



Women as Weapons of War: Iraq, Sex, and the Media

By Kelly Oliver

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From the female soldiers of Abu Ghraib prison to Palestinian women suicide bombers, women and their bodies have been "powerful weapons" in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Kelly Oliver reveals how the media and the George W. Bush administration used metaphors of weaponry to describe women and female sexuality and forge a link between vulnerability and violence. Oliver analyzes the discourse surrounding women, sex, and gender and the use of women to justify America's decision to go to war. She also considers the cultural meaning, or lack of meaning, that lead female soldiers at Abu Ghraib to abuse prisoners "just for fun," and the commitment to death made by women suicide bombers. She examines the pleasure taken in violence and the passion for death and what kind of contexts creates them. Oliver concludes with a diagnosis of our fascination with sex, violence, and death and its relationship with live news coverage and embedded reporting, which naturalizes horrific events and stymies critical reflection.

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Editorial Review

Review

Straightforward and provocative... Recommended.

(*CHOICE*)

Women as Weapons of War is rich and fascinating and stands as an example of how philosophical analysis can enrich our political self-understanding.

(Serene J. Khader *philoSOPHIA*)

Review

Kelly Oliver's book offers a brilliant and unforgettable feminist critique of the recent ways in which 'women' have been used, once again, as the terrain and flesh over which to fight yet another war. At stake in this war is also the future of feminism. Challenging the bunker rhetoric coming out of Washington that combines a noxious mixture of anti-Arab racism with the latest version of the white men's burden to save women from pre-modern cultures, Oliver offers an eloquent plea for the continuing relevance of feminist ways of interpreting the world. In these times of shame and sorrow, this book is indispensable reading.

(Eduardo Mendieta, associate professor of philosophy, Stony Brook University)

When a highly respected feminist philosopher such as Kelly Oliver turns her attention to the most urgent issues facing us today—the war on terror and the invasion of Iran—the reader anticipates the pleasure of a dramatic shift in perspective, an unexpected frame of reference, and a renewal of political energy and ethical thought. And not surprisingly, Oliver has once again delivered on her (unspoken) promise.

(Kalpana Rahita Seshadri, associate professor of English, Boston College)

In her latest book, Kelly Oliver traces the use of women as weapons of war and vehicles of torture to the fact that women lack the cultural means to become articulate agents of their own meaning. Each chapter of the book is laced with rich insights on topics such as the sexual dynamics of the film *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, the contemporary mother as CEO of her family, the popularity of reality shows, neoliberal freedom as freedom to shop, and the meaning of menstrual blood. The wide-ranging insights combine with a clear prose style and a compelling use of contemporary French theory to make for an immensely pleasurable and intellectually satisfying book.

(Cynthia Willett, professor and chair, Department of Philosophy, Emory University)

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About the Author

Kelly Oliver is Alton Jones Professor of Philosophy at Vanderbilt University. She is the author of more than fifty articles and fifteen books, including *Animal Lessons: How They Teach Us to Be Human*; *The Colonization of Psychic Space: A Psychoanalytic Theory of Oppression*; *Family Values: Subjects Between Nature and Culture*; and *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-Bind*.

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