Introduction
Middle East Interests

Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as
one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.
    —Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"

This is a book about the cultural and political encounters that have made the
Middle East matter to Americans. It chronicles how, in the years between
World War II and the turn of the twenty-first century, Americans engaged the
Middle East, both literally and metaphorically, through its history as a sacred
space and its continuing reality as a place of secular political conflict. Thus peo-
ple in the United States encountered the Middle East through war, but also on
television shows; as part of the struggle over oil, but also in debates over an-
cient history; in discussions of religion, and also in constructions of race. This
study, therefore, aims to expand the idea of "encounters" to include those that
happen across wide geographic spaces, among people who will never meet ex-
cept through the medium of culture. And like so many encounters that cross
social or spatial divides, those chronicled here were often ambivalent and con-
fusing: they were fraught with tension and ripe with possibility.

Two factors, the presence of oil and the claim to religious origins, have
been particularly important to these encounters. Oil has often seemed the
most obvious of these two—an irreducible material interest. And for de-
cades, beginning in the 1940s and intensifying after the oil crises of the
1970s, narratives of a U.S. "national interest in oil" were present in every-
thing from presidential statements to car advertisements. By the time of
the 1990–1991 Gulf War, when the United States led a multinational coali-
tion to support Saudi Arabia and Kuwait against Iraq, oil was presumed,
both by those who supported and those who opposed the war, to be a pri-
mary American interest and a motivation for U.S. policy.

Claims to the Middle East as a site of religious origin have wielded a simi-
lar power, if in a different register. Because Judaism, Islam, and Christianity
each take the "Holy Land" as their site of origin, religious narratives helped
forge the connection that allowed many people in the United States to see

themselves as intimately involved with the Middle East, as having a legitimate cultural investment that was sometimes a profound political interest as well.

Yet to speak of oil or religious origins is not so much to explain the relationship as it is to open a question. The Middle East has loomed large as a U.S. interest, especially since 1945, when the United States became a global superpower and the Middle East became one of the most contested regions in the world. But neither the investment in oil nor the meaning of religious history was preordained; each emerged from a complex layering of cultural, religious, and social practices. Representations of the Middle East—of both the ancient religious sites and the modern nations—helped to make the area and its people meaningful within the cultural and political context in the United States. In other words, the Middle East was not immediately available as an American interest; instead, it had to be made "interesting." *Epic Encounters* examines the role of cultural products, from films to museum exhibits to television news, in establishing the parameters of U.S. national interests in the region. Cultural practices have been central to that project, and claims about oil and origins were the twin pillars of its logic.

With the Arab-Israeli conflict providing a constant context, official American policy toward the Middle East in the last fifty years has vacillated between two poles: distance, othering, and containment define the first; affiliation, appropriation, and co-optation constitute the second. In some moments and from some perspectives, particular nations in the region have appeared as partners and allies in the extension of U.S. power. Indeed, during the first decades after World War II, American encounters were most often posited as affiliations, and U.S. interests were framed in terms supportive of the region's anticolonial movements. At the same time, U.S. policymakers posited as an alternative to colonialism a "benevolent" American partnership, which included nearly unlimited U.S. access to Middle Eastern oil.

As policies and politics hardened in both the United States and the Middle East in the 1970s and 1980s, however, attention focused on the Middle East as a military and/or cultural threat requiring containment. Antiterrorism and the "oil threat" emerged as primary concerns in the media and in U.S. policy. Then, with the fall of the Soviet Union and the defeat of Iraq in the 1990–1991 Gulf War, the older theme of U.S. benevolent partnership reemerged, this time in the context of President H. W. Bush's New World Order. Of course, the poles of containment and co-optation often existed simultaneously, sometimes contesting each other, sometimes simply as two aspects of one policy.

If we want to understand the consistent involvement that Americans have had with the Middle East, however, we will need to go beyond, without discarding, this official story. In practice, Americans' encounters with

the Middle East have included everything from pilgrimage to captivity to war, and they have been defined by emotions ranging from admiration to fear to disdain. To understand *these* multifaceted relationships, we must consider the politics of representation: that is, the negotiation of political and moral values, as well as the development of an often uneven and contested public understanding of history and its significance. I argue that cultural products such as films or novels contributed to thinking about both values and history in two ways. First, they helped to make the Middle East an acceptable area for the exercise of American power. Second, they played a role in representing the Middle East as a stage for the production of American identities—national, racial, and religious. The two aspects were interdependent, as the construction of identities and the staging of U.S. "interests" in the Middle East have often gone hand in hand.

While the idea of a U.S. national interest in oil has made the Middle East central to constructions of expansionist nationalism, the sense of religious connection (Muslim, Jewish, or Christian) has sometimes worked in the opposite direction, as a basis for racial solidarities or transnational affiliations. Ancient histories and biblical tales have influenced how people viewed contemporary Middle East politics, in part because events of the religious past have been, in Walter Benjamin's terms, "recognized by the present as one of its own concerns." Narratives of the Middle East's distinctive historical and moral significance have voiced convictions about community, identity, and faith. The fact that the Middle East was the site of religious origin stories has made it, perhaps more than anywhere else in the world, a powerful site of affiliation not only for Jews or Arabs but also for others—African American Muslims, fundamentalist Christians, and amateur Egyptologists, among them—who have claimed the spaces and histories of the Middle East as their own.

Religious, racial, and national narratives frame identity in distinct ways. The stories they tell and the loyalties they require often overlap, but just as often they are in profound, sometimes violent, conflict. This study examines both the official and the unofficial versions of the U.S. encounter with the Middle East. It explores the cultural logic that supported U.S. policies in the region, from the remarkable intersection of biblical epic films and cold war security doctrine in the 1950s to the news media and popular culture accounts that made Israel an icon of effective power after Vietnam. It also traces mobilizations of the Middle East that challenged or offered alternatives to that dominant logic, including African Americans' construction of an Islamic-influenced cultural radicalism in the 1960s, debates over the legacy of ancient Egypt in the 1970s, and Christian conservatives' focus on Israel as a major site for fundamentalist narratives of Armageddon.

I intend *Epic Encounters* to be a contribution to placing U.S. history and culture firmly within the overall history of colonial and postcolonial power. The analysis here aims to address what Amy Kaplan has defined as three major absences in scholarship on the United States: "the absence of culture from the history of U.S. imperialism; the absence of empire from the study of American culture; and the absence of the United States from the postcolonial study of imperialism."[1] To place the history of U.S. global power at the heart of the study of U.S. cultures, and to give culture a central place in an analysis of the production and reproduction of U.S. power, is to resist many of the categories that have separated the "domestic" from the "international." Identities, cultures, and conflicts have often refused to be contained within the borders of the nation-state; in the case of the extraordinary growth of U.S. hegemony in the last fifty years, the nation-state itself has expanded its influence and its reach so profoundly as to belie any attempts to understand "Americanness" outside of that expansion. This study highlights the fact that American global reach has significantly transformed the meanings of the nation itself; in the postwar period, the realities of U.S. power have structured the process of defining a rich variety of American—and "un-American"—identities.

MORAL GEOGRAPHIES AND THE CULTURAL FIELD

The postwar significance of the Middle East for Americans coalesced as part of the process of constructing a cognitive map suitable for the new "American Century." This mapping involved the development of what Michael Shapiro has called "moral geographies": cultural and political practices that work together to mark not only states but also regions, cultural groupings, and ethnic or racial territories. Moral geographies shape human understandings of the world ethically and politically as well as cognitively; they consist of "a set of silent ethical assertions" that mark connection and separation.[2] Different moral geographies can coexist and even compete; each represents a different type of imaginative affiliation linked to certain ideas about significant spaces.

In the following chapters, I trace the cultural history of the moral geographies that Americans have used to understand the Middle East. The book explores how Americans have claimed their "interests" in the Middle East, from Suez to Iran to the Persian Gulf, with the understanding that those interests have included not only oil or political influence but also religious affiliation, cultural power, and racial identity. I argue that the Middle East has been both strategically important and metaphorically central in the construction of U.S. global power. Yet the development of U.S. foreign policy in

the postwar period was also intimately intertwined with the construction of a larger set of values and meanings that were not limited to, invented by, or entirely under the control of policymakers. Moral geographies of the Middle East have also provided alternatives to official policy, framing transnational affiliations and claims to racial or religious authority that challenged the cultural logic of American power. Moral geographies, in other words, are deeply historical and highly contested products, forged at the nexus of state power, cultural productions, and sedimented presumption.

In examining these diverse histories, I have operated from certain more general understandings of the connections between culture and politics. In particular, the arguments in the chapters that follow depend on two fundamental premises: first, that foreign policy has a significant cultural component; second, that understanding the political import of culture requires that we position cultural texts *in* history, as active producers of meaning, rather than assuming that they merely "reflect" or "reproduce" some preexisting social reality.

The first premise is simply that foreign policy itself is a meaning-making activity, and one that has helped to frame our ideas of nationhood and national interest. Foreign policy statements and government actions become part of a larger discourse through their relation to other kinds of representations, including news and television accounts of current events, but also novels, films, museum exhibits, and advertising. To examine these very different types of materials in relationship to one another is not to suggest that they are all the same thing, or that they work the same way. Obviously, the practice of foreign policymakers, be it the establishment of diplomatic contacts with a former guerrilla leader or an order to send troops into a foreign territory, works from a set of assumptions and constraints that differs from that of filmmakers or television news producers. But foreign policy is a semiotic activity, not only because it is articulated and transmitted through texts but also because the policies themselves construct meanings. By defending borders, making alliances, and establishing connections, foreign policy becomes a site for defining the nation and its interests.

In fact, the conduct of foreign policy plays a central role in the construction of nationalism, though foreign policy is only a part of that process. As Benedict Anderson has argued, "nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time."[3] On Anderson's account, nationalism is a cultural development; nations are "imagined communities" rather than natural entities, and as such they depend on cultural articulation and construction. The cultural and political mapping of salient space plays an important role in constructing the political legitimacy of the nation

as the site of political subjectivity and identity.[4] This mapping occurs in many sites, from the weather maps on the nightly news to the daily newspapers' lists of the nation's best-selling novels. The nation-state is modernity's most powerful moral geography. Today, in the postmodern era of globalization, the nation-state may be undergoing a fundamental challenge, as the following chapters discuss. Global capital, virtual communities, and mobile populations threaten both the nation's political legitimacy and its status as an identity container. Postmodernity has produced it own powerful geographic imaginations, in which territory, community, and political affiliations are being reconfigured. As of yet, however, nationalism remains a crucial part of world politics: people battle to achieve or maintain their nations, as in Palestine or among the Kurds in Iraq; to forge new ones out of disintegrating empires, as in Russia or the Balkans; or to maintain the power of their own nation against others, as in the Gulf War.

