

National Security Culture: Gender, Race, and Class in the Production of Imperial Citizenship

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This article is about how national security culture sets out, in raced, gendered, and classed terms, to prepare the U.S. public to take up their role as citizens of empire. The cultural imagination of national security, I argue, is shaped both by the national security state and the media industry. Drawing on archival material, I offer a contextual analysis of key national security visual texts in two periods—the early Cold War era and the Obama phase of the War on Terror. A comparative analysis of the two periods shows that while Cold War practices inform the War on Terror, there are also discontinuities. A key difference is the inclusion of women and people of color within War on Terror imperial citizenship, inflected by the logic of a neoliberal form of feminism and multiculturalism. I argue that such inclusion is not positive and urge scholars to combine an intersectional analysis of identity with a structural critique of neoliberal imperialism.

Keywords: Cold War, War on Terror, gender, race, class, United States, national security culture, media, multiculturalism, feminism, empire, intersectionality, neoliberalism

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS's) nearly 10-minute video (DHS, 2011b) on its "If you see something, say something" campaign offers a visual depiction of the logic of national security in the 21st century. According to DHS, to be a good citizen in the War on Terror era, one must surveil one's environment and report "suspicious activity." In the dramatization of what constitutes suspicious activity, we see a shot of a truck driving into a parking garage followed by a person painting over the lens of a surveillance camera. The protagonist then emerges and notices a can of spray paint on the floor and the painted-over surveillance camera. This rouses his suspicion and disapproval. He then sees two individuals walking away from the parked truck after a shot showing them disposing of the keys. The good citizen phones the authorities to report his suspicions. In an era when Arabs and Muslims are overwhelmingly associated with terrorism, we might expect the antagonists to be brown and the protagonist White. This is not the case. The protagonist is an African American man in a suit, while the

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antagonists/terrorists—a man and a woman—are White. In fact, in a majority of DHS public service announcements (PSAs) produced during the Obama presidency, the protagonists tended to be women and people of color and the antagonists White men and women.

This stands in stark contrast to Cold War national security films, which featured White middle-class men and their wives as the central protagonists. As various scholars have argued, Cold War culture centered the traditional White, middle-class, heterosexual nuclear family (Kozol, 1994; May, 2008), with housewives on the front line of civil defense (McEnany, 2004; Zarlengo, 1999). By contrast, War on Terror national security culture in the Obama era, which is informed by a neoliberal form of multiculturalism and feminism (Eisenstein, 2009; Fraser, 2013; Puar, 2007), features a new configuration of gender, race, and class in the production of imperial citizenship. This article sets out to examine the expansion of national security citizenship, particularly the evolving construction of the “good” imperial subject, from the Cold War to the War on Terror as articulated in the visual texts of the national security state. I argue that the inclusion of women and people of color serves to make 21st-century imperialism more palatable.

The focus is on two pivotal moments: the early Cold War and the years of the Obama administration. These moments represent two poles in the articulation of gender, race, and class within national security culture over a seven-decade period. I also pay attention to the bridge years of the Bush presidency, when traces of both poles can be found. For the earlier period, I analyze three civil defense films from the 1950s: [Survival Under Atomic Attack](#) (FCDA, 1951b); [Duck and Cover](#) (FCDA, 1951a); and [The House in the Middle](#) (FCDA, 1954b).² For the latter, I examine three DHS public service announcements, which are among the top four “most popular” videos on its YouTube channel as of November 2016: [If You See Something, Say Something](#) (DHS, 2011b); the [Walmart Public Service Announcement](#) (DHS, 2010b); and [The Drop Off](#) (DHS, 2011a).

Several historians, anthropologists, and American studies and women’s studies scholars have looked at Cold War visual texts as part of larger projects that focus on civil defense (Garrison, 2006; McEnany, 2004; Oakes, 1995, Zarlengo, 1999) or the broader culture of the Cold War (Masco, 2006; Whitfield, 1996). Similarly, scholars have studied the visual culture of the post-9/11 national security state (Adelman, 2014; Amoores, 2007; Martin & Petro, 2006; Puar, 2007; Campbell & Shapiro, 2007). However, with only a few exceptions, most notably the work of Joseph Masco (2014), there is little comparative work on national security cultural products across time. Such comparative work is essential since the logic of the Cold War continues to inform the War on Terror even while there are differences. We find this to be the case even with the news media. As Barbie Zelizer (2016) argues, Cold War mind-sets inform contemporary War on Terror news frameworks.

² *Duck and Cover* is an iconic civil defense film and needs no justification for its inclusion in this analysis. It has seen something of a revival in the War on Terror era. Several people have uploaded it to YouTube, and the video has close to 2 million views (as of April 18, 2016). *The House in the Middle* was chosen because it was the first successful private–public partnership and started a new trend according to the 1954 FCDA annual report. *Survival Under Atomic Attack* was chosen because it was the first major FCDA campaign, and the film sold more copies than any other government film up to that point (see Garrison, 2006, p. 42).

Building on such comparative work, I study the intersections of race, gender, and class in the production of imperial citizenship during the two key periods discussed above. I use the term *national security culture* to describe the ideology of the cultural products of the national security state. This ideology and the cultural imagination of national security, however, are not the product of the national security state alone. Rather, as I have argued elsewhere with Arun Kundnani (Kumar & Kundnani, 2014), the imaginary worlds created in film and television texts shape national security imagination just as much as the various agencies of the national security state shape cultural texts. Here I build on this work and explore the ways in which the culture industry furnishes the security establishment with the cultural imagination needed to meet its goals. I attend to the complementary and dialectical relationship between the national security state and the media industry in the production of national security culture.

Methodologically, I employ a cultural studies approach, particularly one that reads cultural texts within the political, economic, and social structures from which they arise (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978; Kellner, 1994). To situate and contextualize national security cultural texts, I draw from the work of a wide range of scholars across various disciplines and offer a historical analysis of the two key periods studied. I also conducted archival research, drawing on archived Federal Civil Defense Administration (FCDA) reports as well as contemporary DHS reports to furnish institutional context.

Empire and the National Security State

The United States emerged from World War II as one of two superpowers on the global stage. Policy makers, particularly Cold War liberals, constructed a national security state that would enable the United States to assume the role of an "exceptional" imperial power. The 1947 National Security Act made security a key element of the postwar order, creating the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the National Security Council, and the Central Intelligence Agency (Hogan, 1998). This new and growing infrastructure of the postwar imperial state was presented not as an expansion of U.S. power and hegemony on the global stage, but rather as a form of defensive security, most evident in the renaming of the Department of War as the Department of Defense. Cold War liberals insisted that the United States was not an empire like other European colonial powers. Instead, drawing on a dominant myth in U.S. politics regarding its place in the world, they argued that it was an exceptional state, a beacon for other nations because of its unique history and foundation. U.S. exceptionalism, since the very founding of the nation, has rested on the idea that the country is a "beacon of hope to the oppressed and an example to the world of democracy" (Loveman, 2010, p. 4).

