in the opening epigraph, the journalist Peter Carlson thinks that it is ridiculous that a TV drama, rather than the U.S. government, was criticized for its role in torture (and for its *representation* at that). Whether ridiculous or not, the journalist Kelly Greenhill asserts that it is important to take seriously the power of TV dramas to shape public perceptions of the War on Terror. Throughout the Bush years, TV shows became a crucial way that Americans saw, thought about, and talked about the United States in a state of emergency after 9/11. Public debate, it sometimes seemed, was displaced onto TV dramas. The slippage between debating a television show and debating a government's policies and practices demonstrates the significance of TV dramas during the War on Terror.

After September 11, 2001, a number of TV dramas were created using the War on Terror as their central theme. Dramas such as *24* (2001–11), *Threat Matrix* (2003–4), *The Grid* (2004), *Sleeper Cell* (2005–6), and *The Wanted* (2009) depict U.S. government agencies and officials heroically working to make the nation safe by battling terrorism.[11] A prominent feature of these television shows is Arab and Muslim characters, most of which are portrayed as grave threats to U.S. national security. But in response to increased popular awareness of ethnic stereotyping and the active monitoring of Arab and Muslim watchdog groups, television writers have had to adjust their story lines to avoid blatant, crude stereotyping.

24 and *Sleeper Cell* were among the most popular of the fast-emerging post-9/11 genre of terrorism dramas. *24* centered on Jack Bauer, a brooding and embattled agent of the government's Counter-Terrorism Unit (CTU) who raced a ticking clock to subvert impending terrorist attacks on the United States. The title refers to a twenty-four-hour state of emergency, and each of a given season's twenty-four episodes represented one hour of "real" time. *Sleeper Cell* was not as popular as *24*, partly because it was broadcast on the cable network Showtime and therefore had a much smaller audience. While *24* lasted eight seasons, *Sleeper Cell* lasted two. *Sleeper Cell*'s story line revolved around an undercover African American Muslim FBI agent who infiltrates a group of homegrown

terrorists (the "cell" of the show's title) in order to subvert their planned attack on the United States.

This chapter draws from the many TV dramas but especially *24* and *Sleeper Cell* that either revolved around themes of terrorism or the War on Terror or included a few episodes on these themes. I begin by mapping the representational strategies that have become standard since the multicultural movement of the 1990s and discussing the ideological work performed by them through simplified complex representations. I then ask, If writers and producers of TV dramas are making efforts at more complex representations, how are viewers responding to them? Finally, I address the concerns expressed by various organizations regarding representations of torture on TV dramas.

Simplified Complex Representations

Simplified complex representations are strategies used by television producers, writers, and directors to give the impression that the representations they are producing are complex. While I focus on television, film uses these strategies as well. Below I lay out what I have found to be the most common ways that writers and producers of television dramas have depicted Arab and Muslim characters after 9/11. While some of these were used more frequently (and to greater narrative success) than others, they all help to shape the many layers of simplified complexity. I argue that simplified complex representations are the representational mode of the so-called post-race era, signifying a new era of racial representation. These representations appear to challenge or complicate former stereotypes and contribute to a multicultural or post-race illusion. Yet at the same time, most of the programs that employ simplified complex representational strategies promote logics that legitimize racist policies and practices, such as torturing Arabs and Muslims. I create a list of some of these strategies in order to outline the parameters of simplified complex representations and to facilitate ways to identify such strategies.

Strategy #1: Inserting Patriotic Arab or Muslim Americans

Between 2001 and 2009 television writers increasingly created "positive" Arab and Muslim characters to show that they are sensitive to negative stereotyping. Such characters usually take the form of a patriotic Arab or Muslim American who assists the U.S. government in its fight against Arab/Muslim terrorism, either as a government agent or as a civilian. Some examples of this strategy include Mohammad "Mo" Hassain, an Arab American Muslim character who is part of the USA Homeland Security Force on the show *Threat Matrix*;

Figure 1.1. Strategies 1 and 6, the cast of 24, Season 4. Marisol Nichols, who plays Counter Terrorism Unit agent Nadia Yasir, is pictured on the far right (strategy 1). The multicultural cast (strategy 6) includes an African American president, Wayne Palmer, played by D. B. Woodside, pictured fourth from the left.

Nadia Yassir, in season 6 of 24, a dedicated member of the CTU;[12] and in *Sleeper Cell* the lead African American character, Darwyn Al-Sayeed, a "good" Muslim who is an undercover FBI agent who proclaims to his colleagues that terrorists have nothing to do with his faith and cautions them not to confuse the two.[13] In a fourth-season episode of 24, two Arab American brothers say they are tired of being unjustly blamed for terrorist attacks and insist on helping to fight terrorism alongside Jack Bauer.[14] Islam is sometimes portrayed as inspiring U.S. patriotism rather than terrorism.[15] This bevy of characters makes up the most common group of post-9/11 Arab/Muslim depictions. This strategy challenges the notion that Arabs and Muslims are not American and/or un-American. Judging from the numbers of these patriots, it appears that writers have embraced this strategy as the most direct method to counteract charges of stereotyping.

Strategy #2: Sympathizing with the Plight of Arab and Muslim Americans after 9/11

Multiple stories appeared on TV dramas with Arab/Muslim Americans as the unjust victims of violence and harassment (see chapter 2). The viewer is nearly always positioned to sympathize with their plight. In an episode of *The Practice* the government detains an innocent Arab American without due process or explanation, and an attorney steps in to defend his rights.[16] On *7th Heaven* Ruthie's Muslim friend, Yasmine, is harassed on her way to school, prompting

the Camden family and their larger neighborhood to stand together to fight discrimination.[17] This emphasis on victimization and sympathy challenges long-standing representations that have inspired a lack of sympathy and even a sense of celebration when the Arab/Muslim character is killed.

Strategy #3: Challenging the Arab/Muslim Conflation with Diverse Muslim Identities

Sleeper Cell prides itself on being unique among TV dramas that deal with the topic of terrorism because of its diverse cast of Muslim terrorists. It challenges the common conflation of Arab and Muslim identities. While the ringleader of the cell, Faris al-Farik, is an Arab, the other members are not: they are Bosnian, French, Euro-American, Western European, and Latino; one character is a gay Iraqi Brit. Portraying diverse sleeper cell members strategically challenges how Arab and Muslim identities are often conflated by government discourses and media representations by demonstrating that all Arabs are not Muslim and all Muslims are not Arab and, further, that not all Arabs and Muslims are heterosexual. In addition, the program highlights a struggle within Islam over who will define the religion, thus demonstrating that not all Muslims advocate terrorism. For example, in one episode a Yemeni imam comes to Los Angeles to deprogram Muslim extremists and plans to issue a fatwa against terrorism.[18] These diverse characters, and their heated debates for and against terrorism, indeed distinguish *Sleeper Cell* from the rest of the genre. But this strategy of challenging the Arab/Muslim conflation is remarkable in part because of its infrequency.

