CHAPTER I

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Here is not merely a nation, but a teeming Nation of nations.
Walt Whitman
(Naff, Arab Americans 7)

From the moment this continent was colonized, racism has been fundamental to this country’s functioning on every level. To this day, racism is systematically institutionalized in every aspect of the United States’ political, economic, and social life.
Barbara Smith

United States is home to immigrants from across the world. Many had been driven out from their homelands, others were attracted by the wealth of America. Ethnic groups in excess of hundred vary, from French Basque to Japanese, Peruvian, American, and Russian. These groups “represent the wondrous profusion of ethnic influence in North America” (Naff, Arab Americans 10). Arab immigration originated in late 1800s bringing a multitude of immigrants to the New World. Together they founded a vibrant yet diversified community comprising early settlers, descendants, new immigrants of different sects and faiths. Their community is shaped by a long history which spans over a century.

The term “Arab-Americans” refers to immigrants from Arabic speaking countries of the Middle East to North America. Namely, they are Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and United Arab Emirates and Yemen. Somalia and Djibouti host an Arabic speaking population, thus becoming part of the League of Arab States. Geographically, the Arab world consists of a region that extends from Morocco to Egypt and Sudan in North Africa, Syria and Iraq in Western
Asia to Yemen and Oman in the Arabian Peninsula. Diverse as they are, in terms of religion and sect, they are united in sharing a common language, Arabic. The birth of Islam and its expansion in the 7th century transformed this region into one of world’s greatest civilizations.

Currently, there are around 5-6 million Arab Americans living in the United States. However, the accuracy of this is debatable due to the fact that early immigrants have been falsely categorized by US immigration officials on numerous occasions. First, they were identified as “Turks” from “Turkey in Asia”, along with Turks, Armenians and at times even with the Greek. From 1899 the term “Syrians” or “Syrian-Arabs” emerged. More recently, the creation of state of Israel in 1948, added more perplexity to an already misleading classification. Displaced Palestinians arriving from various Arab and North African countries were given the grouping “Other Asian” or “Other African”. Unfortunate as it is, on these grounds, only estimations can be provided on the exact number of Arab-American community. However, it has steadily increased from 130,000 in late 1930s to pre-World War II figure of 350,000 to approximately 5-6 million today.

Before the great immigration of 1870, Arab presence in the US was exceptional and inconsequential. According to historical documents, the first Arabs to step on American soil came from ‘Moorish’ Spain in 1492 accompanying the great explorer/colonizer Christopher Columbus. It is believed that his famous journey was inspired by a group of adventurous Arabs, who successfully crossed the Atlantic from Lisbon, Portugal and reached South America. In 1539, a Moroccan Arab by the name of Estephan arrived in America as a guide to Fra Marcus de Niza to explore South America. Among other incidents, there are few worth mentioning. The name of Hadji Ali aka “Hi Joly” is recorded in history as the first official Muslim immigrant who came to the US in 1856, while Antonios Bishallamy a native of Lebanon, is considered to be the first Arab immigrant who arrived in 1854. Muslim Arabs from Yemen were said to have made their way through the Suez Canal to the United States.

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1 According to various estimates, the population of Arab-Americans varies between 3.5 - 6 million. The Bureau of United States Census (http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-23.pdf) recorded in 2000, 1.2 million Arab-Americans. However, other estimates are much higher. According to Arab-American Institute (http://www.aaiusa.org/arab-americans/22/demographics) and Arab-American Almanac (5th edition) 3.5 million, Allied Media Corp. (http://www.allied-media.com/Arab-American/Arab%20Demographics.htm) 4 million, and Arab Times (http://www.arabtimes.com/english/advertising/FAQ.htm) 6-7 million.
The stories of Arab adventurers and early immigrants are fascinating as the people themselves. "The stories are valuable to us not only because they were brave, unique individuals who dared to be different, but also they laid the foundation for the three million strong Arab-American Community today..." (Hassan, Stories part 3: 2).

The wealth of America appeared to the Arabs in the form of Philadelphia International Exposition in 1876, organized to celebrate America's centennial. Arab participants returned with riches of the unknown land, such as gold watches, leather shoes, western suits etc. The praise heaped on the United States by those who exhibited wares, was a prime stimulant to Syrian immigration. They inaugurated the great immigration to the US in late 19th century.

In the history of Arab immigration, two distinct phases can be ascertained. It's believed that the first wave occurred from 1870 to 1945, followed by the second, from early 1945 till 1967. The third wave has been identified from 1967 to the present.