The postwar refurbished imperial brand, and the corresponding infrastructure of the national security state, was presented as necessary for the security of both the U.S. homeland and the world in general. This was not the first time that the term *security* was deployed to justify imperial conquest. From the founding of the American nation and the realization of the settler-colonial mission, "national security" has been central to U.S. foreign policy (Loveman, 2010). In the post-World War II era, almost every foreign policy question has been cast through the lens of domestic security.

National Security Council Paper NSC-68, one of the most influential foreign policy documents of the Cold War, laid out a vision for U.S. postwar grand strategy (Loveman, 2010; McAlister, 2005). It called

for massive increases in military spending paid for by significant tax increases and cuts in social welfare programs. Every aspect of life—social, political, intellectual, and economic—was to play a role in this process. NSC-68 noted the difficulty of winning the public to this program since it involved a massive expansion of the U.S. war-making apparatus at the cost of domestic spending. It also identified dissent as a threat to the Cold War project and called for a program to discipline citizens (Masco, 2014). Thus, a civil defense program and a media propaganda campaign were central to building and sustaining public support. The FCDA was created in 1950 for this purpose.

The FCDA was ostensibly charged with protecting all Americans against the possibility of a nuclear attack, but in reality, it focused on the White middle class. As Laura McEnany (2004) explains, the middle-class White suburban home became the locus for the militarization of U.S. society, and women, particularly stay-at-home moms, became central to civil defense. Further, as Andrew Grossman (2000) writes, civil defense planners operated in a climate of “segregated liberalism” in which African Americans were excluded:

Publicly, FCDA civil defense plans called for the protection of “all citizens” and the continuity of a liberal-democratic polity and social order in the event of war. In practice, however, the agency ignored large groups of people, not only for operational reasons, but because planners viewed the social order in both racial and geographic terms. As a result, FCDA emergency plans exhibited stark geographic and racial biases while simultaneously providing the illusion of protection for middle-class suburbia. (p. 479)

Underfunded from its inception, the FCDA relied on a “self-help” model that passed the cost of security from the state to the individual. In the Truman era, Congress refused to fund a nuclear shelter program and cut the funds requested by the FCDA by 92% in 1951, 86% in 1952, and 93% in 1953. Despite these cuts, the FCDA was allotted \$120 million between 1951 and 1953. Much of this money went toward the production of propaganda (Garrison, 2006). The public affairs office of the FCDA, which was staffed by public relations and advertising specialists, would lead this effort and produce a series of booklets, pamphlets, and films to convince the White middle class that their self-activity was central to national security. This was the context for the production of the White, middle-class, heterosexual nuclear family as the ideal imperial subject.

President Truman’s words to entering classes of the FCDA Staff College are instructive in this regard. In a speech for an FCDA training film, Truman (1951) drew on the settler-colonial history of the United States to justify the national security doctrine of the Cold War era. He suggested that the threat posed by the Soviet Union was the same as that once posed by “hostile Indians.”³ At the start of the speech, he states that “our Civil Defense program is a revival of the old American tradition of community defense.” When the “pioneer settlements” came under attack, every “member of those pioneer communities joined together to meet the common danger.” Each person in the family, Truman states, had a defined role and a particular responsibility. The men armed themselves and took their positions at the communal stockade, the women helped to load rifles, and older children cared for the younger ones and

³ This speech was obtained from the Harry Truman library’s archives. It does not have page numbers.

animals. In this way, Truman presented a vision of the White, heterosexual nuclear family complete with traditional gender roles as central to the realization of the settler-colonial mission and creation of the American nation-state. It was this frontier colonial tradition and ethic, based on a fictional depiction of White households in colonial America (Coontz, 1988), that had to be revived to ensure security in the new nuclear era. In Truman's imagined community (Anderson, 2006), the frontier was sutured together with the Cold War period in a seamless history that would bring together different moments of White patriarchal nationhood and citizenship around the concepts of security, personal responsibility, and civic duty.

Truman was not alone in drawing on the United States's settler-colonial past. The cover of a 1956 issue of *Home Safety Review*, a publication of the National Safety Council that issued guidelines for home preparedness and risk management, featured an image of a pilgrim holding a rifle in one hand and a Bible in the other with the caption, "Safety was their watchword too" (Hay, 2006). As James Hay (2006) notes, home safety was tied to "a myth of a nation founded upon principles of self-sufficiency and survival in a pre-urban wilderness" (p. 363). Similarly, for Eisenhower's civil defense chief, Leo Hoegh, the middle-class White home and its nuclear fallout shelter represented the continuation of colonial traditions: Our "colonial ancestors built dual-purpose dwellings," with "Every home a fortress!" (Oakes, 1995, p. 131). Hoegh suggested that this mantra should serve as "our watchword as we strive to attain the freedom so dearly won by our pioneer forbears" (Oakes, 1995, p. 131). Security in the Cold War era was about militarizing the suburban White middle-class home so as to fend off the communist threat both inside and outside the nation. Centered on a project of White nationalism and White supremacy, the culture of the national security state, as we will see in the next section, marginalized racialized others.

Cold War Civil Defense

Millard Caldwell, the first administrator of the FCDA and a staunch segregationist oversaw the production of several propaganda films and pamphlets. The FCDA relied on private sources of funding to produce and distribute the films, which proved to be very cost effective. Its 1954 annual report states that "these sponsored civil defense films are reaching an estimate of 20 million persons per subject at a cost of approximately \$.001 per person reached—considerably less than the cost of a page ad in a national magazine" (FCDA, 1954a, p. 95). This public-private partnership was a mutually beneficial arrangement. The underfunded FCDA could rely on the corporate sector to pay to get the message out, while corporations were able to link their products to survival in the event of an atomic attack. Although presented as "public service" announcements, various corporate entities created what were in effect commercials for their products, not unlike the current Walmart-DHS campaign discussed below.

This tactic was pioneered by the National Paint, Varnish and Lacquer Association whose subdivision, the National Clean Up-Paint Up-Fix Up Bureau, worked with the FCDA to sponsor the film [*The House in the Middle*](#) (FCDA, 1954a, p. 129). The 1954 FCDA report notes that this initiative launched "a unique and highly successful film program" (FCDA, 1954a, p. 95). The film begins by displaying footage from an atomic test site in Nevada which shows three houses being exposed to an atomic bomb. The house in the middle, we learn at the end, survives because it has a coat of white paint. The film combines suburban domesticity with commercialism promoting varnish as a defense against the atomic bomb. It recommends a clean house, a neat and tidy yard, and a fresh coat of white paint as a guarantee of home safety.