Foreign policy is one of the ways in which nations speak for themselves; it defines not only the boundaries of the nation but also its character, its interests, its allies, and its enemies. The affiliations and disaffiliations that the discourse of foreign policy seeks to construct are never permanent, however. They are always unstable and subject to change. Alliances shift or "national interests" alter, expanding or contracting in an unstable global environment. The nation finds itself threatened by the specter of doubt or dissent within, and by the very real possibility of challenge by those outside its boundaries. In fact, this sense of danger and instability in foreign policy discourse is central to its success. As David Campbell has argued: "Ironically, ... the inability of the state project of [ensuring] security to succeed is the guarantor of the state's continued success as a compelling identity. The constant articulation of danger through foreign policy is thus not a threat to the state's identity or existence; it is its condition of possibility."[5] 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.

The second premise of this study is that culture is an active part of constructing the narratives that help policy make sense in a given moment. The historical and political significance of cultural texts lies in the fact that they are integral aspects of both history and politics. The task of any study of culture, then, is to reconstruct the larger world in which a given cultural form was made meaningful. This means, first and foremost, that a cultural product, be it a novel or a painting or a film, cannot be understood solely through "immanent" analyses that stay within the text itself. An exami-

nation of the formal qualities or narrative strategy of a single text, be it Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* or Sylvester Stallone's *Rambo*, is often the first step toward understanding how culture works, but it is *only* a first step, if one wants to explain how and why that product was meaningful in its time. Textual analysis, standing alone, tends toward what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls a "derealization" of cultural works: "Stripped of everything which attached them to the most concrete debates of their time … they are impoverished and transformed in the direction of intellectualism or an empty humanism."[6] Bourdieu also argues, however, that many cultural critics make the opposite error: determined to connect "culture" to "society," they assume that "society" exists somewhere outside of "art," which is then presumed to "reflect" society, in some direct or indirect way. Bourdieu calls this presumption "the short circuit effect," and warns against attempts to interpret a cultural text as a straightforward expression of an outside reality, be it the author's biography (Amy Tan writes about Chinese mothers because of her childhood experience with her Chinese mother) or the world of politics (*Rambo* as an expression of men's fear of feminism).[7] Such "external" analyses are inevitably limited, in that they assume a direct one-to-one correlation between an artistic product and the interests or situation of the artist (whether the artist is viewed in terms of her individual biography or as a "representative" of some larger social group). Such "imputations of spiritual inheritance" fail to acknowledge the specific rules and conditions of what Bourdieu calls "the field." In the case of the cultural field, those conditions would include the meanings of "art" in a given moment, how different types of art relate to each other, the rules for what counts as "good" or even "profitable" in the world of culture, and the economic situation of cultural producers.

The cultural field exists in continuous relationship with the other fields in the larger social system, and this relationship is far more complicated than direct reflection. If we want to argue that cultural products are politically significant—and they often are—we simply cannot make the assumption, implicitly or explicitly, that movie producers or struggling novelists are producing (or reproducing) the ideologies needed by the ruling political elite, which is itself often quite divided. Instead, we have to "explain the coincidence" that brings specific cultural products into conversation with specific political discourses.[8] Even if a movie explicitly attempts to justify a political position (as the 1956 version of *The Ten Commandments* tried to do), the impact of its statement depends on the overall situation, including artistic questions, such as how seriously the film is reviewed; the issue of whether or not audiences interpret the film as a political statement (which is then re-

lated to the history of film viewing and the status of the particular film genre, among other things); and the larger political question of whether the statement being made speaks in harmony with, or in opposition to, other important political positions at the time. The apparent "statement" of a text, then, is not the same as its historically constituted meaning.

A central thesis of this book is that cultural productions help make meanings by their historical association with other types of meaning-making activity, from the actions of state policymakers to the marketing of Bible prophecy. This suggests that we might ask less about "what texts mean"— with the implication that there is a hidden or allegorical code to their secret meaning—and more about how the texts participate in a field, and then in a set of fields, and thus in a social and political world. By focusing on the intertextuality, the ecumenicalism, and the common logic of diverse representations, I indicate the ways in which the production of a discourse about the Middle East comes to be understood as authoritative, as "common sense." This production of knowledge occurs not through the conspiracy or conscious collaboration of individuals but through the internal logics of cultural practices, intersecting with the entirely interested activity of social agents. Instead of focusing on the problem of negative stereotypes of people in the Middle East (and there have been many) or on the role of the media in directing public opinion, this model focuses on the cultural work that happens at the messy intersections. We can begin to see how certain meanings can become naturalized by repetition, as well as the ways that different sets of texts, with their own interests and affiliations, come to overlap, to reinforce and revise one another toward an end that is neither entirely planned nor entirely coincidental. If the end product is the successful construction of a discourse of expansionist nationalism, what we examine here is not a conspiracy, nor a functionalist set of representations in the service of power, but a process of convergence, in which historical events, overlapping representations, and diverse vested interests come together in a powerful and productive, if historically contingent, accord.

ORIENTALISM AND BEYOND

Since the publication of Edward Said's groundbreaking analysis in 1978, the term "Orientalism" has become shorthand for exoticizing and racist representations of "the East." Orientalism is a certain type of lens; through it, Europeans and Americans have "seen" an Orient that is the stuff of children's books and popular movies: a world of harems and magic lamps, mystery and decadence, irrationality and backwardness. Said's *Orientalism* pro-

vided a detailed analysis of the history of such images, as well as a language for understanding how the cognitive mapping of spaces (East versus West) and the stereotyping of peoples are both intimately connected with the processes of economics, politics, and state power.[9] Since its publication, *Orientalism* has served as the inspiration and the model for a flowering of academic and political analyses of colonial and postcolonial power. The scholarship that has productively used Said's framework is so extensive that a comprehensive list is impossible; it includes a broad range of studies of European or American encounters with Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.[10] Precisely because it has been and continues to be so valuable, scholars who want to suggest other models, as I do, must first account for the limits of the Orientalist framework.

In Said's classic formulation, Orientalism is a large and multifaceted discourse, a "textual relation," that became central to European self-representation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Focusing on representations of the Middle East, Said argues that Orientalism distributed a certain kind of geopolitical awareness—"the world is made up of two unequal halves, Occident and Orient"—through various aesthetic, scholarly, and historical texts.[11] Orientalism operates on a binary logic: Orient versus Occident, Europeans versus Others, Us versus Them. These binaries parallel and draw heavily upon the logic of gender construction: the Oriental is "feminized," thus constructed as mysterious, infinitely sexual and tied to the body, irrational, and inclined toward despotism; the European is "masculinized," and posited as civilized, restrained, rational, and capable of democratic self-rule. Orientalism, Said suggests, is preeminently a "citational" discourse, in which authors or artists draw heavily on previous representations, using travel accounts or paintings as if they were their own experiences (some haven't even gone to the "Orient" at all). In this oddly self-enclosed network of authorities, citing other Western writers or an earlier generation of images is the primary proof of "authenticity" and accuracy.

Orientalism provided one primary grid through which Europeans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries made sense of their imperial project. During the heyday of European power, imperialist representations were part and parcel of an enormously effective practice of world rule. In 1914, at the high point of classical imperialism, Europe held most of the world outside the Americas as colonies, protectorates, dominions, dependencies, and commonwealths.[12] The moral logic of imperialism required that Europeans form what Etienne Balibar has described as an "imperialist superiority complex," through which the project of imperialist expansion was able to transform itself, in the minds of its practitioners, "from a mere enter-

prise of conquest into an enterprise of universal domination, the founding of a 'civilization.' "[13]

Orientalism was politically important because it had an extraordinary identity-forging power at the moment that modern identities were coming into being. The Orientalist concept of the "East" played a significant role in constructing European identity, in defining an "us" that was opposed to "them," and in constructing the "modern" and rational self as opposed to the primitive and irrational Orient. For example, anti-Islamic representations were frequent, even (or especially) among experts on Islam, who often presented Islam as an "imposter" religion that bred both fanaticism and corruption. Islam was the "bad" alternative to Christianity, just as the "Orient" was the backward and decadent (if also strangely appealing) half of the East-West binary.[14] For Said, Orientalist scholarship, art, and travel narratives were intimately entangled with the military, economic, and political strategies of European states. By offering Europeans the certainty that they already knew what there was to know of the East, representations became practices: they laid the foundation for imperial rule.

Recognizing the usefulness of Said's intervention, scholars in recent years have also challenged and revised important aspects of his argument. Several have pointed out that Orientalism in colonialist Britain and France was never as internally unified or as stable as Said argues. Instead, it existed as "an uneven matrix" that was taken up differently in different moments.[15] In addition, critics have argued, Said seems to suggest that the best alternative to Orientalism is simple humanism. If only Europeans had been able to see Arabs in terms of their "ordinary human reality," history might have been very different. This vision of an unadorned human encounter ignores our inevitable imbrication in the political and moral assumptions of our historical moment. There are no "empty humans" who can face each other outside of history or cultural values.[16]

In addition to these general concerns, other problems arise when the Orientalism paradigm is brought to bear on the study of U.S., as opposed to European, encounters with the Middle East.[17] As I discuss in detail later, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century popular culture and political narratives frequently did mobilize the Orientalist fascination with exoticism, sexuality, and decadence. Like their European precedents, American cultural texts often seemed to take a mix-and-match approach to representing the "East," making of China and Saudi Arabia and India and Morocco a single world deemed "Oriental." At other times, however, the Middle East emerged as a distinct entity, separated out from the logic of a generalized "East." Quite often, too, different nations in the Middle East were distin-

guished from each other: not only Israel as opposed to the Arab states but also Egypt versus Saudi Arabia, or Jordan as distinct from Libya. The bulk of this book, in fact, tells the story of *post*-Orientalist representation in the United States, that is, the period after World War II when American power worked very hard to fracture the old European logic and to install new frameworks.

Two factors in particular have complicated Orientalism in the United States. First, the Orientalist paradigm fundamentally depends on the presumption that the "us" of the West is, or is perceived to be, a homogeneous entity. Said argues that Orientalist discourse represented the European subject as (racially, ethnically, and culturally) unified, and thus clearly distinct from the peoples of the East. However, U.S. representations of the Middle East, especially those since 1945, have been consistently obsessed with the problem of domestic diversity. Narratives of nationality are perhaps always more concerned with internal difference than Said acknowledges,[18] but in the United States in particular, racial distinctions within the nation were a structuring concern. As I discuss later, the racial status of Middle East immigrants has been part of the dynamic, but only a relatively small part. More often, the politics of black-white relations have influenced the meaning given to different parts of the Middle East—be it Israel or Mecca or Egypt. African Americans, both civil rights activists and black nationalists, have claimed certain histories as their own, and these claims have challenged, complicated, and conspired with dominant discourses that have represented the region as a resource for American nationalism and a site for the expansion of U.S. power. Thus in the postwar period, the us-them dichotomies of Orientalism have been fractured by the reality of a multiracial nation, even if that reality was recognized only in its disavowal. In other words, there was never a simple, racial "us" in America, even when, as was generally the case, whiteness was privileged in discourses of Americanness.