The political economist Charles Issawi sees Arab immigration to the New World as being sparked by the following: “tensions accompanying economic and social transformation; the imposition of conscription; the spread of foreign education; the improvement of transportation; and the massacres of 1860”. (Orfalea 51) Further, periodic famines, droughts and scarcity of cultivable land pushed a growing population to seek their fortune in the New World.

The first wave immigrants were overwhelmingly Christians from the Greater Syrian region, which is present day Lebanon, Syria, the Palestinians and Jordan. Key factors that ignited a mass migration are economic as well as religious.

One of the reasons Arabs chose to immigrate to America in the nineteenth century owes itself to a religious oddity: American Christians proselytized the original Christians of the Holy Land. Of course, in Greater Syria and environs, Islam was dominant, but in the area where missionaries concentrated-Lebanon and parts of Palestine-well over half the population was already Christian. (Orfalea 53)

Christians under Ottoman rule were discriminated, marginalized and were deprived of a higher social status enjoyed by Muslims. Considered inferior, they faced many restrictions including persecution, Gregory Orfalea argues. When the situation further deteriorated, during mid 1800s, due to poor social and economic conditions, sectarian violence erupted. As a result, thousands of Christians out of fear of being
massacred, fled their homelands, creating a full fledged immigration to the United States. Being Christians, they had an added advantage, for they were leaving for a Christian land, whereas Muslims worried about preserving their religious faith in a non-Islamic society. Thus, Mount-Lebanon, a semi-autonomous Christian district of the Ottoman Empire, was transformed into the epicenter of the first wave immigration from Middle East. This pattern remained persistent throughout the collapse of Ottoman Empire. In the aftermath of World War I, Britain and France who dominated this region, added more fuel to hostility between Christians and Muslims by openly favoring the former. Increasing tension in the region incited more and more Arabs to immigrate to the North American continent.

The presence of American Christian missionaries in the region was a deciding factor. They played an important role in advertising the American culture and values of its democracy, freedom and wealth. Their way of life was proof of better way of life. For many, United States represents the land of opportunities, of political, religious and civil freedom, from which they too, could benefit. Although, during this period, Lebanon economy performed fairly well, despite the fact that heavy taxes imposed by Ottoman rulers had a crippling effect on ordinary households. Many immigrants from this period cited heavy and arbitrary taxation as one of the major reasons why they sailed out of Beirut to the New World. Battered by financial hardships, they dreamt of a way forward to gain economic stability and personal advancement in another country.

In the intervening time, Lebanese economy found itself threatened by an unknown enemy. The inauguration of the Suez Canal revolutionized sea traffic and made the Far East more accessible. Lebanese industries such as silk found a stiff competitor in Japan. This opening in 1869 diverted some of the transit traffic to the East that would ordinary have stopped for overload transport on the Syrian coast. Steam ships going through the Black sea had a similar effect. Also, high Turkish taxation on loom industries and the lack of tariffs to protect against the onslaught of cheaply priced machine-made goods slipping in from Europe hurt the traditionally strong Syrian cloth industry.

Perhaps the most serious blow to the native Syrian economy in the midst of this whirlwind of trade, however, was the silk worm blight of 1865-1871, which hit sericulture production just as it was beginning to prosper. Though partly aided by the importation of silkworm eggs
from France, the production of Syrian Silk never really recovered: by early 1920s, it was down 85 percent from late-nineteenth century figures. (Orfalea 62)

Under these circumstances, more Arabs set towards the US. Economic stagnation along with ever growing population created additional problems on the domestic front. Overpopulation, especially in the Lebanese mountains, which had little arable land, began to squeeze peasants, whose holdings were small. Fathers, who would normally divide their land with their sons, were having more children than could make a living on the diminishing parcels. For parents, it was impossible to provide for all their offspring. As Michael W. Suleiman explains in *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*, “Many families found that the subsistence economy could support only one child, who eventually inherited the farm or household income. Other male children had to fend for themselves, and emigration to a New World of great wealth became an irresistible option” (2). They too, ultimately joined the mass immigration. Finally, incidental factors such as improved transportation, advance communication facilities encouraged Arabs to think favorably of immigration.

Arab Muslims, though they first hesitated to abandon home country, by early 1900, affiliated with their Christian counterparts. They started to flee in large numbers only when there were no one left to cultivate their lands, especially when all young and middle aged men were forcefully recruited to Turkish army to defend the Ottoman Empire. Though earlier Arabs were protected from conscription, since 1908, they were forced into the army. “The mortality rate of Arab soldiers in the Turkish army was high: of 240,000 conscripts, 40,000 were killed, many of them thrown into the front lines of battle in the First World War” (Orfalea 65). As a result many conscripts deserted. Druze Arabs did not join in till late 19th century. Among Muslim immigrants, majority was Sunni, though there was a considerable number of Shia Muslims. A last insult by the Turkish to the growing sophistication of the Syrians was suppression of the free press. Thousands of books were burned or buried; writers were fined, expelled or imprisoned. Syrian intellectuals who could get away, took refuge in Cairo and some went to America.