The House in the Middle, however, is about more than the marriage of commerce and security (FCDA, 1954b). It presents the White middle class, and its survival, as the ideal. The narrator begins by focusing on suburban America with its idyllic tree-lined streets. He then states that a highway connects the suburbs to "industrial areas where many town people work." The next shot is of a working-class home, which is described as "rundown, neglected" and where "trash litters the house and yard." At a time of White flight to the suburbs, the racial and working-class coding in the film could not be more obvious. At the end of the film, the narrator shows a picture of the "dingy" house on the left, the "littered" house on the right, both in rubble, whereas the "clean white house in the middle" stands strong against an atomic blast. Both metaphorically as well as in terms of its actual planning, the FCDA put the White middle class at the center. Poor and working-class Whites as well Black Americans became contaminants on the White national body; imperial citizenship in Cold War national security culture was restricted to the White suburban middle class.

[*Survival Under Atomic Attack*](#) and [*Duck and Cover*](#) were the first mass-distributed FCDA (1951a, 1951b) films. Both were produced privately, but under the watchful eye of the FCDA. *Survival*, which echoed themes in the FCDA booklet by the same name published in 1950, was narrated by the famed journalist Edward R. Murrow and produced by Castle Films. It sold more copies than any other government film up until that point, and 20 million copies of the booklet were distributed (Garrison, 2006, p. 42). *Survival* was the first large-scale civil defense propaganda initiative directed at adults, whereas *Duck and Cover* was directed at school-age children. In its 1952 report, the FCDA declared that both "public and private school education proved a staunch ally" (pp. 65–66) and that civil defense activities and programs were either in effect or in preparation in 90% of elementary and secondary schools. Both films attempt to cultivate routine and ritualistic behaviors in response to the nuclear threat to garner consent for empire (Kumar, forthcoming).

The *Survival* pamphlet (Civil Defense Office, 1950) and film begin by assuring Americans that they can survive an atomic attack, in much the same way as the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The pamphlet claims that in "the city of Hiroshima, slightly over half the people who were a mile from the atomic explosion are still alive" (Civil Defense Office, 1950, p. 4). No mention is made of the fact that the other half are dead, or of the U.S. government's responsibility for their deaths. The film ends by stating that if "the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki had known what we know about civil defense, thousands of lives would have been saved." The film thus not only fails to mention the first ever use of nuclear weapons on a defenseless civilian population, it blames the victims for their lack of knowledge and preparation to further the self-help model.

The key focus of the accompanying pamphlet is preparation in the suburban middle-class home. Readers of the pamphlet are told to go their basements, and if they lack a basement, to look out for a shelter in the neighborhood. If the pamphlet focused on providing "information" about radioactivity and home preparation, the film visualizes these instructions in the familiar context of the White middle-class suburban home. This choice was not accidental, but rather flowed from the dominant cultural ethos of the era. Scenes set inside the home mirror the middle-class television dramas/sitcoms of the period, which featured the perfect heterosexual White nuclear family with two children, a boy and a girl. As Elaine Tyler May (2008) argues, popular culture in the 1940s and 1950s was dominated by a "homeward bound" ethic

that emphasized domesticity for women. After the Depression era, happiness was to be found in the male-breadwinner middle-class home, and familial security became a means of domestic containment. In this way, May (2008) suggests that "cold war ideology and the domestic revival reinforced each other" (p. 198). Wendy Kozol's (1994) analysis of *Life* magazine photo essays explains that *Life* normalized the heteronormative White middle-class family surrounded by consumer goods leading the proper consumerist lifestyle. Lynn Spigel (1992) argues that television was central to this process. *Survival* draws from this ethos. This complementary relationship between Hollywood television production and security films is one that continues in the War on Terror era as well.

Survival starts with the classic "civil defense mom," a White middle-class suburban woman who played a central role in home safety (Garrison, 2006; May, 2008). The stay-at-home mom is shown hanging her laundry on a clothesline and looking up nervously at the sky. The next shot is of a man in a suit, not doing household work, also looking up anxiously at the sky. The husband is then shown indoors reading the FCDA pamphlet and explaining its instructions to his wife. The woman obediently follows his instructions in this prefeminist era, carrying out various home preparation chores. After a dramatization of what to do in the case of a nuclear attack, Murrow assures the audience that, just like the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, who "today lead normal lives" and "bear children" who are "normal," the American nuclear family (no pun intended) could survive the impact of an atomic bomb. Thus, the film offers the illusion of security and the preservation of the White middle-class way of life as a means to gain acceptance of the new national security state.

Duck and Cover echoes similar themes. Produced by Archer productions and in consultation with the National Education Association, the FCDA film was shown to children in public schools across the country. It begins with the cartoon character Bert the Turtle and the familiar song, "Duck and Cover," which instructs young people to behave like Bert in the event of an atomic bomb blast. The male narrator (typical of FCDA films) explains that if children duck under their desks, they will be safe in the same way that Bert's shell keeps him safe. Later we see all-White nuclear families covering themselves with a picnic blanket as part of a drill as well as White men and women walking toward fallout shelters.

Black and brown citizens are almost entirely absent, not just in this film but also in Cold War national security texts in general. The White working class is also marginalized. While Murrow states in *Survival* that "factories will be battle stations" in the Cold War competition with the Soviet Union, the industrial working class remains invisible. Arguably, images of patriotic factory workers would have reinforced Soviet propaganda that glorified the working class. Instead, U.S. Cold War national security culture elevated the White middle class (and its consumerist lifestyle) as the main protagonist in its propaganda war with the Soviet Union. Largely absent from Cold War national security culture, even symbols of the working class such as the homes in the "industrial areas" in *The House in the Middle*, are subject to middle-class disdain. In the War on Terror era, as we will see in the next section, there are both continuities and discontinuities with this Cold War framework.

Inclusion in the Post–Cold War Era

The end of the Cold War was supposed to bring with it a “peace dividend.” President George H. W. Bush promised a redirection of military spending toward social improvement. In reality, the 1990s brought more neoliberal reforms and diminished social spending. *Pax Americana* in the post–Cold War world was built on “humanitarianism” and the idea of the United States as a “globocop” that would bring peace through its military (Chomsky, 2002; Seymour, 2012). Part of the legitimacy of this vision rested on an embrace of multiculturalism. As Melani McAlister (2005) writes,

After the Gulf War, politicians and the press alike expected that the United States would now be able to intervene whenever and wherever its leaders felt necessary. The representations of the military provided the mandate for that power: the diversity of its armed forces made the United States a world citizen, with all the races and nations of the globe represented in its population. As the military would represent the diversity of the United States, the United States, as represented in its military, would contain the world. (p. 250)

Colin Powell exemplified this trend, demonstrating the extent to which the national security state had successfully co-opted identity politics. Wendy Brown (2008) describes how the discourse of tolerance, and of multiculturalism and inclusion, made a comeback in the late 20th century.