A second problem is *Orientalism*'s neat mapping of the "West" as masculine and the "East" as feminine. In many ways, Said's argument that the East was linked to femaleness (and thus to irrationality, sexuality, and lack of capacity for democracy) makes sense. For more than two decades, political theorists and women's historians have carefully dissected the division of public and private spheres, analyzing the ways in which industrializing nations began to separate out certain spaces designated as "private"—those signified by home and hearth—and then to gender those spaces "female." Women's association with the private world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was supposed to provide a haven of tranquillity for men, an escape from their stresses in the industrializing, competitive, market-driven "public." But it also

worked to ensure women's unequal access to citizenship, voting, and political life.[19] Similarly, Said and others have suggested that the representations of "Orientals" as feminized (sensual, domestic, nonrational) and the West as masculinized (rational, intellectual, and public) served to legitimate the exclusion of colonized peoples from democratic rights. In this model, citizenship and nationality were necessarily represented as white and male.

Important as such analyses are, however, they do not adequately account for the ways in which "the feminine" has been mobilized to represent nationality, citizenship, and the public. Certainly in the postwar United States, the "universal" subject of the nation-state is *not* imagined simply as male, and citizenship is not simply a matter of *public* life. Instead, the discourse of Americanness has insisted on the centrality of properly ordered private life—inevitably understood as the heterosexual couple and the family—to the public legitimacy of the nation. Women are central figures in this project of representing the nation through the figure of a family. And like the nation itself in foreign policy discourse, the family is imagined as continuously imperiled, under threat from within and without. Thus the "private" world of the marriage, home, and family is necessary to constructing the "inside" of the national community; that "inside" is then mobilized to represent the nation itself in its public mode.[20]

The complexities of race and gender also highlight the fact that, too often, scholars and activists have used the term "Orientalism" to characterize everything from *Madame Butterfly* to television news accounts of the Viet Cong. Yet not all stereotypes, even those of Asians or Arabs, are Orientalist; they might be racist, imperialist, and exoticizing without engaging in the particular logic of Orientalism: binary, feminizing, and citational. When "Orientalism" is used to describe every Western image of every part of the Eastern half of the world, the definition has become too flexible for its own good. Despite these theoretical and historical limitations to the Orientalism framework, however, it remains a useful and evocative characterization of a certain European and American "way of seeing."[21] Rather than endlessly fracturing the definition of Orientalism, or throwing it out altogether, I believe we need to be careful to distinguish when Orientalism *is* at work, and when it is not. If Orientalism does not adequately explain all the diverse ways that Americans came to represent the Middle East, it nonetheless does describe one important version of that encounter. If it was never the *only* manifestation of public fascination with the region, it also never disappeared as a way of comprehending and ultimately domesticating the Middle East for American consumption. Putting Orientalism in its place, then, becomes part of the analytical and historical task at hand.

THE MIDDLE EAST AS "HOLY LAND"

To understand the post-Orientalist logic of the years since World War II, we need to examine in more detail the distinctly Orientalist representations that dominated U.S. encounters with the Middle East in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For most of the nineteenth century, Americans' primary interest in the Middle East was the "Holy Land." Although nineteenth-century maps marked all land to the east of Europe as the "Orient," most people nonetheless distinguished the Near East from areas farther east, such as China and Japan. The Near East, particularly the land of Palestine (which had been ruled by the Ottoman Empire since 1517), was understood as inferior and backward, but also as old, exotic, and connected to the West through Jewish and Christian history.[22]

American travelers began to visit Palestine in earnest in the 1830s, and for those with means travel became quite common after the Civil War. Under the Ottoman Turks, the area was relatively sparsely populated (forty thousand in 1890, when the population of New York City was approximately 3 million), primarily by Muslim Arabs but with some small number of Eastern Christians and Jews. Most American visitors went to Palestine for religious reasons. By visiting the places mentioned in the Bible, they intended to see for themselves the proofs of the authenticity of Christian narratives, and to get a better picture of the life and ministry of Jesus.[23] The biblical scholars who began writing and publishing in the 1830s shared the same presumption: in the face of revisionist "higher criticism" of the Bible and challenges to its historical accuracy, the exploration and study of the lands and historical geography of Palestine and other biblical sites would unearth proofs of the Bible's literal truths.[24]

The vast majority of American tourists were Protestant Christians, who saw themselves as having a particularly meaningful connection to the region on the strength of their religious beliefs. This claim to the Holy Land was inseparable from the popular self-perception that Americans were not only the literal inheritors of God's favor but also better versed in the Bible, and thus more intimately connected with its ancient geographies, than Europeans. Historians have noted the extraordinary inculcation of topographical knowledge via church Bible studies in the nineteenth century. The Methodist Episcopal Church, for example, encouraged young students to take up fantasy existence in the Holy Land and to write letters home to their families from their imaginary tours. For visitors, then, the Holy Land was often linked to nostalgia for childhood and the Bible lessons learned at home. As one Episcopal bishop wrote of his 1874 trip to Palestine:

> This is the first country where I have felt at home....As I try to
> clear away the mists, bring forward the distant, and make present
> what seems prehistoric, I find myself at my mother's side and my
> early childhood renewed. Now I see why this strange country
> seems natural. Its customs, sights, sounds, and localities were those
> I lived among in that early time, as shown to me by pictures,
> explained by word, and funded as part of my undying property.[25]

Most travelers also believed that the contemporary residents of Palestine would provide a living illustration of biblical customs, since they presumed that the Arabs would have changed little in the nineteen centuries since the time of Jesus.[26] Facing their Arab contemporaries, they posited them as people untouched by time, living in a continuing "prehistory." Rather than assuming that one moment in time might include many different ways of life, they characterized geographic and cultural difference across space as a historical difference across time. Anne McClintock has described this presumption as the imperial trope of "anachronistic space"—that is, space imagined as "prehistoric, atavistic, and irrational, inherently out of place in the historical time of modernity."[27] Within this representation of a contemporary place as an example of the "living past" was imbedded the assumption that in time the forces of "modernity"—meaning Europeans and Americans—would inevitably sweep it aside. Thus even though Americans had a specific interest in the Holy Land that differed from that of Europeans, they produced images of it that were decidedly Orientalist in character, exhibiting the same kind of exoticism and fascination with decadence as Europeans did, and presuming that white Christians were in possession of a rationality, historical consciousness, and purposiveness that was denied to the Oriental.

The audience for reports and descriptions of the Holy Land seemed insatiable. Travelogues from Holy Land trips were extremely popular in the United States from the 1830s onward. By the 1850s, literally hundreds of travelers were publishing accounts of their trips, and a surprising number of these were frequently reprinted. William Cowper Prime's *Tent Life in the Holy Land* (1857) was one widely read and conventionally pious version; the painter Bayard Taylor's popular 1855 narrative was decidedly more secular. The missionary William Thomson's *The Land and the Book* (1858) became a best-seller and eventually a classic that remained in print well into the twentieth century. Sold by traveling salesmen and given away at church contests, these reports told of the enthusiasms experienced by emotional travelers on seeing Jerusalem and recounted colorful (and sometimes hostile) encounters with the natives of the area. Many expressed shock at what they described as

the "filthy" and degenerate state of the local population, who, after all, were supposed to be serving as exemplars of biblical customs. Combining adventure narratives and religious education, the guides transcended the divide between Protestant piety and nineteenth-century popular culture.[28]

Both the sanctimoniousness and the racism of the travel guides made them easy targets for the young journalist Samuel Clemens. Embarking on his own trip in 1866, Clemens reported on his tour in a series of letters for a California newspaper; these were then edited and published as Mark Twain's first commercially successful book, *Innocents Abroad; or, The New Pilgrims' Progress* (1869). Clemens frequently contrasted his own sardonic reactions to the more conventional pieties of his predecessors. Noticing that he felt no particular desire to weep when he first saw Jerusalem, for example, Clemens compared himself to travel writer William Cowper Prime: "[Prime] went through this peaceful land with one hand forever on his revolver, and the other on his pocket-handkerchief. Always, when he was not on the point of crying over a holy place, he was on the point of killing an Arab."[29]

Some Protestant Christians concerned themselves with the Holy Land less because of its place in history than because of its future in biblical prophecy. Beginning in the 1870s, American evangelist Dwight Moody traveled across the United States preaching his version of "premillennialist dispensationalism," a method of biblical interpretation based on the belief that God had divided time into distinct periods and that each period, or dispensation, had its own characteristics, scriptural exhortations, and distinct method of salvation. Many of Moody's views were codified and popularized in the 1909 Scofield Reference Bible, which became the standard version for many evangelicals.[30] The Holy Land was central to this system, since dispensationalism asserted that God had a distinct plan for the Jews at the end of time; this plan included the literal restoration of Jews to the land of Palestine and the rebuilding of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem. Moody taught that Christ's return was imminent and encouraged his audiences to read the "signs of the times." Moody's teachings challenged the emergence of both Social Gospel perfectionism and liberal modernism by arguing for a return to the Bible, insisting that the millennial era would be inaugurated by God, not by the good works of humankind. Moody became the best-known leader of an evangelical revival that swept the nation in the late nineteenth century; he went on to found the Moody Bible Institute, which became one of the most important training grounds for evangelical pastors and trained laypersons.[31] In their fascination with the Holy Land as the once and future site of God's action in history, these early twentieth-century

evangelicals were to become the spiritual inspiration for the fundamentalist turn to Israel nearly a century later, in the 1970s and 1980s.

Nineteenth-century Christians of all stripes were also captivated by the physical layout of Palestine. Art historian John Davis has described the remarkable proliferation of Holy Land spectacles after 1840, as changing modes of artistic production provided new ways for audiences to capture the experience of travel, and thus to share in the religious and moral development thought to accompany a journey abroad. In the 1840s and 1850s, audiences flocked to view the large-scale painted panoramas that toured the country. Panoramas significantly extended the viewing experience over that offered by single canvases by giving an all-around view from a particular spot, say a hill overlooking Jerusalem. They thus positioned the spectator— in Mary Louise Pratt's phrase—as "monarch of all I survey."[32] While landscapes of the American West were popular subjects for panorama, "realistic" views of the terrain and sights of the Holy Land predominated. In the 1850s John Banvard added a new dimension, by slowly unscrolling his giant canvas (between twenty-five and forty-eight feet tall) to give the illusion of movement. Already famous for his "three-mile-long" painting of the Mississippi, Banvard created a Holy Land canvas that walked the audience through most of Palestine. Visitors were usually invited to buy pamphlets that described the views in detail. Banvard then presented the panorama as a performance, narrating the scenes as he slowly scrolled the panorama, and spectators became virtual tourists on a pilgrimage to the major religious sights of the Holy Land.[33]

The Holy Land panoramas were just one dimension of an emerging nineteenth-century fascination with vision and spectacle. Although observation and cataloging had certainly been an aspect of modernity and the scientific revolution since the seventeenth century, a more specific interest in viewing and exhibition came to infuse European and American culture in the 1800s. Timothy Mitchell has described the surprise registered by Egyptian visitors to Paris in the 1890s when they encountered this European obsession with "rendering things up to be viewed." Whether one was visiting world's fairs or scientific expositions, walking down the busy city streets, or entering the new entertainments that dotted every corner, Europe and America seemed to be places where one was "continually pressed into service as a spectator," invited to see the innumerable exhibitions and displays that represented the rest of the world for Europeans and Americans. More important, this spectatorial fascination encouraged Europeans and Americans to view the world itself as an extended exhibition.[34] In this universe, reality was never secured until it could be positioned as an object

to be viewed. Only after some part of the world or some group of people could be constructed as an exhibit—and preferably also represented in a visual medium (painting or photography) and through description in a novel or travel narrative—could that place or experience be understood, ordered, and organized. This, Mitchell argues, led Europeans to a great historical confidence based in "the certainty of representation" and to an attitude toward the reality they viewed that he describes, with understatement, as a particular "political decidedness."[35]

