

A RHETORICAL VISION OF TOLERANCE: A STUDY OF MUSLIMS IN POST-9/11 TV DRAMAS

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William Hart teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in intercultural communication, international mass communication, 9/11, and communication, research methods, and rhetorical criticism. One of his areas of expertise is the study of mass communications related to 9/11 and the subsequent war on terror. For example, he has published book chapters on how the enemy was dehumanized in political cartoons shortly after 9/11, on the relationship among country music, conservative politics, and the U.S. military during the War on Terrorism, and on the changes in U.S. television programming after 9/11.

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After the events of 9/11 in the U.S., President Bush, political and religious leaders, celebrities, editorial cartoons, and public service announcements called for tolerance and respect toward Islam and Muslim Americans. A similar call was made in a set of 9/11 related dramas in the 2001-2002 U.S. television season. For this study four episodes were analyzed starting with the October 2001 "Isaac and Ishmael" episode of the *West Wing*. The other episodes analyzed are from three law dramas (*Family Law*, *The Practice* and *The Guardian*). Using symbolic convergence theory, this paper is an analysis of the fantasy themes, which chain out into a rhetorical vision of tolerance for Arab Americans in the United States. Four themes emerge: 1) Muslim as victims as compared to the villain roles of the past; 2) Japanese internment camps as an example of past intolerance; 3) It is an unwise trade off to prioritize national security over civil liberties and personal freedoms; and 4) Racial profiling is not effective in combating terrorism.

After the tragic events of September 11th, 2001, reports of hate crimes toward Muslims rose exponentially in the United States. Mosques were attacked in cities like Alexandria and Norfolk in Virginia and Chicago, Illinois. In San Francisco, a bag labeled 'Pig's blood' was placed on the door of a mosque. Also, threats of physical harm and actual harm, even death, were reported. For example, a man of the Sikh faith was murdered in Arizona because he 'looked Middle Eastern' (Religious Tolerance). The 2002 FBI *Hate Crimes Report* later confirmed this exponential