To be sure, the seismic shifts prompted by the social movement of the 1960s and 1970s precipitated both co-optation and repression. With regard to the latter, President Nixon made “law and order” central to presidential politics and unleashed the war on drugs as a way to target and silence African Americans and antiwar protestors (Baum, 2016). The Southern strategy used dog whistle tactics to secure White voters by promising security in the face of the changes wrought by the civil rights movement (Alexander, 2010). In the decades to come, security would be offered as a “psychological wage” to mollify the citizenry in the face of neoliberalism’s attacks on both wages and the social wage (Kumar & Kundnani, 2015). While the neoliberal turn began under Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan consolidated this process. His election victory also solidified the right-wing backlash against feminism, Black power, and gay rights.

The racialized terrorist threat has been a part of this story since the early 1970s (Kumar, 2017). The 1994 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act brought about a massive expansion of mass incarceration and put in place various legal precedents that would be strengthened and developed by the Patriot Act. Alongside the growth of a carceral state, we have seen the expansion of the national security state since 9/11. While the collapse of the Soviet Union temporarily put into question the need for a massive security apparatus, 9/11 gave it a new lease on life, and the national security state has since been greatly expanded. This is the context for new and old configurations of gender, race, and class in the articulation of imperial citizenship.

Jasbir Puar (2007) argues that the proper gay subject was constructed in opposition to the sexually perverse and racialized terrorist. Within the new discourse of homonationalism, gay citizens came to symbolize the cultural superiority of the United States. Further, to be ideal imperial subjects, the LGBTQ

community needed to accept U.S. imperialism; the price of inclusion within the expanding notion of imperial citizenship involved an acceptance of U.S. civilizational superiority over Muslim majority countries. A notion of civilizational superiority thus sutures together 19th-century imperial rhetoric with that of the Cold War. As Brown (2008) states,

[In] the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, the West imagined itself as standing for civilization against primitivism, in the cold war years for freedom against tyranny; now these two recent histories are merged in the warring figures of the free, tolerant, and the civilized on the one side, and the fundamentalist, intolerant, and the barbaric on the other. (p. 6)

Tolerance, multiculturalism, and inclusion would become means by which to bolster U.S. imperialism in the 21st century.

National security culture during the George W. Bush era embodied some of these themes. The United States claimed to have invaded Afghanistan to “liberate” its women, and, in classic colonial form, White men became heroes. Indeed, the early Bush years saw a revival of White hypermasculinity in figures ranging from Bush (flying a war plane onto an aircraft carrier to declare “mission accomplished”) to New York City firefighters. While men were cast as symbols of patriotism and heroism, women were turned into helpless victims (Faludi, 2008; Rodgers, 2003). As Spigel (2004) suggests, the United States became an

innocent victim in stories that interwove myths of gender and the Orient. Both daytime talk shows and nighttime news were filled with melodramatic tales of women’s suffering that depicted women as the moral victims of Islamic extremism. And “women” here meant both the women of Afghanistan and American survivors (the widows) who lost their husbands during the attack. (p. 246)

Peggy Noonan, Camille Paglia, and others gushed that “real men” were back—that is, those who could protect women (Cole, 2006).

However, in 2004, the “security mom” was born. In the 2004 presidential elections, both the Democratic and Republican Parties sought to position themselves as masculine and “tough on terror” in ways similar to the tough-on-crime posture. The new security mom was not a helpless victim, but rather an active agent in homeland security. In a piece published in *USA Today*, Michelle Malkin (2004b) argued that the presidential candidates should pay attention to the “soccer moms” turned “security moms,” whom she described as married with children and, like herself, in possession of a gun (Malkin, 2004b). Malkin (2004a), an Asian American syndicated columnist and right-wing blogger, wrote a manifesto of the security moms whom she identified as “war bloggers” and women who had taken “homeland defense into their own hands” (Malkin, 2004a, para. 10).

The security mom was a revised version of the civil defense mom for the new postfeminist era. In the 21st century, the Truman pilgrim story was modified to assign greater agency to women; security

moms would no longer simply load guns, they would possess and potentially use them as well. However, just like civil defense moms, they were primarily responsible for home safety. Further, a multicultural nationalism would press up against the White nationalism of the Truman era. Malkin (2004b) set out to create a space for conservative Asian Americans like herself who support the War on Terror and the War on Drugs, even pushing the Republican Party to fight more aggressively against “hostile invasions” by “illegal aliens” (para. 16) within national security culture. Malkin’s security mom is one who teaches her children to recognize racialized threats—from terrorist to immigrant threats—and to distinguish “good” people of color from the “bad” ones. The price of inclusion was predicated on an acceptance of the terror and drug wars, vehicles for the assertion of U.S. hegemony on the global stage.

The ideology of the security mom was reflected in DHS ads (“Everyone Should,” 2005) published by the Ad Council shortly after Hurricane Katrina devastated the city of New Orleans. The White nuclear family reemerged as the central locus of homeland security, even though the traditional male-breadwinner, heterosexual nuclear family represents a minority of kinship arrangements in the neoliberal era (Stacey, 1997). The White family in the DHS ad (see Figure 1) is shown to have devised a plan based on fairly traditional gender roles, with the father in charge of emergency preparation and the mother responsible for gathering the children. Here we see the soccer mom and the security mom fused into one. Two versions of the ads were produced, one featuring an all-White family and the other an all-Black one (Figure 2). Middle-class African Americans were now included in the national security narrative, albeit in a segregated world. However, it was the White family ad that was seen in more magazines. Not coincidentally, the White family is pictured in front of its suburban home with a flag prominently displayed.

Both families are smiling because they had emergency preparedness plans that would keep them safe from a terrorist attack or another form of emergency. The DHS ads suggest that it is the responsibility of nuclear families to be prepared for environmental devastation. The “prepared,” suburban middle-class family, with a gender division of labor reminiscent of Truman’s speech, but adapted to the 21st century, was thus once again the subject of national security culture. The ad further invokes the civil defense self-help model and implicitly blames those who were not prepared—the Black, poor, and working class who had been abandoned by the Federal Emergency Management Agency during Hurricane Katrina. The state took the route of blaming the victim by stressing the concepts of “resilience” (the 21st-century equivalent of self-help) and preparedness, which received a boost in policy circles after Katrina (Kahan, Allen, & George, 2009). In short, the Black working class was not only kept out of the national security narrative, it was blamed for its hardships. This is not new: When the “cluttered” and “dingy” houses in *The House in the Middle* were destroyed by an atomic bomb, the Black families that lived in them were presented as only having themselves to blame for their poor domestic hygiene and their failure to apply a fresh coat of paint.