This confidence in the view emerged paradoxically, however. By the 1820s, scientists were already beginning to explore the unstable structure of human visual capacities—the afterimage, the nature of light and its relationship to the retina, the capacity to simulate the appearance of movement through the rapid display of still images. All these phenomena began to suggest that vision itself was not entirely an objective reflection of an outside world, but that the observer, in the concreteness of his or her body, played a role in producing a subjective, autonomous experience of what was seen. The increasing scientific studies of vision suggested that it was a contingent representation (dependent on the particular structure of the retina, the specific capacities of the brain to interpret information) rather than a simple mimetic function.[36] In the 1830s and 1840s, audiences in Europe and the United States became fascinated with visual illusions, with photographic tricks, with images of movement. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, as exhibits, photography, and other types of visual images (including, eventually, the cinema) came to carry particular status as authentications of reality, of truth, they did so in tandem with the excited realization that the equation of seeing with truth was also fundamentally unstable. Jonathan Craig argues that certain types of representation were invested with the task of accuracy and authority precisely because they provided a "mirage of a transparent set of relations [between observer and observed] that modernity had already overthrown."[37] Spectacle, views, and exhibitions seemed to respond not only to the desire for particular information (about the West or about Jerusalem) but to the larger and particularly modern cultural fascination with the problem of when, and how, "seeing" might—or might not—be the same as "believing."[38]

It was in this context that both photographs and three-dimensional stereoscopic images were pressed into service by those who advocated "universal Holy Land visual literacy." By the end of the nineteenth century, the Holy Land images were the most popular subject for the more than five million stereographs produced in the United States. Marketed to Sunday schools, door-to-door, and at public events like the Philadelphia Centennial Fair, Holy

Land images "made their way into the homes and schools of hundreds of thousands of Americans."[39] Stereoscopes played with the issue of unstable perception, since they provided an illusion of three-dimensionality from two-dimensional photos. But they also promised accurate representation and religious knowledge. The illusion was a route to truth.

Perhaps the most telling example of Americans' desire to immerse themselves in Holy Land imagery was the construction of a small-scale walk-through model of the Holy Land by the Chautauqua Assembly in New York State. The first version of "Palestine Park" was begun in 1874, at the founding of the community that would become nineteenth-century America's most important center of Bible and nature teaching. The park was expanded over the next several years, eventually developing into a 350-foot-long three-dimensional map, complete with cast-metal cities, a small river Jordan, and Chautauqua Lake as the Mediterranean. The park, which soon became known (and copied) all over the country, served as a teaching instrument for children, as well as a site for adults to dress in costume and re-create both biblical and "Oriental" tableaux.[40]

All of these popular amusements combined "spectacle" with "scholarly-ness" to stage Holy Land viewings as ennobling for the viewer. They saturated the culture, combining Orientalist themes of exoticism with the complex nexus of adoration and appropriation that most Protestant Americans felt for the land they claimed as spiritual heritage. By the end of the Civil War, when tourism began to escalate dramatically, travelers were beginning to view their own experiences in terms of those they had seen or read about—and finding themselves disappointed. One Unitarian minister complained that he was frustrated by the small, unimposing size of Jerusalem; he particularly regretted that none of the popular images of the city had been taken from the direction of his approach.[41]

The disjuncture between expectation and experience was sometimes itself a proof of the superiority of Christianity, since the failures of the local population to live up to the biblically inspired romantic hopes of Americans was generally explained as evidence of a general "regression and decrepitude" that were connected both to the "weakness and vices of the Ottoman rule" and to "elements of the Mussulman character."[42] Still, the disappointments of face-to-face encounters did not diminish interest in Holy Land exotica. And as the nineteenth century wore on, the detailed representation of "biblical" spaces was enriched by several best-selling novels with Holy Land settings, particularly *Ben-Hur* (first published in 1880), *Sign of the Cross* (1896), and *Quo Vadis* (1895). *Ben-Hur* was such a sensation that it became the first fiction to be carried by the Sears and Roebuck
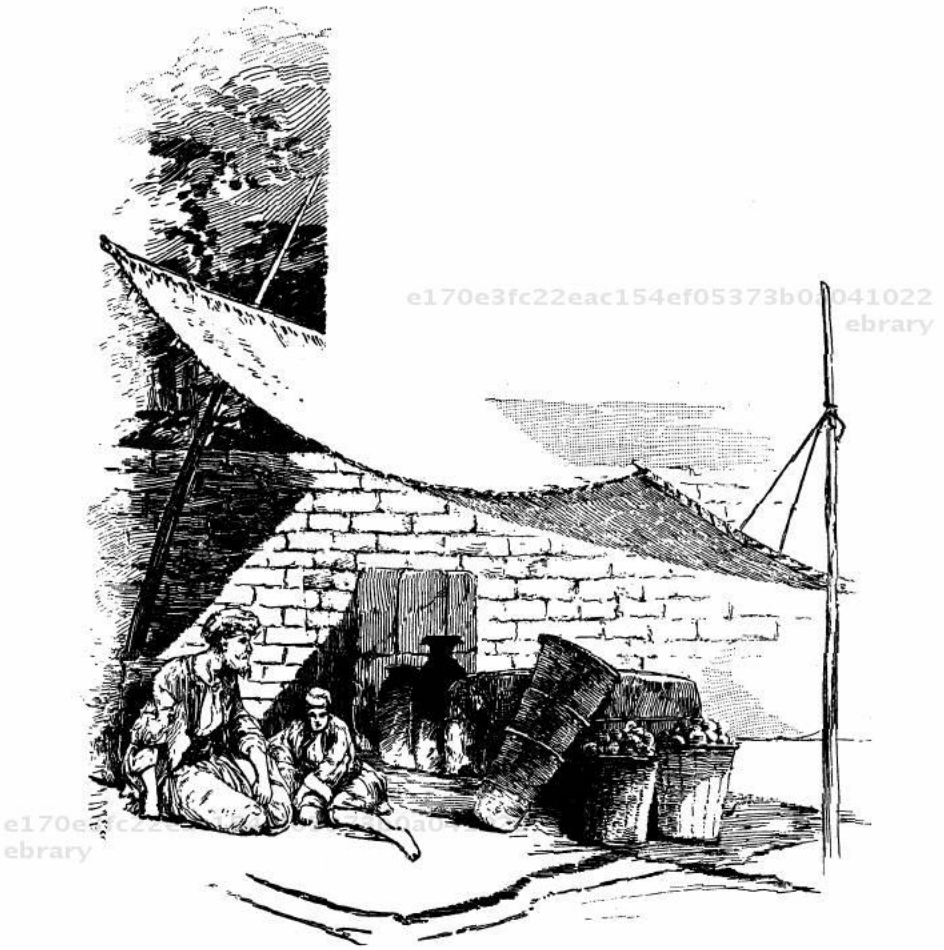
Figure 1.   Line drawing from the lavishly illustrated 1904 edition of Lew Wallace's *Ben-Hur*. The novel was a best-seller from the time of its appearance in the 1880s until the 1920s.

catalog, which purchased a special edition of one million copies and soon sold out. The novel was also made into a well-known stage play.[43] These popular novels were often visual texts as well; the 1900 edition of *Ben-Hur*, for example, also included full-page photos and drawings of many of the major attractions of the area, including scenery, pottery, jewelry, and animals, as well as "typical" native inhabitants.[44] All the fiction texts flowered on a well-tilled field, since for almost five decades, various modes of representation, including travelogues, paintings, panoramas, stereographs, and the Palestine Park, had framed U.S. perceptions of the region through acts of religious, especially Protestant, appropriation. The stories of a biblical past were mapped onto a geographic fetish that constructed a moral position; by viewing and knowing the "Holy Land," Protestant observers fashioned for themselves a spectacular piety.

SHOPPING THE ORIENT

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the "Orient" joined the "Holy Land" as an American concern. For most of the century, white Americans had been focused on continental expansion to the West and Southwest; they had paid relatively little attention to colonizing other parts of the world and therefore had not developed the Europeans' interest in information about their far-flung empires. In the 1890s, however, two factors coalesced to heighten U.S. interest in lands abroad and in the "East" in particular. First was the anxiety about the saturation of white settlement in the American West. Many Americans, like the young historian Frederick Jackson Turner, believed that American democracy had developed out of the economic equality that frontier expansion had made possible and the personal independence that it had made necessary. With "the close of the frontier" and the rapidly expanding populations of U.S. cities, white Americans were increasingly anxious about what would happen without new territories to settle.

The second factor was concern about the economic limits of the nation, which emerged with new urgency in the 1890s. The U.S. economy was just beginning to reach the point where industrialization and increases in mechanization meant that productive capacity might conceivably outstrip consumer demand. (By 1900, the United States would lead the world in the production of manufactured goods.) During a major economic depression from 1893 to 1897, labor strife was intense, frequent, and often violent, as workers and owners battled—quite literally—over wages, working hours, and safety. In this context of "overproduction," depression, and labor struggles, capitalists' search for new markets, particularly the famous "China

market," became a near obsession, not only for business owners focused on their profits but also in U.S. political life more generally.[45]

Yet the age of imperialism was ending. There were, as Joseph Conrad's hero Marlowe complained, fewer and fewer blank spaces on the map of the world.[46] Although the question of whether the United States would aim for noncontiguous imperial expansion was not yet settled, the sense of territorial and economic limits was profound. One scholar has pointed out that it was precisely in the 1890s that both Europeans and Americans became fascinated with the occult. Looking for new worlds to conquer, he suggests, late Victorians turned otherworldly.[47]

It was also in this period that the "Orient" became a highly visible symbol in the emerging structures of a consumer culture. If economic production meant that there were more goods to sell, and the limits of imperialism made conquering new markets less certain, then increases in the average consumption per person would, in time, become a favored answer to the overproduction dilemma. The new urban department stores took it upon themselves to ease their customers into a modern world of increased commodity consumption. These stores were also, not incidentally, early leaders in using images of the Orient to sell consumer goods. Facing a world of nineteenth-century producer-citizens, who had long considered shopping itself to be suspect, department store designers sought to lower people's resistance to purchasing, and advertising sought to trigger buying on impulse, aiming for the emotions rather than rational thought and calculation. Store displays highlighted the link between shopping and sensuousness or sexuality, both of which were associated with the Orient. Harem scenes, Japanese gardens, Persian carpets and fabric, stores decorated as mosques or desert oases: the Orient was everywhere in these consumer stagings. European Orientalist representations had long associated the East with colorful dress and decor, with sexuality and luxury, with indulgence and irresponsibility—all qualities to be encouraged in consumers. In 1903, Siegel-Cooper's in New York produced a six-week-long "Carnival of Nations" climaxing in "Oriental Week," which included a show that offered theatrical representations of a Turkish harem, a parade of dancing girls, a genie of the lamp, and Cleopatra of the Nile.[48] A few years later, in 1912, Wanamakers staged a giant "Garden of Allah" fashion show in New York, based on themes from a very popular novel of the same title by British writer Robert Hitchens.

