

The **Arab Americans**

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Yemen. Arab Jews use Arabic as a language of communication in the home and in their community as well as in their religious services at the synagogue. Most Jews who live in Israel use Hebrew as their first and main language of communication. Immigration to Israel marked a shift in language as well as identity for many Arab Jews. Because of the great controversy over the perceived conflict in affiliations, many have abandoned the term *Arab* when referring to their community, preferring to use other terms such as Oriental Jews, Sephardim, or, in Israel, Mizrahi.

Non-Arab Minorities

Some other minorities who do not speak Arabic as a first language live in the Arab world, such as the Armenians, Kurds, and Berbers. Beyond the differences in language, there are few cultural differences between these minorities and the larger society. On the whole, the laws prevalent in the Arab world have not been enough to protect the rights of minorities. When these non-Arab minorities emigrate, their tensions and differences with Arabs, which may have seemed so important and insurmountable in the Arab world, can diminish.

NOTES

1. Philip K. Hitti, *The Arabs: A Short History*, 2d ed., rev. (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 1970), 61.
2. Roger Owen, *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*, 2d ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 241.
3. All Quranic quotes included refer to the translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., *The Meaning of the Holy Quran*, 5th ed., rev. (Brentwood, MD: Amana, 1989).
4. John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 19.
5. Paul Lunde, *Islam: Faith, Culture, History* (New York: Dorling Kindersley, 2002), 141, 143.
6. Esposito, 47.
7. Lunde, 137.
8. Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 8.

2

Coming to the United States

Developments in the Middle East and North Africa region as well as U.S. immigration laws have profoundly affected the creation and evolution of the Arab American community. The push and pull factors behind the choice to immigrate have created three historical phases that form layers in the Arab American community. Motivated by the lure of economic opportunity, sojourners and settlers, mostly from Lebanon and Syria, came to the United States between 1880 and 1924 and established trade networks, and residency across the country. In the second phase of Arab American history, 1925–65, relatively few newcomers arrived, and the residents and their children mostly assimilated into mainstream society. The topmost layer within the Arab American community consists of the newest immigrants who have arrived since 1965, and their children.

U.S. IMMIGRATION LAWS

Immigration laws have punctuated the two waves of Arab immigration into the United States. The early wave of Arab American immigration started in earnest in the 1880s and continued until the laws changed in the 1920s. From colonial times until the passage of the Quota Act of 1921 and the Johnson-Reed Immigration Act (1924), Arabs were able to emigrate unfettered by quotas. The Quota Act of 1921 sought to severely curb migration from countries outside Northern and Western Europe; it

banned all immigrants from Asia and reduced the numbers permitted into the country from Southern and Eastern Europe as well as the Ottoman Empire. The U.S. government determined numerical limits for the latter group by allowing in 2 percent of the group's foreign-born population in the 1890 Census. Because the first wavers had only just started arriving in the United States in 1880, very few Arabic-speaking immigrants were admitted into the country for three to four decades thereafter, effectively ending the first wave of Arab American immigration. The drastic decline in the number of new immigrants into the community, combined with the pervasive fear and prejudice of the early 1920s, ushered in a period in which Arab Americans settled down and mainly focused on assimilating into mainstream society in the United States. This period stretched from 1925 until 1965.

The passage of the Immigration Act of 1965 marked a significant change in U.S. immigration policy from one that favored immigration from Europe to a more equal approach to people from non-European areas of the world. The act established an annual overall quota of 170,000 immigrants with a fixed cap of 120,000 from the Western Hemisphere (a first) and an annual country maximum of 20,000 immigrant visas. From 1965 until the present day, preferences for immigrant visas are given for family reunification, refugees, and highly skilled workers. As a direct result of the new immigration policies between 1965 and 1992, 400,000 Arabs immigrated to the United States. Other destinations of choice include Australia, Canada, South America, and Europe. However, the long lines of people seeking visas at the U.S. embassies throughout the Middle East continue to testify to the popularity of the United States as a destination.

Since 2001, immigration officials have made it harder for Arab nationals to immigrate to the United States. After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, security officials looked at how the perpetrators had entered the United States and found that the hijackers were all male, Arab nationals who had entered the United States by land and air, many with visas in their real names. As a direct result, U.S. immigration authorities increasingly focused on nationality, specifically targeting Arab and Muslim men. Visa applications of students, tourists, and businesspeople from the Middle East and North Africa were more likely to be rejected after 9/11, reducing the number of new immigrants as well as cross-cultural exchanges. Those residing in the United States with expired visas or in the country illegally were detained, jailed, and sometimes deported. Because immigration laws were unevenly applied to Arabs and Muslims, many viewed this selective enforcement as tantamount to racial profiling.

Targeting a large noncitizen proportion, this enforcement weighed heavily on the community and organizations tasked with protecting Arab Americans against discriminatory treatment. According to the 2000 Census, there are substantial differentials between the total population and the population of those of Arab ancestry in terms of birth abroad, nativity, and citizenship.

As Table 2.1 shows, whereas 6.6 percent of the total population is noncitizens, slightly more than one-fourth of the people of Arab ancestry were not citizens in 2000. Taking under consideration the Census Bureau's population estimate of 850,000 in its definition of a person of Arab ancestry examined in the sample group, this means, then, that 215,050 Arabs in the United States have temporary and permanent green cards, student or work visas, or were out-of-status with immigration authorities. These statistics reflect the strong impact that the changes to the immigration laws and subsequent enforcement have had on the Arab American community.