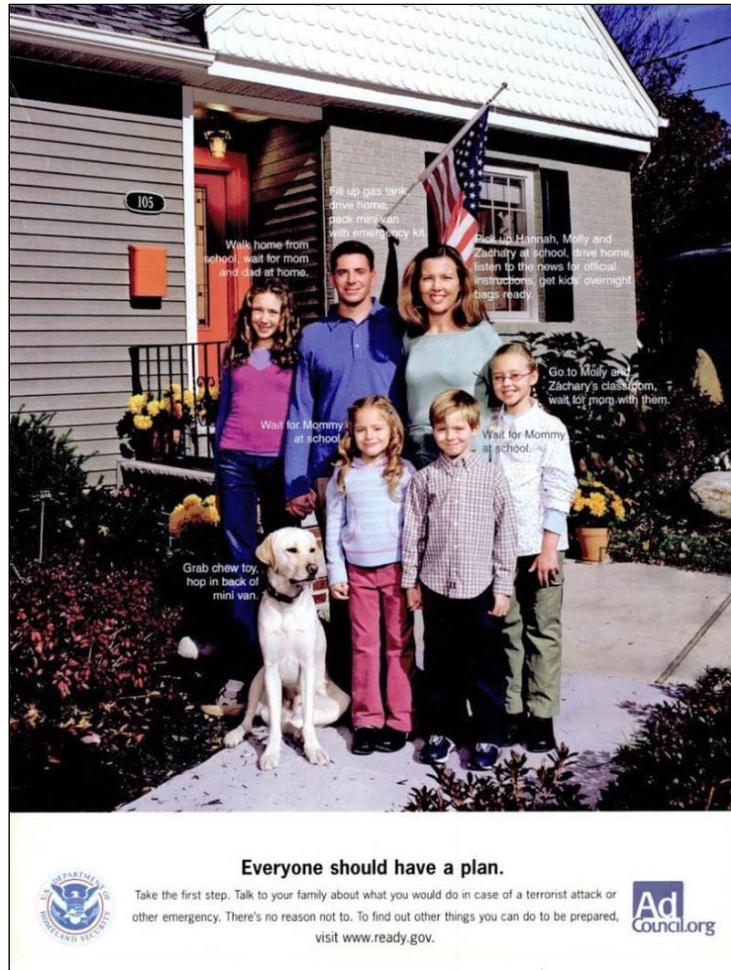


Figure 1. White nuclear family.

In these two ads, we find that the security mom, whether White or Black, does not overtly challenge traditional gender roles. However, Sarah Palin, in her 2008 vice presidential bid, further revised the security mom to create a space for such moms in the public sphere. This version of the security mom, however, was only realized during the Obama era. The Obama administration was marked by the inclusion of greater numbers of women and people of color in positions of state power. This enabled Juliette Kayyem (2016), a Lebanese American Homeland Security advisor to Obama, to adapt the security mom as a professional who was responsible for security both within and outside the home. In her book *Security Mom: An Unclassified Guide to Protecting Our Homeland and Your Home*, she draws on her experience within the national security establishment to make a case that "security begins at home." The new security mom worked both inside and outside the home (and not simply as a blogger and activist a la Malkin) as a member of the national security elite.

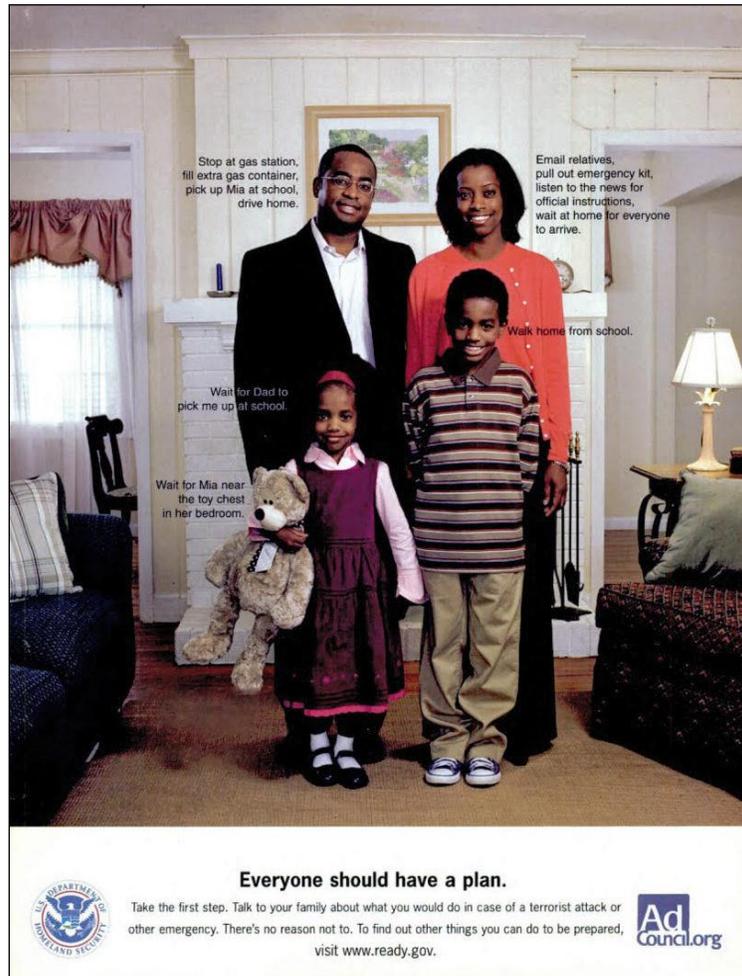


Figure 2. African American nuclear family.

Published in 2016, the book came on the heels of a new trend in the Obama era when powerful women, such as Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg, had articulated a form of elite feminism that became immensely popular. Sandberg's (2013) *Lean In* urged women to try harder to succeed in the workplace and offered various tips for how they might do so. In the process, however, she downplayed structural sexism. This emphasis on individual responsibility is a hallmark of neoliberalism, and Catherine Rottenberg (2014) correctly identifies Sandberg's feminism as "neoliberal feminism." Rottenberg argues that, like homonationalism, neoliberal feminism serves to position the United States as a bastion of progressive liberal democracy which then furthers U.S. imperialism. To this we might add that, by 2014, a corporate-friendly multiculturalism had become mainstream. A majority of business leaders supported inclusion based on the argument that "mixed gender, ethnicity, physical ability, age and sexual orientation are more representative of customers" (Smedley, 2014, para. 1) and therefore better for business. Neoliberal feminism and corporate multiculturalism, begun in previous decades as a process of co-opting feminism,

gay liberation, and antiracism, reached fruition in the Obama era. This formed the context for the articulation of new gendered, raced, and classed notions of imperial citizenship in national security culture.