In fact, the *Garden of Allah* themes quickly became a phenomenon in themselves. At the time of its publication in 1904, the book had been a failure in England, but the melodramatic story of an Englishwoman who finds sexual adventure "in the desert," yet who learns her lesson in the end, sold

extremely well in the United States. Soon, two silent films were made from the book (in 1916 and 1927; there was a later sound version in 1936). *Garden of Allah* was also adapted for the theater; the performance was a "giant spectacle" complete with an onstage sandstorm and live animals. Garden of Allah restaurants and hotels popped up all over the country; advertisements and magazine covers featured drawings inspired by the book and the play. Department stores staged performances and displays based on the theme. Wanamakers, for example, produced a fashion extravaganza featuring "Algerian" fashions, actual Arab models, and a string orchestra playing "oriental" music. The show attracted thousands of women, many of whom were either left standing or refused entrance altogether.[49]

As one cultural historian has suggested, the appeal of Orientalist themes went well beyond simply promoting the loosening that was a part of the emerging consumer society. Exotic Eastern and Near Eastern motifs were popular in the period before World War I in cultural sites that had nothing to do with selling dry goods. Orientalism was the cultural logic through which American culture symbolized a break from nineteenth-century Protestant piety and marked the nation's entry into "modernity."[50] At turn-of-the-century Coney Island, for example, the dancer "Little Egypt" was a popular attraction.[51] Silent films such as *The Arab* (1915), *Intolerance* (1916), *Cleopatra* (1917), *Salome* (1918), *An Arabian Knight* (1920), *The Sheik* (1921), *A Son of the Sahara* (1924), *Son of the Sheik* (1926), and *A Son of the Desert* (1928) also registered the Orientalism common in the larger culture.[52] But shopping in particular became linked to the exotic pleasures of the Orient, which allowed the new discourse of commodity culture to simultaneously praise the practice of indulgence and disavow it, by linking it to foreignness. In this moral geography, the East speaks of something missing in the world of the American work ethic; it is what one longs for; it is the iconography of sexual desire and the possibility of purchasing the feelings that go with that desire—reverie, release, sensual pleasure—through the goods associated with it. And the department store, like the Orient itself, was grasped as an exhibition, a spectacle, even a dream.

Commodity Orientalism was associated with the post-Victorian norms that in the early twentieth century produced a multilayered rhetoric of "emancipation" linking the New Woman, companionate marriage, modernity, and consumerism. In this, the spectacle of Orientalist consumption was very different than that of the Holy Land documents that promised knowledge and piety through visual representation. The new Orientalist display was part of a larger challenge to the Protestant producer ethic that had begun to break down the "separate spheres" for women and men by

Figure 2. In *The Garden of Allah* (MGM, 1927), a young New Woman (Alice Terry) goes to Algeria, where she discovers adventure in the desert and falls in love with an escaped Trappist monk, played by Ivan Petrovich. Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive.

bringing women increasingly into the public and the marketplace. This transformation did not emerge without a great deal of ambivalence. In silent films, for example, the New Woman, with her supposed independence, sexual aggressiveness, and newly acquired vote, was at once admirable *and* threatening. In many of these films, the "Orient" was associated with women's fantasies and women's sexual power in particular. As Gaylyn Studlar has argued, the figure of the "vamp" epitomized this link: a powerful, Orientalized woman who was mysterious and alluring but also dangerous. The quintessential vamp was Theda Bara, the Jewish actress who in the late 1910s starred in both *Cleopatra* and *Salome,* and whose publicity materials often insisted that her name was an anagram for "Arab Death." Associating the sexually voracious woman with the sexual disorder of the East, Hollywood's production of the "vamp" suggested the threat of the despotic woman. Some commentators made clear that they considered the threat quite real: worried that men were on the verge of capitulating to the de-
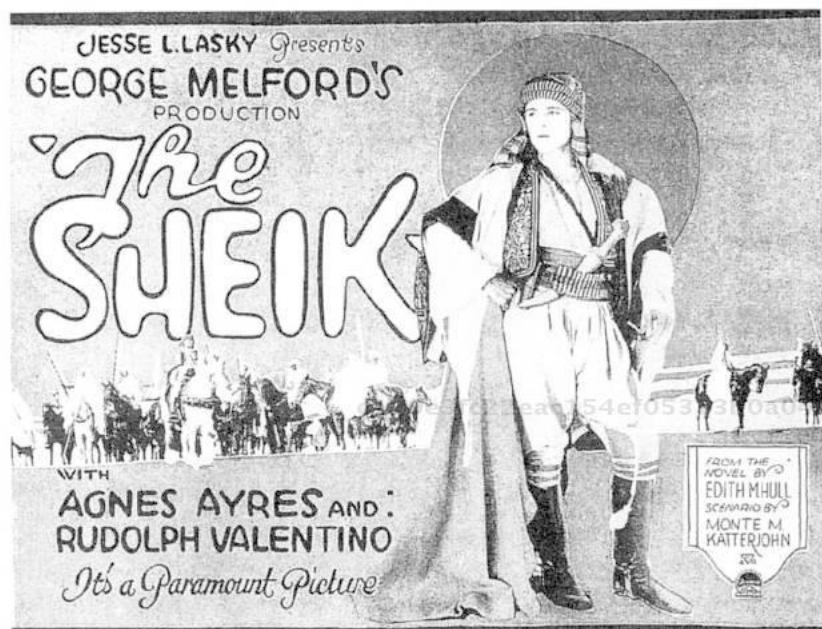
Figure 3.   Advertising poster for *The Sheik* (1921), starring Rudolph Valentino.
The film was one of a wide range of Orientalist cultural productions in the early
twentieth century. Courtesy of Paramount Pictures. *The Sheik* copyright © 2000
by Paramount Pictures. All rights reserved.

mands of women, one 1922 marriage manual railed against the "menace"
of "excessive sexuality or the Woman Vampire."[53]

The popularity of Rudolf Valentino, however, and in particular the iconic
status of his two "Oriental" films, *The Sheik* (1921) and *Son of the Sheik*
(1926), suggest that his numerous female fans engaged the issues of sexu-
ality, the Orient, and consumer culture on rather different terms. Edith
Hull's novel *The Sheik* (1919) had been an international best-seller; as in the
Garden of Allah, its heroine is a young Englishwoman who goes to the
desert to seek adventure. There, she meets a handsome but barbarian Arab
sheik, who rapes her (in the film, only the threat of rape is suggested) but
whom she also falls in love with. At the end of the tale, the olive-skinned
"Arab" is revealed to be an Englishman, son of a noble father and a Spanish
mother; with this knowledge, the spunky New Woman heroine marries him.

In this liminality of Arab/not Arab, Valentino's sheik was similar to
Lawrence of Arabia, the British military officer who became renowned on
both sides of the Atlantic for his exploits fighting alongside the Arabs

against the Ottomans during World War I. In the United States, Lawrence's story was most famously presented by Lowell Thomas, an American journalist who covered the war and had joined Lawrence for part of his time in battle in the Middle East. Thomas returned home in 1919, intending to launch a lecture tour recounting his experiences in France, the Balkans, Germany, and the Middle East. It quickly became apparent, however, that only the Middle East lectures drew large audiences, so Thomas focused his topic and renamed his performance "With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia." Illustrated with films, colored lantern slides, and special lighting effects and accompanied by music, the lecture tour was a multimedia production that drew on the traditions of both Chautauqua and vaudeville. In it, Thomas depicted Lawrence, who spoke Arabic and frequently wore Arab dress, as a romantic adventurer and a military hero. The show began with some success in New York, then went to London, and later all over the world, eventually playing to four million people. Over the next few years, Lawrence's story became virtually its own industry: a hagiographic biography by Thomas in 1924 became an international best-seller; Robert Graves's more sober account, *Lawrence and the Arabian Adventure*, was published in 1927. Lawrence published his own reflections, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, in a small subscribers' edition in 1926; the book was then repackaged in an abridged edition, *Revolt in the Desert*, which immediately sold one hundred thousand copies.[54]

Valentino's sheik films almost certainly drew upon the transatlantic popularity of the Lawrence legend. But unlike Lawrence, who was presented as a war hero and a model of manly behavior for schoolboys, Valentino was a "woman-made man," whose masculine appeal lay almost entirely in his sexual allure. Marketing for *The Sheik* played up the titillation quotient of the Arabian setting, assuring audiences that the movie was "in the full torrent of the Oriental tradition" and that "when an Arab sees a woman he wants, he takes her."[55] Despite a barrage of criticism suggesting that the film played into the "masochistic appeal" of seeing a "fair girl in the strong hands of a ruthless desert tyrant," *The Sheik* catapulted Valentino into stardom. Filmed in close-up, with the backlighting and soft focus usually reserved for female stars, his body uncovered and displayed, Valentino became a spectacle, providing the occasion for unprecedented expressions of female desire.[56]

As a star figure, Valentino was ethnically marked. An Italian immigrant who played a series of exotic "others," Spanish, Russian, and, of course, Arab, his popularity with women elicited a defensive response on the part of some observers that was often explicitly nativist and racialist. Miriam

THE RIDE TO AKABA
May 9 – July 6: 1917

Figure 4. This map of the Middle East as a strategic military battleground in World War I was the frontispiece for Robert Graves's enthusiastic portrait, *Lawrence and the Arabian Adventure*, 1927.

Hansen has described the ways in which Valentino himself became marked by the racial connotations of the films he starred in. In the early 1920s, when anti-immigrant nativism was particularly hostile to Italians and Jews, insinuations of a color continuum linked the "olive-skinned idol" with Arabs or Orientals, and ultimately with African Americans. These associations suggest something of the complex racial status of "Arabs," who were presumed to live elsewhere, as opposed to the immigrants, like Valentino, who represented a racial threat within. The various sex and marriage scenarios in which Valentino starred thus flirted with miscegenation, even as they were able to avoid actually depicting something so presumably shocking to its audience. In the backlash against Valentino—no less significant for its sometimes playful and ironic tone—men claimed to be baffled by white women's interest in the ethnically tainted star. One cartoon in a fan magazine showed an audience watching *The Sheik:* the women were enraptured while the men looked disinterested and disdainful. The caption read: "The Nordic sneered at Valentino while his women-folk thrilled to this jungle python of a lover."[57] In this gender-specific logic, "Orientalism" was, for both men and women, a significant trope that connected exoticism, sexuality (especially female sexuality), consumption, and—through all this—the lure and danger of decadence. The Orient, like the Holy Land, was linked to spectacle, though the meaning of spectacle itself had changed, from its nineteenth-century associations with religious and scientific knowledge to the turn-of-the-century links to femininity, consumerism, and loosened sexuality.

