Women, Words and War: Explaining 9/11 and Justifying U.S. Military Action in Afghanistan and Iraq

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Abstract

Texts and images in the print media, outdoor advertisements, and on the Internet form the primary source material for this article. The Bush administration and the American media, drawing upon well-worn traditions of representation, contrasted American women and Muslim/Middle Eastern women, American and Middle Eastern male sexuality, and the moral qualities (good versus evil) of American and Middle Eastern people. They used those contrasts to explain 9/11 and legitimize war in Afghanistan and Iraq. 9/11 was simply explained through a contrast between American innocence and Muslim savagery. For Afghanistan, the predominant trope was liberating Afghan women from the Taliban, or white men rescuing brown women from brown men, a story at least as old as the British Raj. The Iraq representations were more complex; both pro-war and anti-war proponents used the same images of suffering Iraqi women and girls, but to different ends: Saddam Hussein was a demon who must be destroyed, or the suffering was caused by sanctions and Western military action. Saddam himself was conflated with Iraq, and images of deviant sexuality were employed. Throughout, American women and girls were portrayed as the right kind of woman: usually white and innocent, or heroic soldiers. In any case, they were free, not oppressed.

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Recommended Citation


The War on Terrorism has produced casualties in Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa, Syria, and other Middle Eastern Countries. War casualties War on Terror. Operation Freedom Sentinel (OFS) - This campaign includes casualties that occurred in Afghanistan immediately after OEF concluded December 31, 2014. OFS began on 1 January 2015. To date, there are 49 U.S. deaths and 268 wounded in this current military operation. Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) - This campaign includes casualties that occurred in Iraq starting March 19, 2003. On August 31, 2010, President Obama announced that the American combat mission in Iraq had ended. There were 4,424 U.S. deaths and 31,957 wounded in that military operation. Although the US government claimed that its military operations in Afghanistan were justified by the need to prevent a second attack, this need, even if real, was clearly not urgent, as shown by the fact that the Pentagon did not launch its invasion until almost a month later. U.S. political leaders have claimed, to be sure, that the UN did authorize the US attack on Afghanistan. The U.S. war in Afghanistan was not authorized by the UN Security Council in 2001 or at anytime since, so this war began as an illegal war and remains an illegal war today. Our government’s claim to the contrary is false. This war has been illegal, moreover, not only under international law, but also under U.S. law.