National Security Culture in the Obama Era

The election of Barack Obama to the presidency ushered in a supposed “postracial” era in which the structural limits constraining people of color had been undone; multicultural nationalism displaced the traditional White nationalism of the Cold War. Further, the appointment of Hillary Clinton as secretary of state, building on the post-Cold War precedent of appointing women to this position (Madeline Albright and Condoleezza Rice), reinforced the idea that women can be in charge of imperial policy. National security culture reflected these shifts. The DHS Ready.gov website (<https://www.ready.gov/>) showcased not just the White middle-class nuclear family but also Black, brown, and Native American families. And DHS’s first major PSA with Walmart featured DHS secretary Janet Napolitano as its spokesperson. Whereas the military-industrial elite during the Cold War was predominantly White and male, and while Bush’s national security elite included some diversity such as Powell and Rice, in the Obama era more women and people of color were appointed to high positions (Napolitano was succeeded by Jeh Johnson, an African American). These appointees served to reproduce U.S. imperialism just as efficiently as their White male counterparts during the Cold War.

Black inclusion in the postracial era, however, carried with it the message of personal responsibility characteristic of the neoliberal ethic. One image on the Ready.gov website featuring its preparedness motto (“Prepare, Plan, Stay Informed”) is that of a working-class African American woman and her daughter reading instructions at a store on how to prepare for a tornado. The message is that they can and *should* take personal responsibility for emergencies and emerge resilient by shopping for items they need in case of a disaster. This is consistent with Obama-era DHS policies. Having emphasized resilience on the campaign trail, Obama, immediately on being elected, set up a new National Security Council Directorate for Resilience (Kahan et al., 2009). If civil defense relied on an individualized self-help model, its neoliberal avatar took this model several steps further, bringing together consumerism and security in new and old ways.

The “If you see something, say something” campaign was a creation of Madison Avenue, reminiscent of the role played by advertisers and public relations specialists in the FCDA during the early years of the Cold War. Shortly after the events of 9/11, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) in New York turned to a Manhattan advertising agency to create a security awareness campaign. By 2003, posters and placards with the slogan “See something, say something” were everywhere in New York City—in subway cars, on buses, and at public transportation sites. The ads merged seamlessly with the ubiquitous giant billboards and neon signs that promote conspicuous consumption in places like Times Square to create a neoliberal form of security nationalism. The MTA patented the slogan, seeing no conflict between public service and profiteering. In fact, the MTA (2016) website proudly states that it “owns the trademark to the phrase ‘If you see something, say something,’” and that it “has licensed the phrase to more than 130 domestic and international transportation providers and government agencies” (para. 14). When DHS adopted the slogan in 2010, it paid the MTA for it, and the “TM” trademark symbol appears as a superscript on the DHS website. This merging of commercialism with security, as noted earlier, is not

new. Echoing *Survival's* suggestion in 1950s that the "enemy" would like nothing better than to leave us "unproductive" and that capitalist "production must go on if we are to win," George W. Bush urged Americans to consume, to "get down to Disney World in Florida" and to "take your family and enjoy life" (Bacevich, 2008, para. 2) as the appropriate way to respond to the events of 9/11.

It is therefore fitting that DHS's first nationwide "See something, say something" campaign involved a partnership with the notorious antiunion corporation Walmart. Nearly 600 Walmart stores across the United States played a [44-second PSA](#) at their checkout counters of Napolitano declaring that "homeland security starts with hometown security" (DHS, 2010b) and urging shoppers to watch for "suspicious" activity and report it to the local authorities. Walmart had come under attack for its low wages and the resulting economic insecurity that it creates for workers. In a sleight of hand, Napolitano displaces this economic insecurity and presents Walmart not only as the vital center of any hometown but also as a responsible corporate citizen through its effort to keep the public safe. The PSA does not explain what exactly Walmart is doing to promote security, other than showing the PSA at its checkout counters. This move not-so-coincidentally also helped Walmart bolster its sagging public image. Here we see the tactics pioneered by the National Paint, Varnish and Lacquer Association during the Cold War and a continuation of mutually beneficial public-private partnerships.

Shortly before the Walmart campaign, DHS announced its partnership with the giant Mall of America in Minneapolis. The press release announced that the campaign would feature "both print and video advertisements throughout the mall's shopping and amusement park areas to help the thousands of daily tourists and shoppers to identify potential threats and suspicious situations" (DHS, 2010a, para. 4). By 2013, DHS had partnered with a "number of shopping centers, including the Mall of America, Walmart, Simon Property Group, and the Building Owners and Managers Association" with the goal of "keep[ing] shoppers safe," and "encouraging shoppers to report suspicious activity to local authorities" (Cohen, 2013, para. 2).⁴ In *Survival*, Murrow declares that "our factories will be battle stations." In the postindustrial neoliberal era, by contrast, malls and chain department stores such as Walmart have become the new sites of resistance.

In the Walmart PSA, the shopper-citizen is asked to carry out unpaid vigilant labor that involves looking out for suspicious activity in the store and parking lot. If help was needed, Napolitano instructs them to seek a Walmart manager. In this way, security nationalism designates the proper roles for citizens, corporations, and the state. The working class is included in the narrative, but as consumers rather than workers. The PSA targets working-class shopper-citizens—that is, those who shop at Walmart—although yet again, as in *Survival*, they are not visually depicted. The price of inclusion involves turning workers into consumers who perform unpaid vigilant labor. Correspondingly, the precarious work conditions and economic insecurity of Walmart workers is elided. The good neoliberal working-class imperial subject is one who accepts precarious labor, shops at Walmart, and volunteers in defense of the homeland.

⁴ This is one way in which neoliberalism has shaped national security culture. Although it would be helpful to trace the continuities and discontinuities with the Keynesian era, it is beyond the scope of this article to do so.