Strategy #4: Flipping the Enemy

"Flipping the enemy" involves leading the viewer to believe that Muslim terrorists are plotting to destroy the United States and then revealing that those Muslims are merely pawns for Euro-American or European terrorists. The identity of the enemy is thus flipped: viewers discover that the terrorist is not Arab, or they find that the Arab or Muslim terrorist is part of a larger network of international terrorists. On 24, Bauer spends the first half of season 2 tracking down a Middle Eastern terrorist cell, ultimately subverting a nuclear attack. In the second half of the season, we discover that European and Euro-American businessmen are behind the attack, goading the United States into declaring a war on the Middle East in order to benefit from the increase in oil prices. Related to this subversion of expectations, 24 does not glorify the United States; in numerous ways the show dismantles the notion that the United States is perfect and the rest of the world flawed. FBI and CIA agents
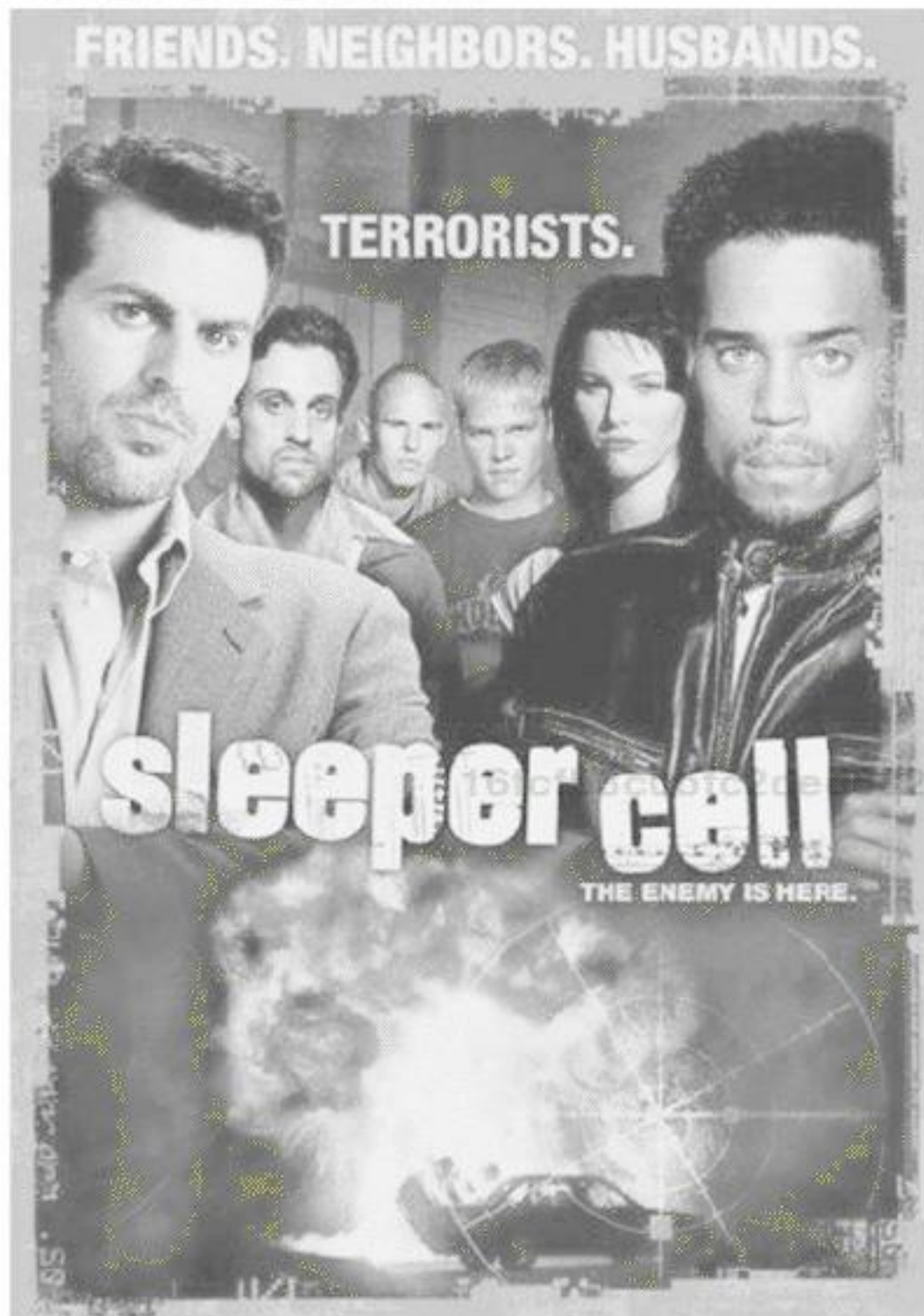
Figure 1.2. Strategy 3, Challenging the Arab/Muslim conflation and representing diverse Muslim identities. DVD cover of *Sleeper Cell*.

are incompetent; other government agents conspire with the terrorists; the terrorists (Arab and Muslim alike) are portrayed as very intelligent. Flipping the enemy demonstrates that terrorism is not an Arab or Muslim monopoly.

Strategy #5: Humanizing the Terrorist

Most Arab and Muslim terrorists in film or on television before 9/11 were stock villains, one-dimensional bad guys who were presumably bad because of their ethnic background or religious beliefs.[19] In contrast, post-9/11 terrorist characters are humanized in a variety of ways. We see them in a family context, as loving fathers and husbands; we come to learn their back stories and glimpse moments that have brought them to the precipice of terror. In 2005 *24* introduced viewers to a Middle Eastern family for the first time on U.S. network
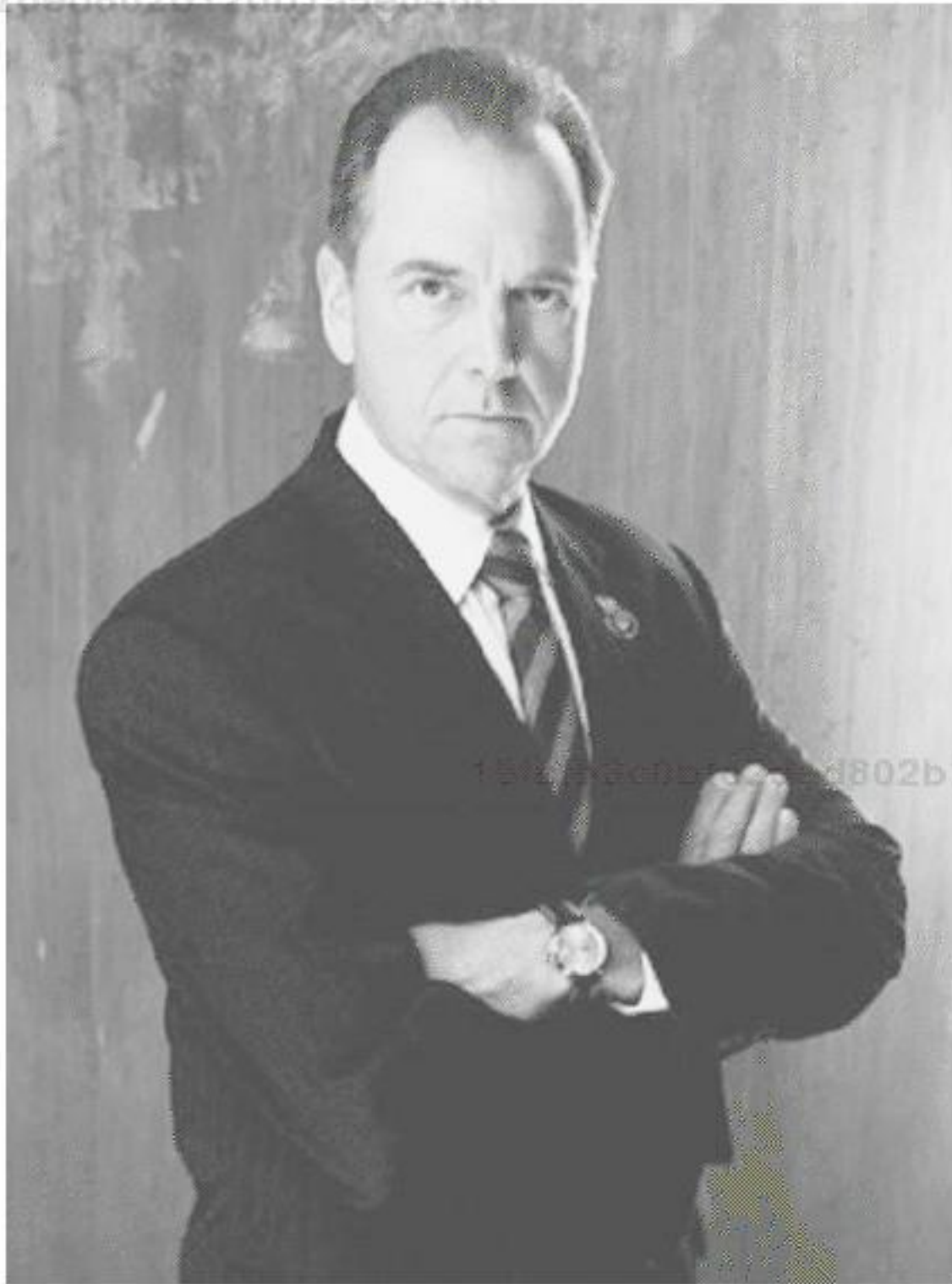
Figure 1.3. Strategy 4, Flipping the Enemy. During Season 5 of 24,
Gregory Itzen plays U.S. President Charles Logan, who conspires
with the terrorists.