In November 2002 the Homeland Security Act became law. This act transferred the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) functions to the newly created Department of Homeland Security (DHS). INS immigration services were transferred to a new bureau called U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), while INS enforcement oversight was placed within the Directorate of Border and Transportation Security, Customs and Border Protection, or Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

In 2003, the DHS implemented a Special Registration program formally known as the National Security Entry/Exit Registration System. Under this program, males older than the age of 16 who had entered the United States

Table 2.1
Comparisons of Nativity and Citizenship Status in Census 2000

	Arab ancestry of non-mixed heritage (%)	General U.S. population (%)
Native (born in the United States)	46.4	88.9
Foreign-born, Naturalized Citizen	28.3	4.5
Foreign-born, Not a Citizen	25.3	6.6

Source: Angela Brittingham and G. Patricia de la Cruz, *We the People of Arab Ancestry in the United States, Census 2000 Special Reports* (Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005), 8; also available online at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs.html#sr>.

since October 2002 from certain countries were required to report to immigration offices to be photographed and fingerprinted on an annual basis. This included nationals from Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Egypt, Eritrea, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. Immigration enforcement, particularly this program, was focused on Arabs and Muslims: 19 of the 25 countries listed were Arab; with the exception of North Korea, all were either Arab or predominantly Muslim countries. According to the American Immigration Lawyers Association, those men who reported to the immigration offices were "subject to arbitrary arrest, detention, abuse and possible deportation" for being out-of-status with the immigration authorities.¹ Although the main features of this program were suspended in December 2003, the men that fall into the Special Registration categories still must report to the USCIS at specially designated ports of entry before departing the United States. Nonimmigrants who are citizens or nationals of Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, and Sudan continue to be subject to Special Registration upon entry to the United States, and "others can be designated for Special Registration on a case-by-case basis."

As a result of this and other initiatives, in the two-year period after 9/11, the number of deportation orders from the 24 predominantly Muslim nations increased 31.4 percent over the preceding two-year period. There was only a 3.4 percent rise in deportation orders from other countries in the comparable time period. These facts caused Arab American leaders to file formal complaints of racial profiling. One lawyer for the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) summarized the opinion of many leaders when he said, "We're not saying not to enforce the laws. But this is selective enforcement."² The rise in security concerns has caused widespread racial profiling of Arab Americans that continues today; at issue is finding a way to ensure national security without violating the inherent civil rights of Arab Americans.

CAUSES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF IMMIGRATION

Arabs in America, 1400-1880

Commercial ties rather than immigration first brought the United States and Arab world together before 1880. It is believed that the first Arabs came to what is now the United States with the Spanish explorers of the fifteenth century. Arabs also actively traded with the early colonies, and by the late

1700s, countries in North Africa formed economic and political alliances with the American revolutionaries. Algerians exported horses to replenish George Washington's cavalry, depleted by the War of Independence. In 1779 when an Algerian ship wrecked off the coast of the rebellious colonies, the mariners chose to settle down in North Carolina. The descendants of the Wahab family of North Carolina, therefore, can claim to be the first Arab settlers in the United States. Morocco was the first country to officially recognize the independence of the United States in the Treaty of Friendship between Mohammad III of Morocco and George Washington in 1787. Since that time, trade and commercial goods from the Middle East have had an important impact on U.S.-Arab relations.

Some celebrated cases of Arabs who moved to the new republic before 1876 are Jeremiah Mahomet in Frederick, Maryland; Antoun Bishallany in New York (1854); and Hadji Ali, a camel driver known as Hi Jolly, in Arizona (1856). These early immigrants came to the United States in search of adventure and out of curiosity, intending to return to the Middle East with interesting stories and perhaps some money in their pockets. Despite their initial intentions, most of the early adventurers never returned home and died, without children, of old age or of diseases, such as tuberculosis, in the United States.

To mark the one-hundredth anniversary of the United States, Philadelphia hosted the Centennial Exhibition in 1876. The Ottoman Sultan, Abdul Hamid II, accepted the invitation to exhibit wares on the faiground and encouraged his subjects to display goods that highlighted the glories of the Ottoman Empire. Arabs and Turks sent 1,600 individuals and firms, winning 129 awards—more than all the exhibitors except the United States and Britain. The Arab traders and artisans sold a range of goods from cotton to coffee and found that their goods, particularly olive-wood rosaries and crosses that were carved in Jerusalem, were in demand. Other popular exhibits were the Tunisian café that served coffee, sweets, and water pipes; and the Moroccan kiosk that was imported intact to sell arts and crafts from North Africa. The tradesmen were so impressed with their sales and the technology in the exhibition that some stayed on and set up import businesses. Others returned home with American goods and tales of the riches to be had in America. The 1876 Exhibition, which showed Arabs that one could become prosperous in the United States, is thus credited with starting the first real wave of migration from the Arab world.

The First Wave, 1880-1924

During the Great Migration (1880-1924), more than 20 million immigrants came to the United States from all over the world. At its peak in

1905–7, more than 1 million people a year immigrated, mostly from Eastern Europe, Italy, and Greece. As part of that period in U.S. history, 95,000 Arabs came from the Levant, and smaller numbers came from Yemen, Iraq, Morocco, and Egypt. Many of the original newcomers stayed and had families in the United States. By 1924, it is estimated that there were approximately 200,000 Arabs living in the United States.³

Among the first wave of Arab immigrants, about 90 percent were Christian, with the remaining being Druze and Sunni Muslim. The Christians were mainly Maronites, although Melkites and Greek Orthodox were among the disproportionate numbers of Christians emigrating from the Levant. One historian estimates that 90 to 95 percent of the immigrants originated from Mount Lebanon, but another estimates that about 10 percent came from Palestine, then under Ottoman rule.⁴ It is hard to estimate such numbers because of the conflation of all Arabs under the category of "Turkey in Asia" or "Syria." The immigrants arrived with some money in their pockets—between 1899 and 1903 the average amount per capita was \$31.85 for Syrians—placing them in the median range of all immigrants showing money at ports of entry.⁵ The immigrants were farmers and merchants by profession and most were landowners, even if they only owned a small plot of land. Few of the immigrants could both read and write Arabic, indicating that many did not have more than a basic education in the missionary schools prevalent in Mount Lebanon at the time.