Representations of ancient Egypt soon became a site where those two trajectories merged. Throughout the 1800s, ancient Egypt had been a source of great fascination in the United States. In the 1820s and 1830s, the Egyptian revival in architecture made its mark on a large number of American buildings, particularly cemeteries and prisons.[58] Anthropologists studied ancient Egypt for what it might reveal about the origins of civilization, and their findings were taken up as part of a much larger debate about race and slavery in the antebellum period. (I discuss this scholarship and its impact in chapter 3.) Egyptology itself became an object of popular interest, and by midcentury, around the country amateur Egyptologists were giving public lectures illustrated with mummies, funerary objects, and pictures of the Sphinx and the Pyramids brought back from digs in Luxor or Aswan.[59]

At the end of the century, as film scholar Antonia Lant has shown, there developed a significant iconographic link between the popularity of "things Egyptian" and the development of early cinema. Egypt, both ancient and modern, was fascinating in part because it was widely considered to be a

"transitional place"—at the intersection of Africa, the Middle East, and points beyond. Ancient Egyptian artifacts also highlighted a rather different transition, that from life into death, and suggested the possibility of immortality. Similarly, public discussions of early cinema often represented film viewing as an "in-between state," not quite dreaming, not quite waking. Perhaps even more important, cinema represented itself as a way of preserving what had disappeared, a type of mummification that could even bring the dead back to life for future generations. "Egypt became a mode of expressing the new experience of film," Lant argues. "Even before the arrival of cinema, writers on Egypt associated that culture with magic, preservation, and silent, visual power—all qualities that anticipate the character of cinema."[60] Egypt's associations brought to cinema the two seemingly contradictory functions of the Middle East as spectacle: the promise of the preservation and advancement of knowledge fused with the exotic reveries of a dream.

In 1922, a new element emerged when archaeologists discovered the intact tomb of the ancient Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun. The artifacts from the tomb constituted what many contemporaries considered the greatest find in the history of archaeology. As the treasures were uncovered during the winter of 1922–1923, newspapers from around the world carried daily reports on the dig's progress. The artistic style of the tomb objects became a cultural phenomenon, affecting furniture design, architecture (again), and especially fashion. The long, lean look of the silhouettes on the tomb paintings was promoted in conjunction with the "modern," slender look of the New Woman; simple, geometric shapes and the use of a few striking colors were the hallmarks of the "Egyptian-influenced" fashions that dominated women's styles in the mid-1920s. Even the signature flapper haircut—a short, clean bob—was said to have been derived from tomb paintings. Over the course of the 1920s, one journalist has argued, "Egyptian influences were totally assimilated into the new 'modern style' they helped create."[61]

A year after the Tut discovery, in 1923, Cecil B. DeMille released the silent film *The Ten Commandments*. Although the bulk of the movie centered around a modern story of two brothers, it was the prologue, set in ancient Egypt, that received the most media attention. Foreshadowing the gushing hype that would accompany DeMille's 1950s epic films (including the 1956 version of *The Ten Commandments*), newspapers and industry magazines eagerly reported on the enormous expenditures required to film the magisterial scenes of the Hebrew Exodus: the twenty-five hundred inhabitants of a tent city and three thousand animals, including horses, camels, burros, poultry, and dogs. Rather than using the close-ups and

closely edited sequences that were already becoming characteristic of Holly-
wood, DeMille filmed the prologue as a succession of extreme long shots,
which gave the appearance of a didactic series of tableaux for the edification
of spectators. What emerged was, in the words of one film scholar, some-
thing akin to "anti-modernist civic pageantry."[62] In this case, as with the
Holy Land views of the previous century, spectacle was staged for the pur-
pose of "truth." But, again, the Orientalist promise of sensation and exoti-
cism was also close to the surface, since the Egypt of the Exodus was also,
in 1923, the Egypt that had spawned Tut fashions and Isis haircuts.

EXPANDING INTERESTS

Orientalism in its various forms highlighted the iconographic status of for-
eign lands in the production of new domestic consumers. But the turn of
the century was also a period in which "foreign lands" themselves became
objects of direct political and economic investments, as American compa-
nies and the U.S. state began to extend their interests beyond the North
American continent. In 1898, direct U.S. political involvements expanded
dramatically, first with the annexation of Hawaii (1898) and then with the
Spanish-American War (also 1898), which resulted in the conquest of the
Philippines, the annexation of Puerto Rico and Guam, and the formation of
a "protectorate" in Cuba.[63]

It was precisely at this moment, however, that imperialism became a
matter of widespread public debate in the United States. After the Spanish-
American War had led to the occupation of Cuba and the Philippines, the
United States found itself in a long, bloody war against the Filipino guer-
rillas who had first fought for their independence against Spain and now
continued the battle against a new occupying power. In the United States,
Americans hotly debated the question of "imperialism," and the terms of
that debate would have a lasting influence on the domestic understanding
of the nature of American global power.

Pro-imperialists used several key arguments. Some seemed to support
U.S. occupation for reasons of simple racial hatred. American military lead-
ers and soldiers, many of them veterans of the recent Indian wars, reported
themselves anxious to get involved in "the nigger fighting business." As
one young man wrote home to his family in 1899, "I am in my glory when
I can sight my gun on some dark skin and pull the trigger."[64] Others used
a more familiar economic rationale—"Trade follows the flag," they pro-
claimed. Still others aimed for moral suasion, insisting that the Filipinos,
"our little brown brothers," deserved the twin benefits of Christianity (i.e.,

Protestantism, since most Filipinos were already Catholic) and American civilization. The civilizing argument was linked to the work of American Christian missionaries who, believing that all people were candidates for salvation, had determined to carry out the "evangelization of the world in one generation."[65] In many cases, then, imperialist rhetoric came directly from the assumption that all peoples were capable of civilization and should thus have the cultural opportunity of "benevolent" Americanization.[66]

Opposition to imperialism also included diverse arguments. Some leading citizens, including Mark Twain, the philosopher William James, and W. E. B. Du Bois, expressed a straightforward support for democratic self-rule. Many others opposed imperialism from the overtly racist fear that U.S. rule in the Philippines would require absorbing more nonwhite peoples into the nation.[67] For them, the desire to incorporate the potential economic benefits of an empire, in terms of both markets and labor, was in tension with the political imperative to maintain a racially exclusive narrative of national identity.[68] In this case, the anti-imperialist position was *not* an argument against U.S. economic hegemony or against the more general kind of political power that would allow the United States to have extensive political influence overseas; instead, it was a pragmatic position about the best way to wield U.S. power.

Ultimately, the bloodiness of the Filipino resistance led to a general disillusionment with direct colonial rule. In practice, U.S. globalizing interests at the turn of the twentieth century did not require such direct control of new territories. The United States had already conquered a great deal of territory beyond the original British colonies under the rubric of Manifest Destiny. That, along with its own history of anticolonialism, would allow the United States to begin to frame its global goals as something other than, and very different from, the old-style imperialism.

In the years before World War II, U.S. state policy and U.S. businesses converged to promote the economic influence of U.S.-based corporations as an alternative to conquest. Under this framework, which historian Emily Rosenberg has described as "liberal developmentalism," Americans assumed that all nations could and should replicate the U.S. model of economic, political, and cultural "development." A major impetus behind government support for business expansion lay in business concerns about the problem of overproduction and the need for new consumers, but U.S. policymakers and exporters also believed that by making mass products (sewing machines, condensed milk, cameras) available cheaply, they would help increase living standards in Latin America, Asia, or Africa, while also improving the U.S. strategic position and making money for American businesses. In 1912, President Taft called the strategy "dollar diplomacy."[69]

Dollar diplomacy did not mean that the U.S. government did not act politically and militarily: the United States intervened in Latin America more than a dozen times between 1910 and 1930 when U.S. businesses were threatened by nationalist uprisings. But the most powerful and effective promotion of the United States happened through the export of American-made goods. In the world of exports, U.S.-based corporations came to represent "America" abroad, and, conversely, "America" came to be signified by its commodities, particularly its cultural commodities. Of all these, none was more important than Hollywood movies.

After World War I, the U.S. film industry emerged as the most powerful in the world. During the heyday of the silent film, foreign box office receipts were an important part of almost every Hollywood production: by 1925, U.S.-made films accounted for 95 percent of those shown in Britain, 70 percent of those in France, and 80 percent of those in South America.[70] Although the movie industry was not yet as large a part of the U.S. economy as it would become after World War II, movie exports were highly valued, on the assumption that movies not only sold themselves but also sold desire for the products and lifestyles they displayed. "Trade follows the film," expansionists proclaimed, highlighting with satisfaction the American strategy of commercial expansion rather than territorial control. In 1925, an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* announced with satisfaction, "The sun never sets on the British Empire and the American motion picture."[71]

Even the coming of sound in the late 1920s did not destroy the leadership of the American movie industry; the U.S. share of the French, German, and British markets dropped less than 15 percent between 1927 and 1931. During World War II, the European audience declined precipitously, of course, and Germany banned the importation of any American movies in areas under its control. But after the war, the United States succeeded in breaking down some of the protections previously instituted in Europe and increasing U.S. film exports, sometimes even linking film deals with aid under the Marshall Plan. In the Middle East, Latin America, and Asia, Hollywood continued to supply from 60 to 90 percent of all movies. By the 1950s, international exhibition receipts often represented more than half of the ultimate film gross.[72] Hollywood was thus part of a project of expansion in two ways: in its Orientalist mode, it was a site of representing the world abroad to U.S. audiences; as an industry, it was also deeply invested in cultivating foreign audiences for an American product. Nowhere is the dual nature of U.S. "interests" more clear than in this two-way flow of Hollywood.

After World War II, U.S. involvements abroad expanded dramatically. Because the United States had been relatively untouched by the war, American-

based businesses, which had already been a considerable economic force, be-
came the powerhouses of the increasingly globalizing economy. Economic
power, including U.S. foreign aid, also often translated into U.S. government
influence, while military power, also built from the economic boom, fre-
quently helped to make that influence into hegemony. At the very least, the
third world became a site of contest between the United States and the So-
viet Union, both of which now exhibited the "great historical confidence"
once attributed to Europe. Nowhere was this more true than in the Middle
East, where U.S. political and economic involvements expanded rapidly in
the postwar period. The following chapters trace the logics that helped to
make that expansion seem meaningful and even necessary to many Amer-
icans. Here I want to simply mention four of the overarching concerns that
have helped to shape U.S. involvements in the region since 1945.

The first concern with the Middle East has been military and strategic.
Official U.S. policy toward the Middle East has generally focused on mate-
rial advantage and political alliances, though this has often been articulated
in moral terms. Policymakers in the postwar period consistently defined
several primary issues, but until 1989, by far the preeminent of these was
the cold war contest with the Soviet Union. This contest had a moral com-
ponent—"saving countries from communism." But in the Middle East as
elsewhere, it also had a clear economic and strategic aspect—the cold war
played out as a struggle for influence and economic relationships with the
formerly colonized nations emerging into independence. The Middle East
was crucial to this struggle, due in part to the geographic centrality of the
region: it sits astride communication lines and travel routes connecting Eu-
rope, Africa, and Asia; it also abuts the southern border of the Soviet Union
(and, with the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, Russia). The
United States' strategy in the region developed out of a sense that the So-
viet Union should not and could not be allowed to dominate the region (or
to control its oil supplies). At the same time, U.S. policymakers were well
aware of the fact that the Middle East was a primary site of the former colo-
nial empires of Britain and France: as the United States began to compete
for dominance in the postwar era, it would do so as a counter to European,
as well as Soviet, influence.