television (in a recurring role for most of the season, as opposed to a one-time
appearance). In their first scene they seem like an "ordinary" family—mother,
father, and teenage son—preparing breakfast. It is soon revealed, however, that
they are a sleeper cell; in the episodes that follow, each family member's rela-
tionship to terrorism is explored. The father is willing to kill his wife and son
in order to complete his mission; the mother reconsiders her involvement with
terrorism only to protect her son; and the teenage son, raised in the United
States, is portrayed with an evolving sense of humanity that ultimately prevents
him from being a terrorist. This strategy—humanizing the terrorists by focus-
ing on their interpersonal relationships, motives, and back stories—is also cen-
tral to *Sleeper Cell.* Each member has his or her personal motivation for joining
the cell: to rebel against a leftist liberal parent (a professor at the University of
California, Berkeley); to seek revenge against the United States for the death

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of family members (one character's husband was killed by U.S. forces in Iraq). Adding multiple dimensions to the formerly one-dimensional bad guy has become increasingly common since 9/11.

Strategy #6: Projecting a Multicultural U.S. Society

Projecting a multicultural U.S. society is another strategy to circumvent accusations of racism while representing Arabs and Muslims as terrorists. In *Sleeper Cell*, the terrorists are of diverse ethnic backgrounds, and Darwyn, the African American FBI agent, is in an interracial relationship with a white woman. For several seasons of *24*, the U.S. president was African American, his press secretary Asian American; the Counter Terrorist Unit is equally diverse, peppered with Latinos and African Americans throughout the show's eight seasons. The sum total of the casting decisions creates the impression of a United States in which multiculturalism abounds. The projected society is one in which people of different racial backgrounds work together and racism is socially unacceptable.

Strategy #7: Fictionalizing the Middle Eastern or Muslim Country

It has become increasingly common for the country of the terrorist characters in television dramas to go unnamed. This strategy rests on the assumption that leaving the nationality of the villain open eliminates the potential for offensiveness; if no specific country or ethnicity is named, then there is less reason for any particular group to be offended by the portrayal. In season 4 of *24*, the terrorist family is from an unnamed Middle Eastern country, possibly Turkey; it is, we assume, intentionally left ambiguous. In *The West Wing*, the fictional country "Qumar" is a source of terrorist plots; in season 8 of *24*, it is "Kamistan." But the name of country doesn't always connote the Middle East. For example, in season 7 of *24*, the African country "Sangala" is an important source of terrorism. Fictionalizing the country of the terrorist can give a show more latitude in creating salacious story lines that might be criticized if identified with an actual country.

The seven representational strategies I have found are not exhaustive, nor are they all new to our post-9/11 world. Rather, these strategies collectively outline some of the ways in which writers and producers of television (and film) have sought to improve representations of Arabs (and other racial and ethnic groups). These strategies are an astounding shift in the mass entertainment landscape. They present an important departure from stereotypes into more challenging stories and characters. This new breed of terrorism programs reflects a growing sensitivity to the negative impact of stereotyping. These new representational strategies seek to make the point—indeed, often with strenuous effort—that

Figure 1.4. Strategy 7: Fictionalizing the Middle Eastern or Muslim country. A map of Qumar, *The West Wing*.

not all Arabs are terrorists and not all terrorists are Arabs. However, for all their innovations, these programs remain wedded to a script that represents Arabs and Muslims only in the context of terrorism and therefore do not effectively challenge the stereotypical representations of Arabs and Muslims.

Stuart Hall has claimed that even those with the best intentions, liberal writers and producers who seek to subvert racial hierarchies, may inadvertently participate in inferential racism, that is, "apparently naturalized representations of events and situations relating to race, whether 'factual' or 'fictional,' which have racist premises and propositions inscribed in them as a set of unquestioned assumptions."[20] The persistent unquestioned assumption in these TV dramas is that Arabs and Muslims are terrorists, despite writers' efforts to create a wider range of Arab and Muslim characters. The primary objective of commercial television networks is not education, social justice, or social change. Rather, the goal is financial, to keep as many viewers watching for as long as possible. Television must therefore strike a balance between keeping its products as engaging as possible and not offending potential viewers. Writers thus seem to be constrained and influenced by two factors: viewers have been primed to assume that Arabs/Muslims are terrorists, and therefore writers create what viewers expect and what will sell; at the same time, some viewers are particularly sensitive and fed up with stereotypes, and therefore writers must create a more diverse world of characters. The results are some modifications to avoid being offensive while perpetuating core stereotypes that continue to have cultural capital.[21] Post-9/11 television is testimony to the fact that the stereotypes that held sway for much of the twentieth century are no longer socially

acceptable—at least in their most blatant forms. But this does not mean that such stereotypes (and viewers' taste for them) have actually gone away; they have only become covert. Simplified complex representational strategies reflect the commodification of the civil rights and multiculturalist movements. The commodification of multiculturalism, while reflecting the sensibilities of some viewers, is submerged under the more prominent consumable message that Arabs and Muslims pose a terrorist threat to American life and freedom.

These strategies attempt to make representations complex, yet do so in a simplified way; they are predictable strategies that can be relied on if the plot involves an Arab or Muslim terrorist but are a new standard alternative to (and seem a great improvement on) the stock ethnic villains of the past. Under the guise of complexity, these representational strategies construct "good" and "bad" Arabs and Muslims, reinforcing a narrow conception of what constitutes a "good" Arab or Muslim.[22] "Bad" Arabs or Muslims are the terrorists, and their "good" counterparts are those who help the U.S. government fight terrorism. Despite the shift away from the more blatant stereotypes of previous decades, Arab and Muslim identities are still understood and evaluated primarily in relation to terrorism. This binary focus, in turn, overpowers the strategies described above. Though some television writers might certainly have humane motives and though some producers might honestly desire to create innovative shows, devoid of stereotypes, any such efforts are overwhelmed by the sheer momentum of our current representational scheme. Thus representations of Arab and Muslim identities in contexts that have nothing to do with terrorism remain strikingly unusual in the U.S. commercial media.[23]

Inserting a patriotic Arab or Muslim American or fictionalizing Middle Eastern countries are ineffectual devices if Arabs, Muslims, Arab Americans, and Muslim Americans continue to be portrayed through the narrow lens of "good" or "bad" in the fight against terrorism. Casting actors of color to give the impression of a postracial society propagates the comforting notion of an enlightened society that has resolved all its racial problems. The various strategies used in the first decade of the War on Terror are akin to a Band-Aid over a still-festering wound. They give the impression of comfort, perhaps even of cure, but the fundamental problem remains.

While these representational strategies that challenge the stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims were being broadcast, circulated, and consumed, real Arabs and Muslims were being detained, deported, held without due process, and tortured. Certainly not all Arabs and Muslims were subject to post-9/11 harassment. Nonetheless, what I am arguing is that simplified complex racial representations—a new representational mode collectively constructed by these multiple representational strategies—performs the ideological work of

producing a post-race moment in which denying the severity of the persistence of institutionalized racism becomes possible. These TV dramas produce reassurance that racial sensitivity is the norm in U.S. society while simultaneously perpetuating the dominant perception of Arabs and Muslims as threats to U.S. national security.

These complex characters and story lines fall short of subverting stereotypes. Fictionalizing Arab and Muslim countries, for example, tends to add to the conflation and generalization of Arab and Muslim identities by implying that terrorism originates from a fictional country that could be any of a number of Arab/Muslim countries. The specificity of the context becomes irrelevant. Furthermore, viewers are well aware that the fictionalized country is supposed to be Arab or Muslim. These fictionalized countries operate as allegories—standing in as doubles for the "real"—and in turn illustrate how the real sites where the United States is waging its War on Terror (Iraq and Afghanistan) often feel like abstract or even fictional locations to viewers.