Nineteenth-century missionary activity in the Levant unintentionally contributed to the attractiveness of the United States. Christian missionaries from the United States and Europe went to the Middle East to convert Muslims and Eastern Christians to Protestant Christianity. Although their efforts were largely unsuccessful in the religious sphere, they did have a substantial impact on the literacy and education in the region. Missionaries set up schools and colleges, many of which are thriving today. For example, in Lebanon, missionaries established the Syrian Protestant College in 1866, later renamed the American University of Beirut, and the Beirut College for Women, now called the Lebanese-American University. Americans devoted to education and service in the Middle East founded the American University in Cairo in 1919. These universities are considered first-rate in the region today.

The missionaries made a good impression on the local people, and many thought the American people kind and generous. The missionaries taught Arabs English and shared photos and political ideologies that may have led some people to consider immigrating.⁶ They showed that the United States was friendly to Christians, and it must have been an easier decision for Christians to move to a land where they could be assured that they would not

be persecuted for their religious beliefs. Perhaps this accounts for the disparity in the numbers of Christians versus Muslims emigrating from the Arab world. Muslims and Druze may have been discouraged from emigrating for fear that the society would be unfriendly and possibly hostile toward their religious beliefs. The few Muslims and Druze who did move to the United States tended to do so with Arab Christian friends and were less likely to bring their families with them.

The vanguard of the early period in the first wave, 1880–1910, were therefore single men between 14 and 40 years old.⁷ Women were a small proportion of the immigrants from the Ottoman Empire until 1899; thereafter, the percentage of women increased steadily. According to available immigration figures, women were only 32 percent of the total immigration between 1899 and 1910; from 1919 to 1930, they were 47.5 percent.⁸ Almost all of the first female immigrants were Christian.

Most immigrants knew very little of the country that they were immigrating to—only that it was a place full of financial opportunity. What they did know was gleaned from the idealized stories told by missionaries and returning migrants. Despite the fact that the "average Syrian peasant was a landowner," the main pull factor for the early wave from Greater Syria was earning money quickly and returning home with wealth enough to bring them and their families social prestige and luxury.⁹ Only one-fourth of the immigrants did in fact return to Lebanon, but many of them chose to re-emigrate to the United States. Whether or not they left for the second time, they brought back wealth and stories that fuelled the so-called American fever—a departure of scores of others across the Atlantic. Another attraction for these young men, and a few women, in the 1880s most likely was the excitement of going to a new land and having fascinating adventures. As more emigrated, networks were established so that an émigré would know exactly where he or she was moving in the country, whom he or she would be working for, and where he or she would be living. As time went on, the adventure became more of a calculated risk for financial betterment rather than a thrilling journey into the unknown.

However alluring the economic gains and adventure of the United States were, there would have been little immigration without some push factors. Although there has been much debate about the role of the Ottoman rulers, taxation, religious strife, and political turmoil, the period of 1861–1914 was relatively calm and prosperous for Mount Lebanon. In late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Lebanon, emigration was caused by the raised material expectations of villagers and farmers: "Emigration, which deprived Lebanon of at least a third of its population, was not the result

of poverty or persecution. Men left the Mountain in search of a way to guarantee, and possibly improve on, a standard of living they had grown accustomed to during the good times of the 1860s.⁹¹⁰

The most important crop on Mount Lebanon was silk, and by 1879, the majority of the income for peasants on Mount Lebanon was linked to the silk industry. The 1860s and 1870s were prosperous times, and silk prices were high. By the 1880s, the price of silk was declining, while the growing population was making increasing demands on the land. Many of the generation born after 1860 expected to improve on the living standards of their parents and were disappointed when they were unable to do so. This disappointment led many younger peasants to emigrate from their villages to the United States.

These young men and women had to first raise enough money to bribe the Ottoman officials, pay for the voyage, and have as a cushion until they could establish themselves in their new country. The cost of a travel permit was often more than it cost to bribe the police officers to get onto the boats heading for Marseilles, Barcelona, or Liverpool. On arrival in Europe, the émigré would wait in the port area for a second boat to South, Central, or North America. They traveled in the lowest level of accommodations on board called "steerage," which was packed to the maximum without adequate food, water, or sanitation. The journey was an opportunity to get to know other émigrés and make new friends from other villages. As was evidenced by the sinking of the *Titanic*, on which more than 100 Syrians died, this cross-Atlantic journey was often hazardous. Unscrupulous ship operators exploited the aspiring emigrants by overcharging them for the journey or taking them to other destinations. Many thought they were going to New York, and on arrival, they discovered that they were in fact in South America.

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the motivations of immigrants changed from one of financial amelioration to desperation. The conscription of young Christian and Druze men of the Mountain into the Ottoman Army from 1908 onward caused many young men to flee their villages to avoid death, because Arab troops were stationed on the front line of battle. In 1917 the British and French Allied fleet instituted a blockade of the coasts of Syria and Lebanon to prevent food from being exported from the Mountain to feed the Ottoman soldiers on the battlefield. The blockade achieved its aim and stopped imported foodstuffs and remittances from abroad from entering the region. The seizure of foodstuffs by Ottoman soldiers, a yellow fever epidemic, and a destructive earthquake in 1918 further compounded the deleterious effects of the Allied naval blockade. It is estimated that one-fourth of the population of Mount Lebanon died of starvation during World War I.¹¹

As with European immigrants, desperation and food shortages were obvious push factors for emigration during the latter end of the decade.