The second concern has been less of a policy interest than a more gen-
eral sense of religious attachment—a feeling of involvement and "rights"
that revisits the earlier fascination with the "Holy Land," but in new and ex-
panded ways. Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all take the Middle East as
their point of origin, and adherents of those religions living in the United
States have placed great importance on claiming—and narrating—the his-

tory and meaning of ancient Middle Eastern events for contemporary life. Thus, while Jews and Arab Muslims are among those presumed to have a "natural" interest in the Middle East, this is only part of the story. (Those associations, too, have complicated histories. It would be quite wrong to assume, for example, that American Jews have only one view of the meaning of Israel for Jews; the debates about Israel have been passionate and sometimes divisive. Part, but certainly not all, of that history has been explored in recent scholarship.)[73] In addition, and more centrally for this study, religion is important for many others who have made cultural and political claims to the region, from African American Muslims to white fundamentalist Christians. As one way of mapping identities and affiliations, religious narratives have not infrequently been mobilized in the service of nationalist and expansionist politics. But the major monotheistic religions have also constructed complex "transnational" affinities of spiritual community, which have served as a resource for articulating diverse identities and interests that have sometimes challenged those defined by U.S. policymakers.

The third major concern for Americans has been U.S. support for Israel. Whatever the moral and political arguments about the founding of Israel in 1948, there is no question that the presence of the new state transformed the Middle East. The Arab-Israeli conflict has become a long-term structuring factor in the politics of the region. Israel and Arab nations have fought five wars in the last fifty years; one of those (in 1973) brought the United States and the Soviet Union to full nuclear alert. For the United States, the commitment to Israel has changed over time. American aid to Israel increased dramatically, for example, after the 1967 war. But U.S. policymakers have consistently indicated both strong support for the existence of Israel (articulated in moral terms, in part as a response to the European Holocaust) and a commitment to a multifaceted alliance with Israel that includes military, political, and economic components.

Finally, U.S. policy has focused on oil.[74] The consumer economies of the United States, Europe, and eventually Japan needed oil to power their machines, heat their homes, and drive their cars. Access to that oil, at favorable prices, became a preeminent postwar foreign policy goal. That goal emerged from the particular history of U.S. oil policy. Before the 1920s, American domestic oil production more than met domestic needs. But in the years after World War I, U.S. government geological surveys began to predict (erroneously) the imminent exhaustion of domestic reserves. Securing access to foreign oil supplies soon became a priority for U.S. policymakers.[75] Although Britain and France dominated most of the Middle East, U.S. companies managed to establish joint cartels with several European

companies. By the end of the 1930s, U.S. giants had already gained control of a sizable share (42 percent) of known Middle Eastern oil reserves.[76] In 1945, one State Department report could proclaim that Saudi Arabia, an area of traditional British influence, was "in a fair way to becoming an American frontier."[77]

At the end of World War II, the postwar paradigm was already in place: American-based oil companies would, as much as possible, obtain access to oil and other strategic raw materials through concessions negotiated in conjunction with the main colonial power in the region, Britain. These economic arrangements were often secured with the assistance of the U.S. government and backed up with the promise of political and even military intervention on behalf of the corporations, their local allies, or both. In the immediate postwar period, for example, the United States intervened numerous times in the Middle East to support pro-Western governments, prevent the rise of "radical" nationalist regimes, or "guarantee the oil supply." In 1953, the newly formed Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) secured the northern border of the new "American frontier" by helping to overthrow Mohammed Mossadegh, the elected but nationalist-minded leader of Iran, when he tried to nationalize Iranian oil.[78] As with other globalizing industries, including film, U.S.-based oil corporations presented themselves as operating in the national interest, and U.S. state power seemed to agree.

At the same time, U.S. policymakers used the expanding commerce to strengthen political and military ties with national leaders in the Middle East. With the worldwide decline of British and French imperialism, those leaders would be beholden to their own national constituencies, and the task of wooing decolonizing nations, from Egypt to Saudi Arabia to Iraq, became a strategic preoccupation. As the nations of the Middle East emerged to independence in the 1950s, however, nationalist leaders like Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, Prime Minister Khaled al-Azm in Syria, and Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran often spoke of steering a course of independence between the United States and the Soviet Union. The United States did not hesitate to occasionally respond to the "threat" of nonalignment with military or covert action. For example, CIA operatives intervened in Syria in 1957, covertly supporting a military coup against a pro-communist government and overtly massing troops on the Syrian border. In 1958, fourteen thousand U.S. troops intervened in the civil war in Lebanon.[79] As one analyst has pointed out, the 1950s were a decade of "turbulent and often spectacular confrontations between the United States and Europe and the emerging nationalist forces in the Middle East."[80] Still, the nonaligned movement allowed several Arab leaders to get economic aid and military

support from one or the other of the superpowers, and thus, for a while at least, to maintain their own relative independence. As the cold war wore on, such middle grounds became increasingly difficult to sustain.

Control over oil became increasingly contentious in the 1960s, as the major oil companies struggled to maintain their dominant position. Increasingly, U.S. policy depended on the cultivation of local allies. By the 1970s, the Nixon Doctrine, which originally had been articulated as a call for the "Vietnamization" of U.S. commitments in Southeast Asia, was extended to call for funding and arming friendly governments in the Middle East, which would then serve as proxies for the protection of American interests. The pillars of this policy in the later 1970s were Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel.[81] As happened elsewhere in the world, these allies were touted as bastions of moderation, stability, and pro-Western sentiment in a sea of threat. When, in 1979, one of those pillars, Iran, "fell" to Islamic fundamentalists, the result was a U.S. foreign policy debacle of the first order. When, in 1990, another of those pillars, Saudi Arabia, was considered to be under threat of a potential Iraqi invasion, that assessment led to a war that involved almost every state in the region as either an ally or an enemy.

These four primary interests—strategic position, religious ties, support for Israel, and access to oil—often worked together, both in policymaking circles and in public discussion. But at times they competed, or had more or less relevance. The multifaceted history of U.S. cultural and political interests in the Middle East is the history of these contending forces; the confluence and the contradictions of those forces defined the contest over the nature and extent of postwar U.S. power in the region.

DEFINING THE MIDDLE EAST AND ITS PEOPLE

Developing U.S. political and economic investments in the Middle East after World War II were accompanied by an increased scholarly interest in the contemporary political forces shaping the region. The postwar paradigm of "area studies" was not necessarily born of the cold war; interest in the modern Middle East was clearly present earlier, at universities such as Princeton, which founded the first department of modern oriental studies in 1927 (as opposed to the traditional Orientalist focus on language, ancient history, and religion). But such scholarship was given new life by the cold war's sense of political urgency, and in the 1950s, prewar proposals for the "organic" and "synthetic" study of the social evolution of the Middle East began to receive government, foundation, and university funding. At the same time, a new generation of Arab scholars, many of whom trained in

Europe, began to produce their own political-historical studies, which in turn influenced scholarship in the United States. For various bureaucratic and intellectual reasons, however, Middle East studies did not become fully institutionalized until 1967, when the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) was founded.[82]

From the beginning, the study of the contemporary Middle East was bedeviled by definitional problems: What were the parameters of the "Middle East"? What made it distinct from other regions? Traditional Orientalist scholars, interested in the ancient texts and sites, could presume that Egypt, or the Hebrews, or Islam provided a unifying force. In the 1910s and 1920s, for example, archaeologists had focused on the contribution of the Middle East to the history of "Western civilization," which they argued had begun in the Fertile Crescent (Iraq and the Levant) and moved westward. But in the period after World War II, the founding of Israel combined with the growth of secularizing forces in the Arab world meant that "Islamic culture" was no longer an even minimally satisfying rubric. Some definitions of the Middle East attempted to make the Arabic language the defining force that linked the areas from North Africa to Saudi Arabia, but what about Israel and non-Arabic-speaking Iran and Turkey? Others traced the historic impact of Islam, or simply marked as the "middle" East the spaces between "sub-Saharan" Africa and Europe on the one hand and "Asia" on the other. But the internal differences among various countries in the region remained so significant as to nearly fracture any attempt at systematic definition: the diversity of cultures and peoples in Morocco or Egypt, for example, separated them from the more homogeneous culture in Saudi Arabia; or, to take another example, the different schools of Islam that predominated in Iraq (Sunni) and Iran (Shia) meant those neighbors had distinct, sometimes contending, theological influences, as well as very different histories of public religious life. The attempt to tell a "total story" of culture and society that would tie together the diversity of the region was itself something of an imperializing ambition, and Middle East studies, like some other area studies programs, often ended up overly concerned with the attempt to construct a content for itself.[83]

For scholars in Middle East studies in the United States, the publication of Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 also raised fundamental questions about the constitution of the field and the politically invested nature of knowledge about the region. Said had suggested that Middle East studies was part of "the knitted-together strength" of a long discourse of Arab and Muslim inferiority that had not been limited to Europe.[84] The final chapter of *Orientalism* made clear that, in Said's view, the United States in the postwar pe-

riod had simply taken over the Orientalist mantle from the former European powers. These criticisms of scholarly practice as, in essence, anti-Islamic, intersected with the more overt political fissures in the field, which was as divided by the Arab-Israeli conflict as the region itself. The resulting intellectual impasse, combined with the definitional quagmire, meant that the field itself was in perpetual crisis.[85]

Defining the race and culture categorizations for Middle Eastern immigrants to the United States proved equally confounding. The first generation of Arab immigrants, who had arrived in the United States between 1890 and the beginning of World War I, were generally Christians from Lebanon and Syria. They were a relatively small population: in the first decade of the century, Syrian immigrants were twenty-fifth out of thirty-nine immigrant nationalities, and their numbers were only 7 percent as large as the number of Jewish immigrants in the same period. Syrian and other Arab immigrants were all but halted by the 1924 immigration laws that established national quotas based on the 1890 population.[86]

The racial status of Arabs was often unclear. Some observers posited Syrians as a distinct race; the Associated Charities of Boston, for example, reported in 1899 that "next to the Chinese, who can never in any real sense be American, [the Syrians] are the most foreign of foreigners."[87] Yet in 1919, the average income of Syrians was three times that of the U.S. population as a whole. And in popular Orientalist films and novels, Arabs were generally distinguished from Africans, who were presented as inferior to the exotic peoples of the "East."