Additionally, as noted above, national security ideology in the Obama era took on distinctive gendered and racialized characteristics. In stark contrast to civil defense films that primarily featured White men in suits, women and people of color were placed at the helm of empire. As the third secretary of DHS, Napolitano joined Hillary Clinton and other powerful women in becoming the face of security nationalism. Furthermore, the *If You See Something, Say Something* PSA depicts White, brown, and Black men and women agents of the national security state hard at work defending the country from terrorist threats. This trend is also reflected in popular culture in television shows such as *Homeland*, *Madame Secretary*, and *Quantico*. *Madame Secretary* features Téa Leoni as secretary of state in a not-so-subtle reference to Hillary Clinton. Leoni's character is a neoliberal feminist version of the security mom—she is part of the national security elite, and at home she is supported by a husband who does his share of the housework. In addition to being at the helm of empire, women have been depicted as CIA agents (*Homeland*) and FBI agents (*Quantico*), central to the plots of both shows, in contrast to the Bush era, when the lead in national security shows such as *24* was filled by White men. The spin-off of *24*, *24 Legacy*, shot during the Obama era, features an African American lead.

The visual and narrative styles of contemporaneous television drama also seep into national security culture. If the family sitcom shaped civil defense films, national security as well as law and order shows that inundate today's television landscape mark current DHS films. The DHS PSA [The Drop Off](#) (DHS, 2011a) follows the style of the immensely popular show *24* in its pace, music, and cinematographic techniques. The format of *24* involved real-time storytelling in which agent Jack Bauer had to avert a terrorist attack within 60 minutes. The 30-second PSA follows this gripping format, complete with split screens, one of the key hallmarks of *24*. At the start of the PSA, we see a fashionable White woman exit a cab. From the suspenseful music in the background, we know that something is amiss. The screen then features a computer-generated text, similar to that seen in *24*, stating the location and time: "Commuter Station. 8:32 am." Unlike civil defense films that tended to be set in the home and in suburban communities, a significant portion of DHS films are set in locations where large numbers of people gather—commuter stations, shopping centers, and malls. Here we see an adoption of a long tradition in Hollywood productions in which ordinary places like bus depots, airports, and train stations are turned into war zones (Vallantin, 2005). *The Drop Off* draws on the style and content of this tradition, but most immediately from post-9/11 television terrorism dramas such as *24*—a factor that might explain its popularity on YouTube. The PSA reveals the complementarity between the culture industry and the national security state, highlighting the flow of culture in multiple directions and the joint production of a national security imagination.

After the woman exits the cab, she enters the commuter station. In the background, we hear the announcement: "Do not leave bags unattended." We then learn that she has either left a bag in the trunk of the cab, or that the White cab driver is also involved in a plot. A White man in a sports jacket observes the taxi driver behaving "suspiciously." The woman, presumably a professional from her attire, leaves her expensive-looking purse on a bench inside the station, as two people who are engaged in a conversation, an East Asian woman and an ethnically indistinct brown man, observe this act. The male narrator states, "Maybe you see something suspicious, but you don't want to get involved. It's nothing, you think. Can you be sure?" The Asian American woman then cuts short the conversation with the brown man in a suit. Here we see a self-conscious attempt to present Asians, particularly Asian American women, as active agents in

homeland security. There is also a suggestion that she might have taken the initiative because she deemed the willful abandonment of an expensive purse as suspicious—an unthinkable act in a hyperconsumer culture. The woman puts her hand out and stops the conversation. The two then go up and report what they saw to the authorities. Similarly, the White man in the sports jacket goes up to a Black police officer and reports his suspicions.

This PSA captures the new configuration of gender, race, and class in the production of imperial citizenship in the Obama era. From their clothes, all the “good guys” are middle-class professionals and two of the three are people of color. Also, the two agents of the state (the police officer outside and the security agent inside the station) are Black. Overwhelmingly, the “good guys” are women and people of color. In contrast, the terrorist “bad guys” are White. One is a female professional and the other a working-class man. This is consistent with a trend in television series during the Obama era, when terrorism suspects were predominantly White American citizens. A study of 10 highly rated television dramas in 2010, such as *24*, *Law and Order*, *CSI*, and *NCIS*, found that 67% of terrorism suspects were White (Blakley & Nahm, 2011).

This self-conscious adoption of a multicultural nationalism is also evident in the [If You See Something, Say Something PSA](#) (DHS, 2011b). In place of the Cold War White middle-class imperial subject, the PSA showcases diverse families. The first shot is of framed pictures of Black, White, and brown middle- and working-class individuals and their families. To the sound of regal music, the narrator announces that the “United States is home to 330 million people,” and is a country known for “freedom, justice, and opportunity.” The exceptional American nation, as the bastion of progressive liberalism, provides a home for people around the world seeking to realize the “American dream.” The film is particularly attentive to the melting pot metaphor, presenting the United States as a benevolent multicultural nation that welcomes and assimilates immigrants.

At this point, the happy patriotic music abruptly becomes foreboding, and the scene changes to a parking garage where a security camera is being painted over. The narrator warns that “there are individuals in the U.S. who seek to carry out acts of terrorism and violence against our communities” (DHS, 2011b). Since the narrator has shifted from talking about immigrants to identifying particular “individuals in the U.S.,” one might be primed to see a racialized foreign body spray-painting the security camera. This is not the case. As stated above, the perpetrator is a White man, presumably working class from his attire. It is noteworthy, in fact, that, like *Drop Off*, the “suspicious” people are all White. The man’s White woman accomplice, dressed in a hooded jacket and pants, is also culturally marked as working class. The male narrator even notes that “reporting suspicious activity should not be based on a person’s race, religion or gender, but rather on behaviors that seem suspicious or out of the ordinary.”

However, this overt multiculturalism and self-conscious political correctness exposes a contradiction in the DHS narrative, given that the implied “bad guys” are immigrants. Had the film been about the far right and White supremacists, who in the two decades leading up to 2010 were responsible for more terrorism deaths in the United States than Muslim American citizens or residents (Kundnani, 2014), it would not have begun with the image of the melting pot and a discussion of immigration. Arguably, White supremacist political violence is embedded into the very fabric of U.S. nationhood. The

film instead begins with the idea of a multicultural American nation composed of people from “across the globe” who bring “*different* cultures, traditions and ideas” (DHS, 2011b) as they come to the shores of the United States in search of the American dream. Immediately after making the case for American exceptionalism, the scene cuts to the parking garage, and the narrator announces that “*at the same time*, there are individuals in our country who seek to carry out acts of violence and terrorism against our communities and our country.” The juxtaposition of the melting pot metaphor with the assertion that there are some people “*in the country*” (who have presumably come from outside) with “*different cultures*” that intend to carry out acts of violence, creates a subtle association between immigrants and terrorism. While the United States celebrates its diversity, the video also warns that there are bad individuals who pose a threat to national security and who must be separated from “*our community*” and “*our country*.” It carefully avoids demonizing the culturally distinct other while also pointing a finger at “*bad*” individuals in these communities.