The departure of many young men and a few women in the 1880s created new circumstances on Mount Lebanon by the 1890s. The traditional patriarchal structure relied on a gendered division of labor—men worked outside the home, and women had children and cared for the family. As the men left, women became the central focus of the family, dealing with the farming and family decisions. Although most left with the intention of sending money back to their family in the form of remittances, the emigrants sent little money back in the first few years, and "that which was sent was intended mainly for buying up property in the man's name."¹² This left some overburdened and angry women on the Mountain. Throughout the entire wave of migration (1880–1924), most women who emigrated were married and went to join their husbands and share the burdens of raising a family, or they went without their husbands to improve the family finances or to escape bad marriages, such as poet and artist Kahlil Gibran's mother did in 1895.¹³ If these married women returned after three or four years, they reportedly brought with them \$300 or \$400, with which many purchased land to grow crops for sale and subsistence. In this period, a large percentage (38.6%) of female immigrants above the age of 18 years old were unmarried.¹⁴ By the mid-1890s, single men rarely returned to their villages to find a bride. By the turn of the century, single women began to emigrate to find a husband or to escape the drudgery of village life and gain the freedom that comes with disposable income and a different society. The choice of single women in the Mount Lebanon villages to emigrate also showed that the villagers were aware that the men had permanently moved to the United States.

After 1899, significant numbers of women arrived in the United States, and many families moved their home base from Mount Lebanon permanently. The men-only boarding houses were obviously inappropriate for married couples, and so the husbands moved out and set up their own family homes. This move marked a social change, as the sojourners became settlers who realized that the United States was home.

The Second Wave, 1925–1965

The second phase of Arab American history (1925–65) was mainly one of assimilation and acculturation. Although wives and dependent children of U.S. citizens were not counted toward the quotas imposed in the 1920s, few nonrelative immigrants were permitted to enter the country. The lack of newcomers from back home until the 1950s created a vacuum of communication between

the Arab world and the community in the United States. As the primordial ties with the village and family loosened, there was a corresponding tightening of the ties with United States. Many Arab Americans assimilated into the mainstream, de-emphasizing their ethnic backgrounds at home as well as in public. During this period, many Arab Americans blended into mainstream and became invisible as an ethnic minority.

After World War II, revolutions and wars dominated the political and economic realities in Arab world. Some Arab elites came as political exiles, especially from Iraq, Egypt, and Palestine. The first Palestinians in the second wave were those with relatives living in the United States or those who already had U.S. citizenship. In all, almost 6,000 Palestinians came as political refugees in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1953, the U.S. Congress passed the Refugee Relief Act to accommodate refugees, particularly Palestinian refugees, as a separate immigration category. Under this law, (extended in 1957), almost 3,000 Palestinians were admitted to the United States between 1953 and 1963.¹⁵ Many arrived with little financial resources. After the Refugee Relief Act, approximately 3,000 additional Palestinians came to the United States. More came as students and stayed after they finished their educational programs, so they were not accounted for in the statistics. Among the immigrants during this period were two renowned Arab American intellectuals of Palestinian origin: the late Columbia University Professor Edward Said, who came from Cairo in 1951 to attend prep school in Connecticut, and the late Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, who came to the United States in 1950 as a graduate student. Others, such as Hisham Sharabi, were at U.S. graduate schools when the 1948 war broke out and had little choice but to stay.

In the 1950s, a different type of immigrant moved from the Arab world to the United States: the elites. Although some Palestinians, such as Said, were from the upper class, most Palestinian immigrants were not. Most of the other Arab immigrants between 1950 and 1965 were members of the leadership in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq who were fleeing popular revolutions and new regimes that were confiscating their lands and wealth in their home countries. The 1952 revolution in Egypt and the 1958 revolt against the Iraqi monarchy left those associated with the previous regimes out of favor. Diplomats posted outside the country at the time often stayed in the host country, including those posted to the United States. Coptic Christians and middle-class Muslims concerned about the economy and religious freedom after the revolution also left Egypt for the United States or Europe. These exiled elites arrived educated, with strong English-language skills, and with vast resources. They generally moved to cosmopolitan areas and had little in common with the earlier wave of Arab immigrants.

The Third Wave, 1965–present

Between 1965 and 1992, more than 400,000 Arab immigrants arrived in the United States because of the changes in the immigration law and quotas as well as further upheavals in the Arab world. This third wave was substantially larger than the second wave and three times the size of the first wave. Although the first and second waves had had children and their numbers had increased, the third wave would become another substantial layer in the community.

The rise of pan-Arabism, charismatic leaders, and visions of greater prosperity gave many Arabs high hopes for the future in the 1950s and early 1960s. The defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War humiliated Arabs as well as their armies, ending a period of relative optimism and shattering the myth of Arab strength and unity. As a result, many Arabs were disillusioned and pessimistic about the future of the Arab world and chose to move to the United States and other non-Arab countries. There was a peak in immigration after the defeat in the Six-Day War, and other miniwaves of immigration stemming from other political events.

Since 1967, economic policies and wars have encouraged a cross-section of Arabs to emigrate. Because of the civil war and strife, 90,000 people emigrated from Lebanon from 1965 to 1992, and thousands of Palestinians, Syrians, Jordanians, and Egyptians have left their birthplaces. In the last 40 years, each of these labor sending countries experienced major political upheavals that have acted as propelling mechanisms for emigration.

