

the same extent, all Arab- and Muslim-Americans] have had no history or that it was only of the most inconsequential sort.”³

The first wave arrived between the late nineteenth century and World War II. It came from the geographic Syria region, especially from the small towns and villages in the Mount Lebanon area, and was primarily Christian. Most of the immigrants were lower-middle class or somewhat poorer. Their greatest bond was the family and the sect to which they belonged. They arrived not really understanding nationality very much, primarily because there was no such concept where they came from. Importantly, they thought of themselves as sojourners, believing that they would be here for only a short time before returning home. They therefore did not strike roots in the country right away.

However, by about 1908 or 1909, they began to think seriously in terms of settling down and becoming citizens. Unfortunately, that coincided with a surge of nativism in the United States, directed especially against people from Eastern Europe and the Ottoman Empire. The Arab immigrants began to encounter very serious roadblocks to citizenship. The Immigration and Naturalization Service argued that they were not really white free persons, but Asians like the Chinese and Japanese, and therefore were not entitled to citizenship. But Arab immigrants, who had been considered white by the American government and public since the 1880s, began to fight in court. By about 1923-1924 immigrants from greater Syria, especially Christians, had, through the U.S. federal courts, achieved "free white" status.⁷ However, Muslims and Arabs from outside Syria were not included in that category until the 1940s. A major court decision in 1944 reversed the 1942 denial of

citizenship to an applicant on the grounds that he was a Muslim, an Arab, not from an area that was accepted as part of Europe, and therefore not really white.⁸ The decision may have been motivated in part by the recognition that the United States was becoming a world power and it was in our national interest to be more inclusive (the court's opinion noted, "In so far as the Nationality Act of 1940 is still open to interpretation, it is highly desirable that it should be interpreted so as to promote friendlier relations between the United States and other nations.")⁹ In any event, after 1965, immigration law was liberalized¹⁰ and more and more Arabs arrived.

The extensive earlier restrictions on citizenship, however, led much of the Arab-American community to try and hide its background. It did not emphasize its origins to its children, who for the most part grew up either ignorant of their background and heritage or ashamed of it. Many in the community nonetheless believed that they were not only as good as others in the U.S. but that they contributed to the West by leavening its materialism

sojourners, by and large they came as permanent immigrants or as students who decided to remain. A community emerged that identified itself as Arab.

The second wave's arrival coincided with changes in the American culture, especially the demise of the old melting pot theory. The civil rights movement and developments in academic disciplines such as anthropology and sociology had led to the idea that it was all right to accept your background: to be an ethnic, if you will. The idea of an ethnic Arab community began to grow.

The 1967 War in Israel and Palestine was the watershed so far as the Arab-American community was concerned. American media coverage of the war was absolutely horrendous for the Arabs who lived through it. Almost none of it demonstrated any sympathy or objectivity about Arabs or Arab-Americans. The community reacted by forming organizations that would defend it, that would begin to explain the community to the rest of the society here, that would try to educate Arab-Americans about how to coordinate, how to get the Arabs and other Americans to talk to each other.

The Association of Arab-American University Graduates, a major national organization, was formed in 1967. The National Association of Arab-Americans, the first Arab-American lobbying organization, followed in 1972, thanks in large part to the efforts of former U.S. Senator James Abourezk. In 1980, as the result of a great deal of discrimination and prejudice, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee was created. And in 1985, the Arab American Institute was organized, primarily to get Arabs to participate in the political process.

Unfortunately, the Arab-American community found that it was difficult

Another group essentially chose ethnic isolation. This was particularly true of newer groups that came in the 1980s, especially Muslims. Finding that they could not change society's attitudes very easily and that they could not accept what was going around them, they effectively decided to remain in their own enclosure.

But the majority wanted integration. They wanted to be part and parcel of American society. Many succeeded. Unfortunately, societal attitudes have made this difficult. There is a move among the younger Arab-American population to insist that even though the designation white applies to Arab-Americans, in practice, Arab-Americans have not been white. They are not white; that is, they are not fully accepted; because of the way they are treated. This is especially true when there is a crisis that relates to the Middle East, and prejudice prevents their views from being taken into consideration. But if we are to integrate Arab-Americans, we need to read Arab-Americans into American history and to follow through by making sure that Arabs are indeed allowed to become integrated politically and socially. Movies have portrayed Arabs and Muslim-Americans in extremely negative terms.¹¹ We have to begin producing movies about average, decent Arabs and Arab-Americans. Unhappily, Islam and Arabism have been hijacked. They have been hijacked by extremists in the Middle East but, in a way, they have also been hijacked by different extremists here. By continuing to emphasize the negative we marginalize the majority of the people, good decent Americans who want to be integrated.

¹ Lynette Clemetson and Keith Naughton, "Patriotism vs. Ethnic Pride, An American Dilemma: Arab-Americans Worry about a World of Hate." *Newsweek*, September 24, 2001, p. 69.

² William E. Leuchtenburg, "The American Perception of the Arab World," in George N. Atiyeh, ed., *Arab and American Cultures* (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977), p. 15.

³ William E. Leuchtenburg, "The American Perception of the Arab World," in George N. Atiyeh, ed., *Arab and American Cultures* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1977), p. 15.

⁴ Michael W. Suleiman, *American Images of Middle East Peoples: Impact of the High School* (New York: Middle East Studies Association of North America, 1977).

⁵ These are the 21 members of the Arab League, including the Palestinians. A study in January-February 2000 by Zogby International found that 56% of the Arab-Americans included came from Lebanon, 14% from Syria, 11% from Egypt, 9% from Palestine. James J. Zogby, "Understanding Arab Americans, Part 1," April 3, 2000, <http://www.aaiusa.org/newsandviews/washingtonwatch/040300.htm>

6