This fictionalizing strategy has many precedents. Fictional Latin America, with locations such as San Pasquale in *Commander in Chief* (2005), Tecala in *Proof of Life* (2000), and Curaguay in *The A-Team* (1983–86), has been a staple of mainstream film and television for decades. Similarly, fictional "Arabia" is not a new representational strategy; rather it is a strategy that is making a comeback. The Hollywood film *Harum Scarum* (1965), starring Elvis Presley, for example, takes place in "Abulstan" and "Lunacan." Disney's *Aladdin* (1992) takes place in "Agrabah." Originally set in Baghdad, the location was changed to avoid associating this fairy tale with the Gulf War.[24] These films seek to trade on the West's long-standing, and carefully cultivated, notions of an imaginary, fantastical, and exoticized East. Recent films and television shows emphasize their portrayal of actual locations, to heighten the sense of place and create presumably realistic depictions of current and historical events. Post-9/11 TV dramas have merely conflated their methods, emphasizing their "realistic" story lines—"ripped from the headlines," as *Law and Order* and others advertise—in the ideological safety of fictionalized locations.

Simplified complex representations are also deceptive: they offer a limited field of explanation of the War on Terror under the guise of an expanded field of explanation. Audiences are given the impression that multiple positions and perspectives have been considered, for example, by exploring the motives of terrorists. Terrorism, according to *Sleeper Cell*, is caused by disaffected non-Arabs who turn to fundamentalist Islam and Arabs who embrace fundamentalist ideologies. Consistent with what Mamdani calls "culture talk"—the notion that terrorism can be explained merely by examining Arab or Muslim "culture"— the series perpetuates the idea, circulating in popular culture since at least the

1970s, that Arabs and Muslims have a monopoly on terrorism.[25] The motives for terrorism that are presented often lack real depth or exploration. These plot lines are, however, gripping, making it is easy to ignore all that remains unchanged and the way in which the dominant discourse of the United States as an innocent victim of terrorism is maintained.

Simplified complex representational strategies attempt to challenge the Arab/Muslim terrorist stereotype by making concessions to how violence, sympathy, and context are framed. The Arab terrorist stereotype has emerged not only through repeating this one-dimensional character in films, news reports, and government speeches but also through its particular framing. The Arab terrorist stereotype was born from a fundamental distinction: violence perpetrated by Arabs and Muslims is framed as illegitimate; violence committed by the United States is legitimate, indeed necessary to democracy, freedom, and peace. What makes a terrorist a "terrorist"—a pejorative term, in comparison to "freedom fighter"—is that the violence is illegitimate because it is targeting innocents and because it is senseless or without a moral outcome. "Arab/Muslim terrorists" in the U.S. media have historically been portrayed as seeking power or chaos; the United States, in contrast, is consistently portrayed as fighting to preserve equality. Recent television dramas seem to challenge this basic distinction. Behind the grim certainty of Jack Bauer's fatalism, 24 seems to relish its portrayals of the U.S. government as flawed and at moments even morally bankrupt. Similarly, *Sleeper Cell* provides its terrorist characters with ample opportunity to state their grievances; their backstories appear to lend a degree of legitimacy to their violence. However, in the broader arc of these shows—with their eventual, if tortured, triumph against evil—such grievances are ultimately framed as illegitimate. The complexities of history and religion are eventually boiled down to Arab/Muslim individuals spewing nonsensical, hateful rhetoric at the United States or Israel. Furthermore, the portrayal of Arab/Muslim terrorists as well organized and intelligent, while a departure from previous representations of incompetent Arab/Muslim terrorists, conveys the idea that the threat is "real" and that the United States is still smarter since the terrorists are outsmarted in TV dramas.

As with all instances of framing, what is not shown is as important as what is.[26] While it has become increasingly common to show the verbal tirades of Arab terrorists, promising to free their country from U.S. foreign policies, it is uncommon for the context of such references to be adequately addressed. The concept of freeing an Arab country from the negative impacts of U.S. foreign policies remains abstract, since viewers don't see the daily realities of those countries. Both the suffering of Palestinians living under Israeli military occupation that is supported by U.S. policies and the suffering of the Iraqi people

as a result of a decade of U.S. sanctions are absent from the story line. This absence operates to ensure that any consideration of their violence as legitimate remains taboo. Thus while simplified complex representational strategies make concessions to complexity—giving voice to the grievances of terrorist characters, allowing us to see them in the context of their families—"their" violence remains incomprehensible, beyond reason, and in the service of hatred.

How violence is framed, including what parts of the story are intentionally left absent, is intimately connected to how sympathy is framed and who is represented as deserving or undeserving of the audience's sympathies. Because terrorists commit senseless acts of violence, because they are the "bad" guys, they are not deserving of sympathy. By contrast, the "good" Arab/Muslim characters—patriotic Americans and innocent victims of post-9/11 hate crimes—are positioned as worthy of sympathy. These dramas are remarkable in that they encourage a post-9/11 audience to root for certain Arab and Muslim characters and to feel sadness—even outrage—when those characters are unfairly attacked. But such sympathy, it becomes clear, is possible only because of the basic good/bad binary. We root for these unlikely good guys because they challenge (though they don't overturn) our cultural assumption that the Arab/Muslim character is the bad guy. These concessions are reflective of the "post-race" moment. Gray states that representations of blackness in the 1980s and 1990s rewrote "a strife-ridden past into a harmonized vision of possibility" and in so doing made it difficult to differentiate between "progressive political possibilities" and "neoliberal and conservative rewrites of the same old racial narratives."[27] Similarly, post-9/11 TV dramas, through multidimensional characters and story lines, construct an internal logic of racial sensitivity and diversity that makes it increasingly difficult to differentiate between new Arab and Muslim representations and the reinscription of long-standing stereotypes.

Responding to Simplified Complex Representations

Television executives are complicating their story lines in an effort to avoid reproducing stereotypes and to project racial sensitivity. Their choices reflect an era in which blatant racism is for the most part no longer tolerated by mainstream U.S. culture. So if TV shows are responding to broader cultural trends, what about the flipside: how is the broader culture responding to them? To what extent do simplified complex representations influence viewer responses? What do TV critics and viewers say about portrayals of Arabs and Muslims?

The range of critiques offered by film and television critics tends to fall along ideological lines. Yet, surprisingly, the differentiation is not that drastic. Taking *Sleeper Cell* as a case study of viewer responses, we find that political

conservatives, or those on the right, tend toward harsh criticism of these representational strategies, claiming that they prioritize political correctness over an accurate portrayal of the very real Arab/Muslim threat to U.S. national security. Political liberals, or those on the left, tend to acknowledge *Sleeper Cell*'s attempt to offer alternative representations of Muslims but nevertheless criticize it for being pedantic. Both sets of responses demonstrate the limited impact of these representational strategies and how—despite their efforts at complexity—they devolve toward a problematic simplicity.

The conservative writer Dorothy Rabinowitz, in her review for the *Wall Street Journal*, states:

> SHOWTIME'S *Sleeper Cell* won't make viewers particularly happy, its intention being, evidently, to teach rather than to delight—a worthy enterprise in this case, and one, it turns out that's also highly compelling most of the time. The 10-part series . . . is clearly meant to represent varying aspects of Muslim society—in particular attitudes towards terrorism. . . . with a didactic streak more than a little evident.
>
> Its strains and balancing efforts aside, it is soon obvious that there's much in this story about the day-to-day planning and training for a terror strike that should enthrall—and chill—audiences.[28]

Rabinowitz describes *Sleeper Cell*'s teaching mission and its intention to give voice to "Muslims opposed to Islamic extremists" as efforts that will not please viewers. What will please audiences, she goes on to say, are the parts of the show that portray views that "are common in numerous quarters of the radical Islamic world"—in other words, its portrayal of the Muslim threat to U.S. national security.