The war in Lebanon from 1975 to 1991 forced many Lebanese and Palestinians living in Lebanon to fear for their lives and come to the United States, whether or not they had relatives who were citizens. The 1991 Gulf War impacted many communities, causing substantial migrations of people within and outside the region. In the 1990s, ordinary Iraqis fled the country because of food shortages caused by the U.N. sanctions and the extreme measures of Saddam Hussein's regime. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Gulf countries expelled thousands of its Palestinian and Yemeni workers in the early 1990s because of their leaders' positions on the Gulf War. As they returned to Yemen, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian territories, these workers had to find alternative employment in countries with high unemployment rates. Many Palestinians and Yemenis were forced to leave the region entirely in search of jobs. Palestinians, who are often recorded as being from Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, or the Gulf countries, probably form the largest segment of the recent immigrants. Egyptians working in the Gulf were affected by the disruptions of the war. Governmental corruption, mismanagement,

and autocratic regimes have spurred on emigration from the Arab world. These recent immigrants are from a wide variety of social and economic backgrounds and are approximately evenly divided between men and women. Although they treasure the safety of the United States, many did not see their immigration as permanent, particularly those who fled their country only because of war. Rather, they expected to return one day to their country when it is at peace and full of job opportunities.

A good number of these immigrants came to the United States for post-graduate education or for career reasons, never expecting to return. Between 1965 and 1976, 15 percent of the immigrants were educated professionals and highly skilled technical workers. The educational system in many Arab countries was substantially upgraded after independence, and by 1975, Arab countries such as Iraq, Egypt, and Lebanon could boast of excellent universities in their capitals. The number of university graduates increased in the late 1960s and 1970s, but the number of jobs available did not correspond with their skills level. With few job prospects, many saw immigration as their only option for career advancement, and so they left, contributing to the serious problem in the development of the Arab world that is called the "brain drain."

The graduate educational opportunities available in the United States provided one of the incentives for many young, bright Arabs to emigrate. Although Arab universities had good facilities, U.S. schools offered superior academic programs, equipped with the latest technology for medical and engineering schools. Therefore, wealthier parents sent their children to the United States for undergraduate or graduate schools. Arab governments and U.S. institutions such as AMIDEAST also helped to facilitate the training of professionals in the United States, believing that they would return to their home countries, skilled and ready to contribute to their society and economy. But the corruption, stagnated economies, flat job market, and poor financial prospects back home forced many to rethink the concept of returning after their schooling was completed. Although some did in fact return, many stayed in the United States where educational opportunities developed into career networks and employment options. These skilled laborers and educated professionals established permanent residency because the lifestyle was better, and income was significantly more substantial than that which would be possible back home.

Other pull factors were the political institutions, tolerance of differences, and the guarantees of individual rights in the United States. Most of the post-1965 immigrants are Muslims who value the freedom to worship and the ability to establish mosques. As versions of Islamic fundamentalism grew,

they pushed moderate and secular Muslims to leave Muslim-majority countries, making the United States an attractive option. The right to worship was also important to many Christians who emigrated after 1965. The Iraqi Chaldeans and the Egyptian Copts in particular believed they were in a disadvantageous and discriminatory position in their respective countries. The right of individuals to take pride in and display their ethnicity has been a pull factor for immigrants from all over the world. The rise of multiculturalism as the dominant social philosophy since the 1970s increased tolerance for differences and allowed for expression of heritage, language, and customs.

SETTLEMENT PATTERNS

The main point of entry for Syrians before 1924 was New York Harbor—first through Castle Garden and then Ellis Island, which opened in 1892. Other popular ports of entry were New Orleans, Boston, Philadelphia, Providence, and Baltimore. After the long journey by boat with dreams of setting foot on *terra firma*, every immigrant had to pass a medical test and go through an interview process. Many were turned away because of trachoma, an eye inflammation, and were returned to their villages without their families. Others circumvented U.S. immigration officials by going through Mexico or the Caribbean. Some families chose to continue their journey and join relatives in South or Central America. Today, there are descendants of early Lebanese migrants in Peru, Brazil, Venezuela, and other South American countries.

U.S. border officials usually did not speak Arabic and, as with other immigrants, the Arab names were anglicized on entry into the country. The long Arabic names were shortened and then made pronounceable for English speakers. The new name was often a dramatic change from their inherited identity: for example, "Yaccoub" became "Jacobs" and "Qassem" became "Kasem." This initial name change heralded in a series of dislocations of identity in the United States.

For aspiring and actual immigrants, New York City embodied and represented the United States. "Nayirk" was often used in conversation interchangeably with the United States, which was generalized to be America, which in turn was called "Merka." New York, known as the Mother Colony for the early settlers, had the most diverse and most concentrated population of Arabs before 1900. The area around Washington Street in Lower Manhattan became known as "Little Syria," an ethnic enclave with many Arab-owned businesses and residents. It was to serve as the intellectual center

for Arab Americans between 1880 and 1910 and was the base for many Arab American social institutions. Washington Street was full of noise and activity with weaving factories, storefronts, and cafés serving bubbling water pipes and coffee. Almost all of the intellectuals resided in New York City, and they played important roles in leading the community, founding churches, organizations, newspapers, and Republican and Democratic Clubs in the 1890s.

Little Syria was the commercial center for Arab Americans in its heyday. The first Arab-owned bank (founded by the Faour brothers) was established to provide capital for the new businesses. Some stores in Little Syria were import houses that bought curwork embroidery from Italy and laces and silk from France and had workers from China and the Philippines making inexpensive goods for them, long before it became an economic trend. The stores also fuelled demand for cottage industry items, such as cheaper laces sewn in Mount Lebanon. They imported food, kitchen utensils, water pipes, and cultural items, such as musical instruments, from back home for the comfort of their fellow villagers residing throughout the United States. Many of the stores were dry goods stores.