For Arabs and other immigrants, however, racial status was not simply a matter of cultural "common sense"; it was a legal question with serious consequences. Until 1952, U.S. law, building on the Naturalization Act of 1790, allowed naturalized U.S. citizenship only to "free white persons and persons of African nativity or descent."[88] In the 1910s, the question of the racial categorization of Syrians or other Middle Easterners went before U.S. courts on numerous occasions, often with conflicting results. Like other rulings on the race of Armenians or Indians or Asians, those that dealt with Arabs used a mishmash of criteria to determine racial classification: race might be determined by the "look" of the claimant, the geographic location of his or her home, or the complex ethnological and scientific arguments of the period that claimed to explain the biological and/or historical basis of race.[89] In the Massachusetts case of *In re Halladjian* (1909), for example, the judge's decision on the "whiteness" of Armenians was accompanied by the observation that "the average man on the street ... would find no difficulty in assigning to the yellow race a Turk or Syrian with as much ease

as he would bestow that designation on a Chinaman or Korean." A year later, however, in *In re Mudarri*, the court maintained that Syrians should be classified as Caucasian and commented that "this court has long admitted Syrians to citizenship."[90] But in 1913, a South Carolina court decided that Faras Shadid, who had a skin color "about that of walnut," was not white. Nonetheless, two years later, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals (*Dow v. United States*) reversed a South Carolina court's decision that Syrians were ineligible for citizenship, arguing that Blumenbach's classification of the races in 1781 had defined the inhabitants of certain portions of Asia, including Syria, as "white persons."[91] A Massachusetts court decision of 1944 reached a similar conclusion, declaring that one Mohamed Mohriez, who had been born in "Arabia," was eligible for citizenship. Arabs, the judge reasoned, "belong to that division of the white race speaking Semitic languages. ... Both the learned and unlearned would compare the Arabs with the Jews toward whose naturalization every American Congress since the first has been avowedly sympathetic."[92] This legal definition seemed to fit with emerging popular perceptions, in which Arab immigrants were considered to be particularly assimilated in American society. In the 1940s, for example, Salom Rizk was chosen by *Reader's Digest* to lecture across the United States as the quintessential American immigrant.[93]

The second wave of Arab immigration came after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, when Palestinian refugees scattered across the world. The new immigrants differed in important ways from the first generation: they were predominantly Muslim, from one-third to one-half were Palestinians, and they were far more likely to retain cultural and national ties to the land of their birth. Still small in number by the standards of U.S. immigration, these new arrivals began a process that would not be completed until the end of the immigration quota system in 1965: Arabs in the United States moved from being largely Christian, assimilated, and middle-class to become a population divided by nationality, religion, education, and class. After 1965, Detroit became a major center for Arab newcomers. Already a relatively large number of Arab immigrants had made Detroit their home since the turn of the century: 555 "Syrians" worked at the Ford motor factory in 1916. The numbers slowly increased via the family chain migration that is common with many immigrant communities. With the loosening of immigration laws in the 1960s, Arab-speaking immigrants became the fastest-growing ethnic community in the area, and Detroit became the city in which Arabs and Arab-Americans are most visible as a group.[94]

The fact that Arab immigration has been historically so small, however (and, outside of Detroit, largely invisible), meant that these immigrants were

not a significant factor in how the Middle East has been represented to Americans. Unlike, say, the depictions of Chinese, which frequently have been influenced by the immigrant status of the Chinese in America (and vice versa), Arabs played a largely symbolic role in American culture until the 1980s. As I discuss in chapter 6, even at the end of the 1990s, the presence of Arab immigrants had only begun to be recognized in the dominant culture and, even there, largely through a concern over "domestic" terrorism.

Moreover, immigration of other non-Arab groups from the Middle East was, before 1965, minuscule. Iranians, whom I discuss in chapter 5, were first recognized as a community by other Americans during the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979–1980, though they have also since become a distinct subcultural force in a few cities, particularly Los Angeles.[95] At the turn of the century Jews also immigrated to the United States in large numbers, but not generally from the Middle East. The southern and eastern European Jews who arrived after 1890 were legally considered "white" (and thus capable of naturalization as citizens), although they were nonetheless singled out in popular political parlance as a distinct "race."[96] Anti-Semitism was often virulent; it was a decisive factor in the 1924 law that set immigration quotas by national origin. The relationship between the descendants of the European Jewish immigrants and the contemporary Middle East is extraordinarily complex. Although the majority of American Jews have never lived in Israel, most now feel strong emotional ties to that country. Yet the relationship of American Jews to Israel has been the subject of decades of passionate debate in the Jewish community, and the valence of that relationship has altered many times. While I do touch upon some aspects of this debate, it is not a focus of this study. For most people in the United States, the Middle East became meaningful as an area of U.S. interest in ways that did *not* take into account the fact of either an Arab immigrant community or an American Jewish connection. When the numbers and visibility of Arab and Muslim immigrants increased in the 1980s, the new demographic consciousness did begin to alter the cultural representations of the Middle East. For the most part, however, the Middle East was "outside"; when it was claimed, it was often as history and heritage, but almost never as "home."

CONTESTED ENCOUNTERS

This study analyzes the importance of representations of the Middle East in the construction of postwar U.S. nationalism and the contest over the meanings of "Americanness." The chapters that follow trace some of the multiple encounters that mapped the Middle East for Americans. They do

not, of course, tell all of the possible stories about those encounters. In particular, they do not focus on the connections that many people generally assume to be predominant in U.S.–Middle East relations: Jewish hopes for Israel, Arab investments in Palestine or the rest of the Arab world, or Iranian connections to Iran. These stories have been told elsewhere. Instead, each chapter aims to trace something of the unexpected convergences that have made the Middle East matter to Americans who might otherwise have ignored it.

Overall, I argue that, after World War II, political and cultural conditions in the United States produced a post-Orientalist model of representing the Middle East for American audiences. These new representational dynamics were not always in the service of U.S. state power; in certain cases they explicitly contested the presumptions of official U.S. policies. But even the official rhetoric of nationalist expansionism worked to establish the United States as different from the old colonial powers, and it did so in part by fracturing the East-West binary on which traditional Orientalism had depended. If U.S. appropriations and representations of the Middle East did *not* follow a simple Orientalist paradigm, that was because the project of separating the United States from European imperialism, or distinguishing the Middle East from the rest of the Orient, functioned strategically. In the logic of the last fifty years, one alternative to European power/knowledge over the Orient was American power in the modern Middle East.

Chapter 1 examines the discourse of "benevolent supremacy" that developed in the first decade after World War II, when U.S. interests were framed in terms of supplanting the former colonial powers by supporting the region's anticolonial movements. The chapter focuses on the trope of exodus from slavery as it appears both in biblical epic films like *The Ten Commandments* and in foreign policy documents of the 1950s. These texts, I argue, drew upon and revised the civil rights connotations of the exodus narrative. Working through a gendered logic that figured "slavery" in sexual terms—as a problem for (white) women in relation to despotic men— the films offered right-ordered marriage and the "freely chosen subordination" of women as the solution. They then cast that subordination as a model for the relationship between the United States and the decolonizing nations of the Middle East, constructing U.S. power as a "benevolent supremacy" that would replace older models of direct colonial rule.

Chapter 2 examines the Middle East as a signifier in the construction of African American political and religious identities between 1955 and 1972. Drawing on the writings and speeches of Martin Luther King Jr., James Baldwin, Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and Amiri Baraka, among others,

this chapter traces competing constructions of salient ancient histories and contemporary affiliations between African Americans and the Middle East: on the one hand, the Christian-influenced civil rights movement's evocation of the ancient Hebrews and the modern-day Israelis; on the other, Black Muslim constructions of affinities with both Islam and contemporary Arab anticolonialism. Both groups challenged the nationalist expansionism of official policy, even as they reproduced some of that policy's key assumptions. The chapter concludes with a close reading of Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, which aimed to usurp the dominance of both Christian and Islamic influence, in part by turning to the ancient Egyptians as a source of religious and historical identification.

The 1970s were a period of transition and contest, as the legacy of Vietnam and the impact of the 1973 oil embargo came to frame U.S. encounters with the Arab states and Israel. Liberals and conservatives held competing models of the United States' role in the world. Mainstream liberals envisioned a multipolar world that took into account the economic power of the oil-rich Middle East. This model, in which the United States would function as a kind of supreme manager rather than an enforcer, competed with conservative paradigms of the United States as a hegemonic power in the region, ready to reassert the military toughness of the cold war era in a more global environment. Chapters 3 and 4 explore two very different cultural and political conjunctures in which these competing models found expression—one associated with Egypt and one with Israel. Chapter 3 analyzes the American tour of the *Treasures of Tutankhamun* exhibit in 1977–1979 in the context of the oil crises of the previous five years. Through a detailed reading of the exhibit itself, as well as the news accounts and popular culture embrace of Tut, I argue that the Tut representations were incorporated into a dominant rhetoric of imperial stewardship over the resources of the Middle East. The chapter goes on to examine a related debate about the racial and cultural status of the ancient Egyptians (were they black or white?), which soon became intertwined with narratives of contemporary international politics. Tut became an extraordinary nexus, where responses to the 1973 oil crisis, recognition of the new realities of Arab wealth, and debates over racial identities in the United States intersected and sometimes collided.

The managerial model that infused the official Tut representations was challenged by conservatives and other cultural commentators, whose rhetoric of military reassertion coalesced in the iconography that surrounded Israel in the 1970s. Chapter 4 highlights the ways in which Israel came to be revered for its prowess on the battlefield and its antiterrorist activities. I sur-

vey sources that range from Christian apocalyptic literature to television news coverage of terrorism to suggest that Israel became *less* a symbol of religious and cultural affiliation for Americans (as it had been in many ways in the years immediately following the Holocaust and the founding of the state) and more an emblem for a conservative argument about the legacies of Vietnam. In that logic, Israel, unlike the United States, seemed to many to be a nation that was not afraid to fight—and win.

In 1979–1980, this new cultural concern with antiterrorist toughness solidified in U.S. responses to the Iranian hostage crisis. Chapter 5 traces media and popular cultural representations of the capture of U.S. hostages at the American embassy in Tehran, along with the related policy discourse of antiterrorism. The language of threat and containment permeated policy texts and popular culture, helping to construct the United States as an "aggrieved space" distinguished by its (feminine) suffering. The hardening of anti-Islamic sentiment in the 1980s contrasted sharply with the Black Muslim narratives of the 1960s; the new logic presented the region less as a site for affiliation and appropriation than as a source of external and internal threat to Americans.

With the fall of the Soviet Union and the defeat of Iraq in the 1990–1991 Gulf War, older themes of U.S. benevolent partnership reappeared, this time in the framework of President George Bush's New World Order. Chapter 6 argues that the representations of the Gulf War were intimately intertwined with the problem of representing the nation in the context of increased immigration and a revitalized consciousness about racial diversity. By figuring the military as a diverse microcosm of U.S. society, Gulf War discourse linked domestic concerns over multiculturalism to a rhetoric of military and political expansion. What I describe as "military multiculturalism" was enabled by the unquestioned world predominance of the U.S. military, but it was dependent on an understanding of the Middle East as "outside" any meaningful definition of Americanness. When Arab immigrants to the United States became visible within that discourse, their presence threatened to shatter its fundamental assumptions.

In each of these chapters, I suggest that the politics of identity in the United States was intimately interwoven with the changing cultural logic of U.S. foreign policy. The Middle East was not a static interest, but a mobile sign—it played a role in staging American world power, and the struggles over the meanings of Middle East history and the control over Middle East resources profoundly affected American self-fashionings.