The criticism of liberal writers tends to focus on how the educational thrust of *Sleeper Cell* compromises its entertainment quality. A reviewer for the *Village Voice*, Joy Press, writes:

> *Sleeper Cell* moves way too slowly to get anyone's pulse racing—except maybe the Arab American community, which will almost certainly protest, despite the writers' awkward attempts to give equal screen time to "good" and "bad" Muslims. . . . Not only does *Sleeper Cell* fan free-form paranoia about Arabs, foreigners, and loners (hey, maybe that next-door neighbor with the funny accent is a terrorist after all!), but it plants the idea that the people meant to be protecting us from amorphous terror might be as inept as Inspector Clouseau—or even former FEMA chief Michael Brown. What could be scarier than that?[29]

This reviewer conflates Arabs and Muslims, despite *Sleeper Cell*'s efforts to challenge that conflation, and criticizes the TV drama for fueling the public's fears about sleeper cells and inept government officials. While conservative perspectives tend to praise TV dramas such as *Sleeper Cell* for instilling fear in the

American public (though they are critical of portrayals of the US government as inept), liberal perspectives tend to be critical of fear-mongering.

The show's attempt to challenge the Arab/Muslim/Sikh conflation does not go unnoticed by Gillian Flynn, though she finds plenty of other faults with the show. She writes for *Entertainment Weekly*:

> Strange that only four years after we were forced to add phrases like sleeper cell to our vocabulary so much of a series about terrorists on American soil can feel cliché. Showtime's nine-part *Sleeper Cell*, about a small group of Muslim extremists and the undercover agent who's infiltrated their band, has every feature that every movie involving post-9/11 terrorism seems to deem essential. The optimistically named agent Darwyn al-Sayeed (Michael Ealy) is himself a Muslim, leading to the obligatory declaration that the extremists are distorting the word of the Koran. "These guys have nothing to do with my faith," he proclaims. At various points, the terrorists decry football and American arrogance, a trait highlighted in one scene in which some frat types harass a Sikh, mistaking him for an Arab, and allowing Mr. Survival of the Fittest to explain to them and us the differences between the cultures. These are all certainly important points, but Sleeper makes them artlessly—yet with a confounding confidence that it's teaching us something new. . . . We know it, we've heard it, find a slicker approach.[30]

Some liberal television critics, in other words, claim that the pedantic quality of these representational strategies compromise their entertainment value. John Leonard writes for *New York* magazine, "*Sleeper Cell* tries laudably to entertain us and to complicate us simultaneously. But we also experience the Stockholm syndrome in reverse. The more time we spend with these people, the less we care about them."[31] And Joan Juliet Buck writes for *Vogue*, "The earnest realism of *Sleeper Cell* adds up to an exploitative and inept piece of garbage."[32]

In contrast to television critics who acknowledge and criticize these representational strategies, many viewer posts on the Internet tend to praise *Sleeper Cell* for educating the public—not on the diversity of Muslims, but on the ongoing Arab/Muslim terrorist threat to national security. Not surprisingly, there are a wide array of viewer responses on Internet forums devoted to television shows. Some (e.g., tampafilmfan.com) are run by individuals, others (e.g., tvsquad.com) by corporations such as AOL and News Corporation. These websites allow everyone and anyone to be a critic and to anonymously "talk back"—consistent with the new culture of viewer feedback initiated by major networks such as CNN, which has shifted its news format to invite and include viewer perspectives. Some viewer posts focus on whether *24* or *Sleeper Cell* is more entertaining; others discuss the "hotness" of the actors; still others say what they would like to see happen in the story line—who will fall in love, who will

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be avenged, and so on. My focus here is on a particular strain of responses—those that focus on the realism of the show and reflect a collapsed distinction between television and politics.

A recurring theme in viewer comments is *Sleeper Cell's* realism, its presumed "realistic" portrayal of the War on Terror and the Muslim threat to U.S. national security. One viewer, Mike Rankin, writes:

> I loved it for being fearlessly honest when it comes to the true face of our real enemies—not turning them into generic, PC comicbook versions of themselves.... Unlike most political thrillers from Hollywood, the bad guys didn't turn out to be the American military or the military-industrial complex or the oil companies or our own corrupt politicians. The enemy was the enemy, from start to finish—Islamic extremists who would be happy to see our entire civilization turned to dust.[33]

Rankin is discussing the "flipping the enemy" strategy and indirectly critiquing 24 (and a smattering of Hollywood films) for portraying Americans as complicit in terrorism. He articulates a preference for *Sleeper Cell* over other TV dramas because Muslims are the sole enemy; no others are implicated along the way; no one else diffuses the potency of an Arab/Muslim threat. This post reflects how TV dramas can be used to make claims to "truth" and "realness"—and how viewers can use them to confirm their own suspicions about what is real. The emphasis here is not on an appreciation for representing diverse Muslims but rather on educating the public on the War on Terror and the Arab/Muslim terrorist threat. This viewer seeks programming that affirms an "us" and a "them" and appreciates a drama that reinscribes conceptions of the domestic and foreign wherein the foreign is signified as a threat.

Similar commentary is made by a poster who identifies himself as a military officer:

> I am an NCO in the United States Army. After four over seas tours in the last four and a half years I was beginning to get a little tired of my job. Then *Sleeper Cell* fell into my lap. It truly reminded me why I do what I do every day. I Sit and watch the tv and hear all the negative stuff the media puts out and I get very discouraged. I am out here everyday watching along with my brothers and sisters in arms as we rebuild a torn country. I see us out there working with the MUSLIM society giving entire cities electricity for the first time ever, giving school supplies and clothing to kids, watching as grown Iraqi men break down and cry because we put a new roof on his adobe house and many other things that never make the news. I know this is a fictional story but it is so real to life that it made me get right back in the fight and remember why I am over here doing what I do. I beg Showtime to continue this show if for nothing else but to make America aware of the real terror that faces our blessed nation. Plus it make for one hell of a pass time. BRING THE SHOW BACK SHOWTIME!!!!SGT SIEBRASSEBAL AD IRAQ.[34]

The military officer acknowledges that *Sleeper Cell* is fictional, yet insists that it is realistic to the extent that it inspires him to continue participating in the War on Terror. Drawing on dominant discourses from the Bush administration, Sergeant Siebrasse articulates the benevolent role of the United States during the War on the Terror. According to him, "the Muslim" is either a terrorist or a victim in need of rescue by the United States.

Other viewers have also emphasized the realism of this "educational" drama on the War on Terror and expressed disappointment that the show was not renewed for a third season:

> I am so upset that they have totally taken off *Sleeper Cell*. . . . We should fight for this show to be put back on, it is the world we live in today with these *Sleeper Cell*s living among us they would just soon chop our heads off. These are doctors, teachers, nanny's so this show is so important to know the knowledge of these TERRORIST living among us and our children. So for them to take off a show full of info. is down right stupid. Instead they want to put on filth, yea don't educate us any on the TERRORIST who want us all dead.[35]

This Internet poster, Isebella, discusses *Sleeper Cell* as if there is no distinction between the show and the War on Terror itself. The people she refers to as terrorists living among us, nannies and teachers, are the covers of two of the show's characters.

Such elisions between televised fiction and historical reality are common across fan forums. Statements like these are perhaps the greatest possible compliment for a show like *Sleeper Cell*, whose claim to artistic significance draws primarily on its urgent declarations of its authenticity. Writers and producers of *Sleeper Cell* pride themselves on their realism, in particular, their use of current events in the plotlines, filming at actual locations (e.g., Los Angeles International Airport), and consulting with members of the FBI and experts on Islam. These elisions are also a backhanded compliment to the mainstream news media, which has made television reporting into a similarly urgent, fast-paced action narrative that aspires to hold viewers in the grip of its dramatic authenticity. When these two cultural strands are both successful, their borders blur; TV dramas about the War on Terror often come to stand in for non-fictional accounts of the War on Terror.