Trade in Little Syria revolved around the peddling profession. In the 1880s, the new immigrants made their way directly to contacts in Little Syria. Once there, the owner of a supply store provided the immigrant with a little training and goods to sell. Between 1880 and 1910, most newcomers from Mount Lebanon became peddlers, traveling from place to place, selling goods and wares to customers. In their first few days in the United States, new arrivals were tested selling goods on the streets of New York, returning to a basic boarding house at night. After they had honed their skills and found the peddling trade acceptable, the peddlers would move out of the city, seeking new customers, usually in less urban areas.

The most common trade was pack peddling. The resulting stereotyped image of the early Arab immigrant inspired the character of Hakim in the Broadway musical *Oklahoma!*—an olive-skinned young man who sold goods to farms from a cart. The stereotype sidelined the role of women; by 1903 more than one-third of Syrian pack peddlers were women. Some found the peddling trade repulsive, but both men and women found it grueling work. The peddler would obtain his or her supplies on credit from stores, manufacturers, or warehouses that were usually owned by fellow villagers. Sometimes the peddler would make items himself or herself or have relatives sew finished pieces. His or her *qashshah*, or pack, would be full of goods such as holy items (rosaries and crucifixes), toiletries, notions (buttons, thread, ribbons, needles, and laces), handkerchiefs, trinkets, cloth (including linens), jewelry, clothing, garters, and suspenders. The peddler would carry as much as possible,

and the pack could weigh between 50 and 200 pounds. The peddler would then walk door-to-door, selling her or his wares and sleeping wherever a spot could be found, sometimes in the homes or barns of customers and sometimes out in the cold. His or her personality and charm would determine whether he or she would get a hot meal at night as well as how many items he or she would sell each day.

As more peddlers entered the trade, a network of settlements fanned out from New York City. Many of the first wavers chose to not stay in the port cities and traveled by boat or train to find a spot less inundated by commercial outlets to set up their base. Sailing up from New Orleans, first wavers started businesses in Vicksburg, Mississippi, and other points along the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio Rivers. Supply points were established in cities and towns in the Northeast, then in the Midwest, and on the West Coast by the 1880s. The networks were headed by a merchandise supplier who received shipments and refilled inventory sold via parcel post or express delivery from the stores in Little Syria or other ports such as New Orleans. New York stores supplied Utica and Buffalo; New Orleans stores supplied settlements in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas; and St. Louis stores supplied the Midwest, including Indiana, Iowa, and the Dakotas. These merchandise suppliers would set up receiving stations, often along rail lines, for peddlers to pick up more goods, as the peddlers often traveled for months at a time. The local merchandise suppliers played a central role in the lives of peddlers through managing their finances, organizing peddling routes to prevent overlap, and running boarding houses for them to stay in between trips. Although the favor of the head of the settlement could impact the amount of income earned, the peddler remained his or her own boss with the independence to move to another city or choose another supplier. Some peddlers, particularly women, chose not to do overnight trips and instead sold in a city or in the immediate rural area, returning home at night.

The early settlers must have looked very foreign to Americans. In addition to their large packs, the itinerant peddlers wore roomy white collarless shirts and baggy black pants that had multiple folds from the hip to the crotch and then tapered to the ankles. They might also wear a fringed headscarf, a black vest, and waist sash. If they were dressing up or in the city, they would don a *tarboosh*—a red felt hat in the shape of a truncated cone, with a black tassel—and a suit. The women wore loose-fitting cotton blouses, long skirts, and a light shawl or kerchief over their hair.

New immigrants became peddlers because the trade required little training or English-language skills. The goods were sold on credit and only a small amount of capital investment was necessary to start trading. Other peddlers

were Eastern European Jews, Greeks, Armenians, and Italians, and their trade gave many immigrants a better personal understanding of entrepreneurship as well as the American way of life and its emphasis on self-reliance and individuality. There were different types of peddlers, described according to the way they carried their goods. Pushcart or road peddlers sold their goods from mobile stands, which were wheeled throughout cities. Pack or foot peddlers carried goods on their backs, walking their goods to their customers. Although some Syrians were also pushcart peddlers, the early Arab immigrants specialized in pack peddling in rural and remote areas, including mining towns and farms as well as in heavily ethnic non-English-speaking neighborhoods. Indeed, there is evidence that some peddlers learned both English and German, which was widely spoken in the United States at the turn of the century. Some peddlers who worked in areas such as Texas also spoke Spanish. Arabs seemed to pick up these languages easily, and some even worked as translators and interpreters with the U.S. Immigration Service. The peddlers' main customers were women confined to the home because of language differences or remoteness of location. Although the life of a peddler was lonesome and tough, it enabled him or her to become financially successful. It is estimated that by 1910, American rural women had bought \$60 million worth of goods from Syrian peddlers.¹⁶

Depending on their skills and goods, peddlers could earn up to \$2,000 a year. The average peddler's income was \$1,000, while industrial laborers earned an average of \$650 a year, and the average per capita income for an American was \$382 in 1910. Immigrants entered the world of peddlers to avoid dull factory work and to be outside in the fresh air with a sense of freedom and independence. Peddling must have been especially attractive to those accustomed to farming and to physical work outdoors. Peddlers would often barter their goods for food or other items, and so helped customers when they were short on cash. Even in harsh economic times, such as before harvest or in the Depression, peddlers were able to sell goods and to provide a service for families. Through establishing national networks, peddlers expanded markets and boosted profitability for products manufactured in the United States as well as suppliers in Europe and, to a lesser extent, Syria.