This narrative corresponds with DHS’s day-to-day functioning—it has two departments that handle immigration (including border security and customs)—and none focused specifically on White supremacist violence.⁵ To be sure, a unit of DHS produced an intelligence report on the threat posed by the White far right in the United States in the early months of the Obama presidency in 2009. The response to this report, however, was so hostile that the DHS unit was repudiated and blocked from monitoring the White far right (Kundnani, 2014). The focus on immigrants is consistent with theories of radicalization that have guided the counterterrorism activity of the national security state since 9/11. As Arun Kundnani (2014) argues, various counter-radicalization models are based on the notion that “*alien cultures*,” rather than political factors, are responsible for terrorism. Islamic culture and theology in particular are seen as the driving cause of terrorist violence. The film, however, carefully avoids a discussion of Islam and eschews the ubiquitous images of bearded and turbaned brown men. Instead, it casts White men (and sometimes women) as the perpetrators of violence. Further, it includes within “*our community*” the “*good*” people of color who have assimilated by accepting the benevolence of U.S. imperialism. In this way, 21st-century security nationalism self-consciously adopts an overt multiculturalism while resorting to subtle dog whistle tactics to alert the White, brown, and Black imperial citizen to those “*bad*” people of color with “*different cultures*” who are capable of terrorist violence. Even while the film explicitly eschews White middle-class normativity, the striking absence of brown bodies as terrorists functions to paper over the implicit anti-immigrant message.

In the film’s (DHS, 2011b) next scene, after the White man paints the security camera, we see a Black man in a suit enter the garage. This professional expresses annoyance when he sees the security camera painted over and becomes suspicious at the sight of the White man and his female accomplice dropping the keys to a large white van and moving away from it. He slinks down in his seat, so as not to be seen by the White couple, and calls the authorities to report this suspicious behavior. Within the logic

⁵ DHS contains 22 federal agencies with a total of more than 180,000 employees. Its key divisions are: Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection; the Office of Science and Technology; Customs and Border Protection; Immigration and Customs Enforcement; the Transportation Security Administration; Emergency Preparedness and Response; and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

of neoliberal multiculturalism, the Black professional occupies a higher position than working-class Whites. Not only is he the protagonist of this vignette, he acts responsibly, as managers at Walmart might, and contacts the authorities. However, unlike Jack Bauer of *24*, this is where his role ends. He is not to take the matter any further. After the protagonist places the call, the music changes, and the real hero of the PSA, the national security state, steps in. The narrator explains that it is "not easy to put the pieces together and we don't expect you to. That is the job of law enforcement and intelligence agents." The good citizen is one who supports state and private surveillance (e.g., security cameras in parking garages), accepts the paternal authority of the national security state, and internalizes the mantra that "homeland security is a shared effort and responsibility for each of us." The responsibility of Black men is to not to be suspicious of a criminal justice system that disproportionately incarcerates African Americans, but to trust the system to keep them safe from brown terrorists.

The casting of a Black professional in this role is reminiscent of films such as *Rules of Engagement* and *The Kingdom*, in which Black characters take the lead in protecting the country from people of Middle Eastern origin who are depicted in a stereotypical and Orientalist manner (Bayoumi, 2015; Shaheen, 2003). As Moustafa Bayoumi (2015) argues, ultimately the presence of African American actors in such lead roles serves to present an image that "racial conflict has been made residual and even overcome in the U.S." and that "having surmounted its historic deficiencies . . . the liberal (and liberating) potential of the American empire is consequently affirmed" (para. 29). If the United States is a postracial society, then empire—particularly a multiracial and multicultural empire—cannot be racist. Indeed, by eschewing stereotypical depictions of Arab and Muslim Americans, the PSA offers a more sophisticated version of this narrative, consistent with the casting in popular crime and terrorism dramas cited above, demonstrating the joint production of national security cultural imagination.

The rest of the PSA contains similar scenes in which people of color are calling in to report a White person they perceive as behaving suspiciously. A Black middle-class woman at a train station calls the authorities after she observes a White man taking pictures and making notes, and an East Asian woman calls security when a White man leaves his backpack and starts to walk away. In all these cases, "good" Black and Asian citizens must be vigilant and call the authorities when they observe suspicious activity, but they must not take matters into their own hands. In this way, national security culture in the Obama era, through the adoption of a neoliberal multiculturalism and feminism, reconfigured the ideal imperial citizen.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of the visual texts of the national security state during the early Cold War years and the Obama War on Terror era, this article outlines the continuities and discontinuities in the articulation of imperial citizenship. By situating these texts within the historic and institutional contexts from which they emerge, it demonstrates that national security culture does not remain static, but must of necessity evolve. However, the evolution of imperial citizenship and the inclusion of women and people of color is not a positive development. The neoliberal multicultural and feminist national security narrative marks a more sophisticated means by which to win consent for empire in an era dominated by identity politics. As Adolph Reed argues, the moral economy of identity politics is premised on the notion that "a

society in which 1% of the population control[s] 90% of the resources could be just" if "roughly 12% of the 1% were black, 12% were Latino, 50% were women, and whatever the appropriate proportions were LGBT people" (2015, para. 15). The Obama administration was attentive to this moral economy in its insistence on inclusion rather than structural transformation. The culture industry reinforced this logic through its introduction of more women and people of color in leading roles as seen in *Homeland*, *Madame Secretary*, *Quantico*, and *Scandal*. Together, the national security state and the culture industry helped produce a new cultural imagination that naturalized the massive expansion of the national security state in the Obama era.

The election of Donald Trump, who ran on an openly misogynist, racist, nativist platform, is likely to precipitate a new national security culture. Based on developments at the time of writing, the Trump administration had diverged sharply from Obama's symbolic inclusiveness, with the appointment of a cabinet consisting overwhelmingly of older White men drawn from the military and the corporate world. It is still too soon to know whether national security culture will revert to the cultural politics of the Cold War or that of the George W. Bush era or whether it will evolve in new and hybrid ways. It is harder still to predict what "Trumpism" will look like in practice given the divergent views within his administration and the Republican Party. The challenge, however, is not to restrict one's analysis simply to the Trump era and highlight the administration's racist, xenophobic, and misogynist security agenda, but to locate it within the broader historical arc in a way that does not glorify a "golden" past. As this article argues, neoliberal multiculturalism and feminism have served as effective means to normalize U.S. imperialism. Inclusion therefore is not cause for celebration. Methodologically, I would argue that it is not enough to study cultural texts by themselves (and the formation of intersectional identities within them) devoid of structural context. Rather, critical scholars must bring together intersectional analysis with a structural critique of neoliberal imperialism and the inequities it perpetuates both domestically and globally.

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