Surprisingly, many post-9/11 TV dramas whose central theme is the War on Terror did not succeed past a season or two; some did not last longer than a few episodes. Why did they fail to capture audiences given the ripped-from-the-headlines relevance of their plots and ability to capitalize on post-9/11 fear? *The Wanted*, meant to be a documentary version of 24 with CIA agents investigating and combating terrorism, lasted a mere two episodes. It was attacked by critics for promoting questionable journalistic standards and by viewers for being

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contrived, empty propaganda. In contrast, *Sleeper Cell* was often criticized for being preachy and for trying to teach rather than entertain.[36] 24 was the only show that succeeded for multiple seasons; it was applauded for the ticking time bomb scenario that defines the show and keeps viewers on the edge of their seats. One of the keys to its success, at least as evidenced from the fan forums, is an apparent absence of pedagogy. It seems that viewers and critics alike criticize shows with an educational thrust. However, the "education" that is the focus of criticism is the diverse portrayals of Arab and Muslim identities, as opposed to the presumed "education" on the "reality" of the Arab/Muslim threat.

Some viewers reject the paranoid message of *Sleeper Cell*. One viewer, "TrentB," fed up with fear-mongering, posted the following to metacritic.com (a division of CBS Interactive):

> More mindless neocon propaganda vomited onto our screens. This country is going to collapse into a police state if people are actually believing this garbage. Fellow citizens, start questioning your government for God's sake! They're taking away our liberties and expanding federal police control over states and cities. Terrorists don't have any power over us—in fact they have less power to threaten us than street criminals. It's all a facade, and the Feds are using it to grab more control over our lives.[37]

Not all Internet posters accept *Sleeper Cell*'s message about an impending terrorist attack; not all accept its claims to realism. Some explicitly reject the message about the perpetual threat of terrorism and criticize TV dramas for capitalizing on post-9/11 fear, needed to support the U.S. government's War on Terror. Trent B. asserts that terrorism is a screen for the government to amass more power and that what should be feared is not terrorism but government control. Nonetheless, the vast majority of posts engage in the TV drama as a stand-in for the actual War on Terror.

One poster's comments elide the War on Terror and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, perpetrated by Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols.

> Having lived in OKC at the time of the Murrah bombing and being a federal government employee, I have an intense interest in terrorism issues. I believe the time will come when the world will finally understand that the OKC bombing was conducted by middle-eastern terrorists using *Sleeper Cells* to accomplish the mission while employing "lily white" accomplices, Tim McVeigh and Terry Nichols. There was so much covered up by the FBI, and ordered by higher government officials. Records have been destroyed and evidence has been withheld.[38]

For this viewer, Sue Barnham, *Sleeper Cell* is not only a lens through which to understand the War on Terror but also a lens through which to reevaluate earlier instances of terrorism. Though two white men were convicted for the Oklahoma City bombing, she claims it must have been perpetuated by Muslims.

Barnham joins a large number of fellow posters, as well as TV critics on the right, in the idea that there is an incessant need to protect the domestic from the foreign (and to project any potential domestic threats onto foreign enemies). She "flips the enemy" in reverse: rather than say that there are white accomplices to Arab/Muslim terrorism, she asserts that there are Middle Eastern terrorists behind the Oklahoma City bombing. This poster insists on the unique connection between terrorism and Arab and Muslim identities.

Unlike responses from film and television critics, viewer posts to the Internet represent an unstable archive; they are often anonymous, and the source cannot be verified. They are fragments of larger sentiments, operating like eavesdropping into conversations for which the larger context is absent. Juana Maria Rodriguez refers to online exchanges as "textual performances: fleeting, transient, ephemeral, already post. Like the text of a play, they leave a trace to which meaning can be assigned, but these traces are haunted by the absence that was the performance itself, its reception, and its emotive power."[39] After being immersed in the often rabid and frequently misspelled rantings on Internet fan message boards, it is tempting to conclude that these posters are a very small subsection of the United States and that they certainly do not represent a mainstream perspective. Such a temptation, however, must be resisted, because these same voices are found among mainstream cultural critics. They also comment on the realism of the show and participate in blurring the boundaries between the War on Terror waged by the U.S. government and its fictional representations on television. Dan Iverson, for example, who writes for IGN Entertainment (a division of News Corporation), stated:

> [*Sleeper Cell*] never sides with the radical Muslims, and it never makes you feel like what they are doing is justified, but what it does is gives you a window into their culture and the terrorists' perversion of their religion in order to see what would drive people to do what they are doing. For this reason alone, *Sleeper Cell* should have a larger American audience - as we are waging war with this same enemy, and yet we know nothing about them or the religion that fuels their hatred for us. If more television programs were to responsibly give this type of attention to their radical fundamentalist enemies we might not be so ignorant of current events.[40]

Like many posters, Iverson laments the perceived "ignorance" of his fellow Americans. The pessimistic vision of his country, however, is less startling than the faith he has in fictional television: equivalent to news education, bettering our understanding of an entire religion and group of people.

Michael Medved, film critic and conservative political commentator, also has faith in the power of television. Regarding the film *Syriana*, he writes: "The problem, it seems to me, in a lot of these new films, is not that they humanized terrorists, that's good dramatically, the problem is that they're sympathetic to

terrorists, that they erase the distinction between terrorists and those who are fighting terrorism and that's a terrible thing."[41] Medved contends that there is a moral difference between those who kill innocent people and those who kill the killers of innocent people and states that this should be accurately reflected in films, highlighting his investment in narratives of U.S. exceptionalism. He is committed to a particular configuration of blame that maintains the United States as innocent and heroic and Arabs and Muslims as committing sense-less violence, upholding the dominant "they hate us for our freedom" discourse. However, Medved need not be concerned that humanizing the terrorists will make viewers sympathize with them. Despite the range of representational strategies identified above, viewer responses suggest that for most the domi-nant message remains the same: the United States is at war against terrorism because Arabs and Muslims are a threat. There is a tension between writers and producers' intentions on the one hand and critic and viewer responses on the other hand. Writers and producers create multiple representational strate-gies to circumvent accusations of racism and to maintain the largest viewership possible. Yet most critics dismiss such strategies for being too politically cor-rect, preachy, or artless, and many viewers take away the message that Arabs/Muslims are a threat to U.S. national security despite the multiple representa-tional strategies that would seem to counter that hypothesis. Despite efforts to convey that all Arab and Muslims are not terrorists, viewer and critic responses demonstrate that the impact of these representational strategies is limited. Viewers do not comment on how they have come to understand the diversity of Arab and Muslim identities. Ultimately, these representational strategies pay lip service to racism. Simplified complex representations do not necessarily result in viewers expressing sensitivity regarding Arab and Muslim identities. Rather, stereotyping persists because the message of these TV dramas is that Arabs and Muslims are a threat to U.S. national security, despite a few Arab and Muslim characters that are against terrorism. Ultimately, fear-mongering trumps multicultural sensitivity.

Although the impact of their particular representational strategies is lim-ited, the impact of the TV dramas themselves is far-reaching. Operating as sites to discuss and debate the War on Terror, TV dramas have participated in mediating the war itself. They do this by producing a public around it, by lifting "people from the realm of their idiosyncratic interests, their 'particu-larity,' towards the realm of common interests, the 'universal' values that join them together and define a collectivity of spectators as precisely a 'public.'"[42] TV dramas turn the War on Terror into a common interest on at least two levels. First, TV dramas base their story lines on current events, thereby estab-lishing a relationship to pressing political concerns. Despite being fictional,

TV dramas are intimately involved with the particulars of the War on Terror, creating a product that can feel more real to viewers than the news media. In other words, through TV dramas viewers can imagine the War on Terror in a nonabstract way: they can watch U.S. government agencies at work to combat terrorism; they get to know the terrorists and get to virtually visit Afghanistan and other sites where the War on Terror is waged. Second, in addition to or as an extension of political forums, viewers discuss the War on Terror on Internet forums, which in turn become places where government policies are discussed and debated, which in turn further blurs the boundaries between the War on Terror and its representation. The fact that various groups have lobbied particular TV dramas to change their representation of Arabs/Muslims or of torture in order to manage the potential adverse impact on public perceptions demonstrates how powerfully television mediates the War on Terror. Writers and producers of TV dramas are pressured to be accountable to the possibility of viewers consuming their representations as a clone of the War on Terror.