Considering the conditions and risks of peddling, it is perhaps surprising that women were involved in peddling. In fact, between 75 and 80 percent of the Arab American women peddled during the period 1880-1910. These women were considered to be more profitable and adept at the trade than men because they could more easily establish a rapport with the female customers and so increase sales. There were some well-known women peddlers

who enjoyed the independence of overnight peddling but were usually accompanied by a close male relative (father, brother, or husband). More often, women were day peddlers who returned home at night. After they married, women might retire from peddling to take care of the children at home, but they sewed and crocheted items (another popular item was the Japanese kimono) for their male relatives to sell. If the need for extra cash arose, however, women returned to peddling for quick income, and Arab American women were known to have been peddling into the 1940s. This testifies to the fact that Arab American families, like other Americans, struggled financially during and after the Depression Era.

In the 1890s, some of the peddlers put down their packs and either bought new forms of transportation from which to peddle or opened a retail business. A horse and cart allowed the peddler to travel farther from the supply point. By replacing the pack with a cart or automobile, the peddler could carry more goods and was able to offer more expensive items, such as linens from Europe and Oriental rugs. This move to different forms of transportation to sustain the peddling industry was eclipsed by the arrival of the mail-order business. When companies such as Sears, Roebuck began their catalog mail-order business, and local department stores became more common, the need for door-to-door sales lessened. Improvements in transportation—cars, buses, and trains—delivered goods to the customer, and the peddling industry faded by 1910. In 1915, a New York State census found that peddling was no longer in the top five areas of employment for employed Syrian heads of households.

By the early 1900s, more peddlers were beginning to make the commitment to permanent settlements, and they generally clustered in Arab neighborhoods at old supply points, known as a *hara*. The typical *hara* was small, usually not more than 20 families, and in a mixed white ethnic area that was within walking distance of the central business district of a town or city. Some of the families lived in three-generation households, as other family members joined their relatives in chain migration. Although there were exceptions, living in clusters was the norm for the early immigrants and their children. Some of the bigger cities and towns had larger *haras*, but there were no grand arches or other visible signs to declare to outsiders that they were now entering an ethnic enclave. The residents of the *hara* were usually from the same village and were often related and of the same religion. The residential arrangement fostered a sense of close relations and conversation as people sat out on their porches in the evening or congregated at neighborhood picnics. Itinerant preachers and non-Arab churches usually served the spiritual needs of the residents, but a few Eastern Rite churches and a

few mosques were established. Other community institutions, such as social organizations and clubs, sometimes followed the building of churches, but the roots of these *haras* were shallow, and few institutions from this era have survived. However, before and during the Depression, these *haras* gave the first wavers and their families stability and a sense of security.

Many former peddlers used their marketing and entrepreneurial skills to become independent merchants in both the retail and wholesale trade. Arab Americans opened shops in the peddling settlements and at the supply points for peddlers. Dry goods stores in Cleveland, Ohio, and Cedar Rapids, Iowa, which stocked and refilled the peddlers' packs in the 1880s, sold the same goods to outside customers in the late 1890s. Ex-peddlers also opened up grocery stores, bakeries, clothing shops, and haberdasheries selling small wares and sewing supplies. Typically bearing the family name, these stores were a family endeavor. Children went to school by day and stocked the shelves and swept the floors by night. The men ran the stores and did the finances, while the women were in charge of the household and continued to make popular decorative items and clothing. Their home was often based above or behind the store, blurring the distinction between home and work. Some ex-peddlers catered to a more upscale clientele and sold more expensive goods in their new stores, including Oriental rugs, expensive fabrics, and embroidered linens, often provided by the import houses of Little Syria.

Not all Arab Americans were peddlers or storeowners. Muslims and Druze immigrants in particular were attracted to the farming opportunities available at the turn of the century. Arabs arrived after the Homestead Act of 1862, which gave land to anyone willing to farm it to encourage westward expansion. They moved out West and to the Midwest to farm, as they had in their villages. Druze set up colonies in Appalachia and farmed extensively in West Virginia. Yemenis traveled to California to farm and work in the San Joaquin Valley, leaving families back home and sending back half of their earnings.

Many Arab Americans worked in the factories of the Midwest and New England for a wage. In 1914, Ford Motor Company paid its workers the then-substantial amount of \$5 for eight hours of work. In 1900, there were 50 men working at the plant in Detroit; by 1916, there were 555 Syrian men registered as employees. As a result, Detroit grew to be an important center for Arab Americans, especially for Muslims who were more likely to work in factories, lumber camps, and livery stables than were Christian immigrants. One possible explanation for this preference, when peddling could yield a higher income, is that peddling was harder for Muslims than for Christians, who could reach a comfort level with the farm wives by quoting from the

Bible and finding a religious commonality with their customers. Another explanation is that factory work was more stable, involving less risk and danger than peddling. The woolen mills of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, and the sardine canneries of East Maine, and textile factories of Fall River, Lowell, and Lawrence, Massachusetts, were popular places to work for Arabs who chose not to peddle. Others established their own manufacturing plants with their savings. Many of these businesses, such as Hagggar slacks and the Jacobs Engineering Company, are still in business today.

By the eve of World War I in 1914, many Arab Americans were settled into their new land. When the United States entered the war, they were eager to serve their new country and fight their old enemies, the Ottoman Turks. Many did not wait for the draft and volunteered to go to war even if they had just fled their homeland to avoid conscription into the Ottoman Army. In all, 15,000 Syrians (or 7 percent of the Arab American community at the time) served as American infantrymen, or Doughboys, in World War I. Some were decorated for their valor. It is estimated that 64 percent of the New York Syrians bought \$1.2 million worth of liberty war bonds to boost American efforts, and perhaps make a profit to boot.¹⁷ From 1910 onward, Arab Americans founded Red Cross chapters and Boy Scout troops. World War I was a chance for the early settlers to oppose the Ottomans and be patriotic for their new country at the same time. Rising to the occasion, they found a stronger sense of belonging in the United States and social status as veterans in return.

After World War I, the pioneers strove to attain a better life for themselves and their families in the United States. The men moved from cramped, men-only boarding houses to their own homes and had families. Parents focused on their children's education as a way to improve the status of the next generation; they no longer went peddling for months at a stretch and instead enrolled their children in schools. Although Arabic was spoken in the *haras*, these children grew up to be bilingual, speaking Arabic at home and English at school. Many of the first settlers who were illiterate in both English and Arabic when they arrived had learned to read and write Arabic to communicate with family and friends back home. They also read Arabic newspapers published in New York to keep abreast of the news. However, by 1920, Arabs were writing fewer letters, and the only form of Arabic used frequently was colloquial, spoken Arabic at home. The efforts taken to learn how to read and write Arabic were lost on their children, who avoided speaking Arabic outside of their social community in the 1920s and 1930s.

The immigration laws and nativist attitudes of the 1920s and 1930s were constructed to protect the interests of Northern and Western European-descent

immigrants against those of the other immigrants. This created an atmosphere in which assimilation was encouraged, and ethnic expression suppressed. The first English-language journal published for Arab Americans, *Syrian World*, stated that "race prejudice" was leading the second-generation Arab American to "look with contempt upon the language and queer customs of his parents."¹⁸ The loss of language was one of the effects of the period of assimilation between the world wars.

The Roaring 1920s challenged the family values of many Arab Americans and pulled the second and third generations further from their parents' control and influence. Before 1920, marriage was considered very important and schooling for girls less practical. Most of the marriages were arranged by mothers, priests, or within the social networks that existed within the *hara*, or between communities in different towns. As the second generation attended school, they learned English and met friends outside the community and at church, if they attended a Roman Catholic Church. Romances blossomed, and mixed marriages became more commonplace.

The rising number of naturalized U.S. citizens in the community gave more Arab Americans the right to vote, and thus more political clout, as Arab Americans became more involved at the local level. A 1924 survey by the Syrian American Club found that only 50 percent of the Syrians eligible for citizenship were citizens. After a campaign to increase the numbers of voters, raise political awareness, and stress the greater importance of politics in the United States than in Lebanon, the percentage of citizens shot up to 75 percent relative to those eligible for citizenship.¹⁹ Some Arab Americans won local office, proving that they could participate in mainstream politics.

The Depression of the 1930s challenged the wealth and ties of the Arab American community. As the Great Depression took its toll on all Americans, Arab Americans sold their farms and vineyards on Mount Lebanon to give money to their relatives, to establish a church or mosque in the United States, or to pay off a mortgage. The income from the sale of the land eased financial burdens in the short-term. As the Depression continued, however, some Arab Americans, particularly women, reverted to peddling to subsist. During the Depression, most of the wealthy suffered financially. The Faour brothers, the main lenders to the merchants of Little Syria, lost \$1 million, and George Faour died alone in a boarding house. The smaller grocers and merchants weathered out the storm, and most managed to stay in business. In a situation of economic choices, most chose to keep their assets in the United States over those in Lebanon. They also chose to build churches and mosques as well as social organizations in the United States, emphasizing the permanence of their migration. However, some of the second and third generations maintained

close ties to those left behind and established charities to help the needy in Lebanon. They also quietly continued to send back remittances.

World War II and the antifeign sentiment in the United States spurred along the assimilation process for many Arab Americans. At least 30,000 GIs of Arab heritage joined the U.S. armed forces in World War II, a greater percentage than enlisted in World War I to fight the Ottoman Turks on behalf of the United States.²⁰ There were Arab Americans fighting in many of the major battles, including the Battle of the Bulge, a D-Day landing in southern France called Operation DRAGOON, and in combat missions over Berlin. As in World War I, a result of the war was further assimilation and acculturation. By the end of the war in 1945, many Arab American *haras* had disappeared with the exception of Dearborn, Michigan. From 1925 to 1965, Arab Americans were a part of the larger internal migration occurring at the time. Although a few families in rural areas remained as farmers or merchants, many moved to cities and towns. The smaller *haras* disintegrated as their residents moved to the suburbs or to bigger towns. Arab Americans in Little Syria moved their residences out of Manhattan. The construction of the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel in the 1940s forced most remaining Washington Street businesses to close and relocate, and many moved their businesses to Brooklyn. Little Syria was replaced with office buildings. Only two nondescript buildings, on the northwest corner of Greenwich and Rector Streets, are now left of the Mother Colony in New York City.

By World War II, the Arab American community had dispersed and assimilated into neighborhoods and industries that were not ethnically signified. One historian concluded that without the influx of new immigrants after 1965, the "Syrian-Americans might have assimilated themselves out of existence."²¹ This is incorrect, however. Although many families no longer lived in *haras* or spoke Arabic, they actively participated in social networks, such as clubs and churches. Expressions of identity and community became limited to spheres less visible to non-Arab Americans but were nonetheless still present by 1965.

NOTES

1. American Immigration Lawyers Association, <http://www.aiala.org>.
2. Kareem Shora and Timothy Edgair, "After 9/11, an Assault on Civil Liberties: Interview with Kareem Shora and Timothy Edgair," *TRIAL* 39, no. 10 (October 2003), 56-61.
3. Anan Ameri and Dawn Ramey, eds., *Arab American Encyclopedia* (Detroit: UXL, 2000), 36.
4. Alixia Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 112.