TV dramas that represent the War on Terror have an intimate relationship with what comes to be imagined and understood as "the real," by which I mean the "truth" produced by the U.S. government about the War on Terror. Because TV dramas have a semblance of "the real"—indeed, they take great pains to create a sense of authenticity—they can become an extension of it.[43] According to Jean Baudrillard, at this historical moment it is not that the representation threatens to replace the original but rather that the distinction between the original and its representation has broken down. Representations of reality—images, symbols, signs, media—have come to stand in for "the real" to the extent that the representation becomes indistinguishable from the original, or what he terms "clones of the real."[44] Some viewers experience and make sense of the War on Terror through its simulation. As Susan Willis writes:

> America lives its history as a cultural production. The post-9/11 era, as one defined by individual uncertainty in the face of an over-certain but often mistaken and repressive state, has seen a tremendous burgeoning of cultural forms meant to explain and manage the crisis. Daily life in America is articulated across an array of competing popular fictions.[45]

The fictional dramas and news dramas examined in this book are cultural forms that participate in explaining and managing the War on Terror. Viewers' experiences of the War on Terror, in turn, are intimately linked to these cultural forms.

Prime-Time Torture

The controversy surrounding 24's depiction of torture arose shortly after the revelation that U.S. military personnel had tortured inmates at Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison.[46] Leaked photos showed Iraqi prisoners being physically, psychologically, and sexually abused. The horrific photos intensified the debate about whether or not the U.S. government was sanctioning torture. In the view of the right-wing commentator Rush Limbaugh, the photos did not reveal torture but rather the U.S. military "blowing off steam"; he questioned what the public was so worried about since the torture victims "are trying to kill us."[47]

Here I explore the extent to which TV dramas mediate the War on Terror by normalizing logics that legitimize torture. The apparent contradiction here is a key example of how simplified complex representations operate: in the case of 24, multiple strategies are employed to avoid a simple conflation of Arabs and Muslims with terrorism, yet at the same time for many Americans 24 has helped make the real torture of Arabs and Muslims seem like a necessary evil— regrettable, perhaps, but essential for the safety of our nation.

In 24 this process works in various ways, all of which ultimately create a sense of urgent realism, a sense that disaster could strike at any moment, and thus that quick decisions must be made (even if they are difficult ones). One such device is the use of a split screen in order to present the show's multiple plotlines and a version of "real time." The most important of these techniques, however, is the "ticking time bomb scenario,"[48] one of the show's foundational plot devices. Agent Jack Bauer knows that a deadly bomb will be detonated within the next few hours; he therefore must make the difficult decision to torture a suspect in order to obtain the necessary information to disarm the bomb. The "real time" and ticking time bomb scenarios create an environment of immediate urgency. However, creating a sense of realism and a realistic portrayal are very distinct objectives; the ticking time bomb scenario as a symbol of the War on Terror might effectively create dramatic realism but is not necessarily realistic. The ticking time bomb scenario has powerfully influenced the public discourse on the War on Terror, particularly the debate on torture. Right-wing politicians and advocates reason that torture is necessary precisely because of this specter of an impending attack. President Bush in a nationally televised speech told citizens that the CIA, in successfully capturing and questioning terrorist Khalid Sheik Mohammed, extracted timely information using procedures that stopped further terrorist attacks.[49] In other words, the ticking time bomb scenario represented in 24 was used as a justification for torture in the War on Terror.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the writers and producers of 24 repeatedly claimed that their show is entertainment as opposed to a realistic

or educational program on the War on Terror. And as I mentioned, the show has been criticized by a range of groups for its depiction of terror. These groups fear that the show will sway its viewers into perceiving torture as a necessary and effective technique. The frequency, and intensity, of these attacks are perhaps the most compelling evidence of just how gripping the show's depiction of torture is. Again and again in 24, Jack Bauer employs any means necessary to capture terrorists and thwart terrorist attacks. Across the show's eight seasons, viewers have witnessed Bauer choking, suffocating, electrocuting, stabbing, and shooting suspects in the hope of extracting information. As an outlaw hero, Bauer's heroism relies on his breaking the rules to save the day. Thus viewers are frequently reminded that Bauer's actions are illegal to heighten the dramatic quality of his actions. Furthermore, he doesn't *want* to be doing this, but he *has* to do it—for the sake of all of us. Jack Bauer breaks the law in order to (often single-handedly) stop terrorism and save lives. He is a stunningly successful manifestation of situational morality: he is the good guy who does bad things because they are justifiable. The show thus positions viewers to admire his bravery, even if repelled by his actions; Bauer's choices are portrayed as difficult and sad, perhaps even terrible, but nonetheless necessary.[50] According to the logic of 24, we would all be dead if it weren't for Jack Bauer.

As mentioned, the Parents Television Council has expressed concern that children who watch 24's torture scenes may become desensitized to violence and may perceive torture favorably. Human Rights First has expressed concern that viewers might conclude that not all human beings are deserving of basic human rights. Military faculty from West Point have expressed concern that 24 will have an undue influence on U.S. interrogators in the field and on cadets in training. Because torture has been found to be an ineffective method of interrogation, they wanted the show to make torture scenes realistic: subjects do not necessarily "break" in a few minutes or hours—as they so often do under Bauer's coercion—and then provide truthful information.[51] West Point faculty stated that it is not uncommon for a tortured suspect to provide false information in order to stop whatever is being done to him; it can take weeks or even months for a suspect to break, and some die in the process. They stated that a more realistic scenario would be to spend months with a prisoner establishing trust (which is how *Sleeper Cell* portrayed torture). West Point faculty have witnessed military cadets disregard their training in order to mimic Jack Bauer. Tony Lagouranis, a former U.S. Army interrogator at Abu Ghraib, stated that such programs can trump the military training that soldiers receive. Brigadier-General Patrick Finnegan, dean of West Point, stated that Bauer's illegal behavior, persistent violation of protocols, and use of torture was influencing young soldiers in the field: "the disturbing thing is that although torture may cause

Jack Bauer some angst, it is always the patriotic thing to do."[52] In other words, 24, whether intended or not, has successfully linked torture to patriotism.

Following the Abu Ghraib scandal, debates ensued in newspapers on whether the torture scenes in 24 were influencing the public to support torture by representing it as an effective, and therefore legitimate, tactic in the War on Terror. It became part of the public discourse. Kelly M. Greenhill, in an editorial in the *Los Angeles Times*, reported that during the May 15, 2007, Republican presidential debate, candidate Tom Tancredo said about the War on Terror, "I am looking for Jack Bauer at this point"; and Rudolph Giuliani argued that interrogators should use "any method they can think of." Giuliani's statement was met with applause.[53] Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, in a speech defending the use of torture, stated, "Jack Bauer saved Los Angeles. . . . He saved hundreds of thousands of lives. . . . Are you going to convict Jack Bauer?"[54] According to Dahlia Lithwick of *Newsweek*, the Bush administration lawyers who designed interrogation methods in the War on Terror and redefined torture cited Jack Bauer more often than the U.S. Constitution.[55] Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff gave a speech at a Heritage Foundation dinner, "Fact vs. Fiction in the War on Terror," on the ways in which 24 does and does not mirror real life.[56] Even an Arab American defended 24 in an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, stating, "Well, here's the hard cold truth: When Islamic terrorists stop being a threat to America's survival, viewers will lose interest in 24, because it will have lost its relevancy. Until such time, I will continue to watch 24—because, believe it or not, the idea that there are Jack Bauers out there in real life risking their lives to save ours does mean something to me. . . . Because terrorists and their supporters continue to hide amongst us in plain sight, we need Jack Bauer, now more than ever."[57] 24 became a vehicle for the government to discuss the War on Terror and particularly to recognize the counterterrorism efforts of government agents, thus revealing how TV dramas have mediated the War on Terror, not only by representing current events, but, more important, by normalizing the need for torture given the impending threat Arab/Muslim terrorists pose to U.S. national security.

Furthermore, Jack Bauer stands in for the U.S. government: he confronts multiple dilemmas inherent in war and demonstrates the difficult necessity of his actions. He also brings comfort to Americans that everything possible is being done to protect them. It is not only his determination that brings comfort but also portrayals of the U.S. government's technological capabilities. Caren Kaplan writes that since the Gulf War the media has focused on technological advances during war, in particular, precision targeting. She writes, "'Space power' and the vast resources of the military-industrial-media-entertainment network generated discourses of precision that obscured information about

civilian deaths or rendered them inconsequential. The representations of the war were less embodied than previous representations of wars, with U.S. military casualties going undercover or under the radar, as it were, as well."[58] This concept of "precision war" has seeped into television shows. Despite the intense violence in many TV dramas, and even moments where government agencies are portrayed as making grave errors, technology is central to the ultimate heroism of the United States. 24 has high-tech means to defeat the terrorists—from tracking their locations to eavesdropping on important conversations to recovering crucial information from damaged hard drives and precision bombing of targets. This emphasis on precision extends from technology to torture techniques; Bauer precision torture extracts needed information.

Human Rights First and the Parents Television Council have documented that representations of torture on U.S. television have increased exponentially since 2000. They report that from 1996 to 2001 there were 102 scenes of torture. From 2002 to 2005 torture scenes increased to 624. The 67 torture scenes in 24's first five seasons placed it at the forefront of prime-time depictions.[59] In addition to an increase in representations of torture on prime-time television, there also has been a shift in the identity of the torturer. In the history of U.S. television, the torturer had usually been the bad guy, not the good guy. Historically, torture was used as a technique by writers and producers to villainize a character; it was considered immoral and therefore a stock tool of the bad guys—who included the Russians during the Cold War, the Viet Cong during the Vietnam War, and Latin American and Middle Eastern dictators in the 1980s and 1990s. Since 9/11, and especially through the character of Jack Bauer, the hero has become the torturer. Torture is now used for the greater good, as opposed to being used in the service of evil or power.

Polls indicate that representing the good American hero as the torturer changed public opinion on torture.[60] A poll conducted by *ABC News* and the *Washington Post* in 2004 revealed that the majority of Americans—65 percent—are against torture, while 35 percent believe that torture is acceptable in some cases.[61] However, it also indicated that the public made a distinction between torture and physical abuse. While the majority of respondents indicated that torture was unacceptable, 46 percent indicated that physical abuse is acceptable. Among the actions deemed acceptable were sleep deprivation (approved by 66 percent of respondents), hooding (57 percent), noise bombing (54 percent), threatening to shoot a suspect or expose him or her to extreme heat or cold (40 percent), punching and kicking (29 percent), and sexual humiliation (16 percent). The same poll revealed that 60 percent of the public perceived the Abu Ghraib prison scandal to constitute "abuse," not "torture." What emerges here is a wide gray area in which morality becomes a slippery slope,

in which there are always exceptions to the rules. It turns out the news media itself may have aided this growing acceptance of torture, or at least of some of its manifestations. Brigitte L. Nacos and Oscar Torres-Reyna write, "An ironic consequence of the Abu Ghraib revelations was the drastic decline of the use of the T-word in pertinent news accounts. Instead, anchors, correspondents, and reporters themselves preferred terms like 'abuse,' 'alleged abuse,' 'mistreatment,' and 'wrongdoing.'"[62] Government officials and journalists came to distinguish between "hard-core torture," "torture lite," and "coercion."[63] Nacos and Torres-Reyna note that after the Abu Ghraib prison scandal, "Americans were less inclined to agree with the statement that torture is "never justified" as a means to force suspected terrorists to reveal important information. By December 2004, more than seven months after the Abu Ghraib story broke, only 27 percent of the public rejected the torture of terrorist suspects categorically, while 69 percent found it justified to varying degrees."[64] The operating cultural logic shifted from one in which torture was considered illegal and morally wrong to an exceptionalist logic in which torture was considered wrong but necessary and effective in moments of national crisis. But public opinion polls also demonstrate an ideologically fractured populace, in which approximately half of the public agree and other half disagree that there is a difference between "torture" and "abuse," or that either is acceptable.

Certainly 24 alone is not responsible for shifting perspectives in favor of justifying torture or "abuse." Representations of torture on 24 are part of a larger field of meaning and exist alongside the Bush administration's enormous public relations efforts to make torture palatable to the American mainstream and make torture legally acceptable, often despite its clear violation of the Geneva Conventions. The news media and government officials succeeded in making torture acceptable and necessary, and TV dramas participated in doing the ideological work (even as they offered post-9/11 representational strategies that resisted stereotyping) to justify the U.S. government's actions during the War on Terror.

After the meeting in 2006 with Human Rights First, West Point faculty, and members of the FBI and CIA, the writers and producers of 24 introduced a new plot to the show. In season 7, which aired in 2008, the U.S. government puts Bauer on trial for his use of torture. Bauer is depicted as a broken human being, seemingly haunted by all the people he has tortured. His actions are questioned throughout the season by other characters who maintain that torture is not only illegal but also morally wrong. The antitorture message, it seems, is clear. And yet this plotline becomes, in effect, another simplified complex representational strategy: this explicit portrayal of the terrible consequences of inflicting violence on others is continually called into question by the

season's other, far more urgent events. As Bauer is confronted with one ticking time bomb scenario after another, the rest of the plot seems to be an advertisement for the unfortunate necessity of torture to divert terrorist attacks, consistent with simplified complex representational modes.

These terrorist dramas are built on a basic paradox, between representational strategies that project a postracial, multicultural United States and the logics that legitimize racism and torture. These processes are simultaneous and interlinked. Simplified complex representations enable logics that justify torture; or more specifically, they make a successful case for torture, because the suspension of Arab and Muslim American civil rights relies on them as evidence that racism is no longer a factor in the decisions most Americans make. Therefore, if the actions of the government, or the military, are not racist, then the people the United States fights must be the bad guys. TV dramas, by co-opting multiculturalism and standardizing these seemingly humanistic representations of the Other, produce a post-race illusion of good if problematic intentions. This illusion makes logics that legitimize racism appear as though they are not racist.

The television landscape shifted on 9/11 as the vague, ominous threat to U.S. national security took center stage. The story lines in TV dramas such as 24 and *Sleeper Cell* reinforce the government's need for a War on Terror; these shows have, in numerous guises, replayed the tragedy of 9/11 weekly to U.S. audiences, keeping the trauma fresh in the collective memory. These cultural productions, despite employing a range of strategies to avoid reproducing stereotypes, offer a very specific story that keeps viewer-citizens living and reliving the War on Terror. There is a fundamental contradiction between representational strategies that project an enlightened, postracial culture yet maintain the relevance of the threat. So long as Arabs and Muslims are represented primarily in the context of terrorism, our current crop of representational strategies—for all their apparent innovations—will have a minimal impact on viewers' perceptions of Arabs and Muslims and, far worse, will perpetuate a simplistic vision of good and evil under the guise of complexity and sensitivity.

What is most strongly conveyed by these post-9/11 TV dramas is that Arabs and Muslims pose a threat to U.S. peace and security. The articulated fear, similar to that during the Cold War, is that the enemy is among "us," so that we must live in a state of constant fear and vigilance. According to Douglas L. Howard, "For all we know, our neighborhoods, our businesses, and our highways have been or are being targeted even as we speak, but we are (and we must feel) powerless to protect ourselves from what we cannot see and what we do not know. . . . 24, in all its violent glory, makes us believe that, if the terrorists are out here, something, everything, in fact, is being done to stop them and to

keep us safe."[65] 24 and *Sleeper Cell*, despite their representational strategies, do the ideological work of perpetually reenacting the Arab/Muslim threat.

Above all, what is depicted in these TV dramas is a nation in perpetual danger. As McAlister has written, "The continuing sense of threat provides support for the power of the state, but it also provides the groundwork for securing 'the nation' as a cultural and social entity. The 'imagined community' of the nation finds continuing rearticulation in the rhetoric of danger."[66] Writers and producers create an "imagined community" of virtual viewer-citizens,[67] many of whom are interpellated into a sense of impending threat that supports the state.[68] Television is the fundamental way such a threat can be conveyed to a nation. In addition to being the disseminator of this threat, television capitalizes on it, keeping viewers both fearful and captivated.