Immigrants Arabs, Muslims and Christians, men and women saw United States as a temporary haven where they could make a fortune in order to live comfortably once they return home. Those who well adjusted to the new environment, fascinated by the riches and opportunities, encouraged their families to join them.
Apparently whole communities disappeared from villages and towns to make their way to America. As I mentioned earlier, the first great wave survived World War I and the subsequent disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. In the post World War I period of 1920-24, over 12,000 Arabs managed to immigrate. 1924 was a turning point in the history of Arab immigration. In the United States, the Johnson Reed Immigration Act restricted number of people entering US. The quota for Syria was exactly one hundred. This event formally, but temporarily brought an end to first great immigration phase from Middle East.

Their long journey was often arduous and challenging. The voyage itself cost them a considerable amount of money. However it was seen as an investment. Majority of immigrants were poor, illiterate and unskilled. They traveled in steerage. Some, duped by travel brokers, landed in South America, Australia or the Caribbean. Those who successfully reached their destination- Ellis Island, New York, found work as pack peddlers. Over half the Syrians in America lived in New York City, most of them squashed in with the Irish near the wharf on the Lower West side on Washington Street. There, some of them set up coffee houses, bazaars, weaving factories and groceries in direct contradiction to more established inhabitants of the area such as bankers of Wall Street.

Unlike Immigrants from Europe, Arabs didn’t feel inclined to work regular hours in America’s booming industrial sector. Pay for garment workers were abysmally low, hovering around $10 a week and women usually got half of that. Peddlers often did better, earning between $200 and $1500 a year. Peddling required less capital and skills and few words of English. New Immigrants were given a helping hand by those who were already established in the profession. However it demanded endurance, commitment and hard work. As peddlers, Arabs traveled across states selling wares like perfumes, toiletries, jewellery, clothing and trinkets. Dedication to the profession brought them prosperity in a short period of time. Unlike industrial workers, they were unaffected by factory lay offs. In addition, they earned more than an average factory worker, farmer or miner. Further a peddler from Washington Street became an emissary from the exotic land, and at the same time, an American entrepreneur in the making. A positive outcome of peddling was “by distributing the products of small American industries throughout the country, the immigrants helped these industries grow, thereby fostering the economic health of the nation” (Naff, Arab Americans 44).
At times, peddling presented unpleasant situations. They were driven off, verbally abused and threatened by hostile Americans. On the other hand, they were also well received, offered lodging and refreshments. Women peddlers enjoyed more success than their male counterparts, for they were considered less threatening. Peddling exposed them to American way of life, customs, as well as language. In return, peddlers gradually became part of American culture. Children adored peddlers and their stories, women anxiously waited to purchase latest arrivals. Along with their merchandise peddlers brought “wisdom of the East” (Naff, Arab Americans 41). As they enjoyed the fruits of their labor, money was spent on clearing debts and bringing families to them. Some invested in peddling to trade in more expensive items to cater to a wealthy clientele and to use horse carriage to cover more distance.

The Syrian peddlers went everywhere, from Washington Street in New York City, they fanned up toward Utica and Buffalo: from New Orleans they peddled in Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas: along the Rio Grande, olive-skinned “wet backs” at the turn of the century peddled in border towns. (Orfalea 80)

By late 19th and early 20th century, peddling settlements sprung up across the nation. They established themselves mainly in Northeast and Midwest of United States. Thriving Arab American communities bloomed in major metropolitan centers like New York, Chicago, Boston and smaller cities along the railway line, like, Fort Wayne (Indiana), Cedar Rapids (Iowa), Spring Valley (Illinois) and Worchester (Massachusetts). For peddlers, hoisting 50-200 pound packs or carrying the notions cases was a way to overcome isolation in this new land. It allowed them to literally walk out into America without the tedious, sometimes humiliating attempts in order to adapt to American behavior in a fixed setting. Though, others too peddled, including the Germans, Irish and Swedes, Syrians in particular thrived well in both rural and city markets.

Arab-Americans blended well with working class American families. Christians joined American Churches. Muslims, however, practiced their faith at home. Reflecting their way of life in the Arab world, immigrants of same sect, same religion lived together making their own sub-community. For Arab-Americans, family has always been valued to the point that the quest for self often begins and ends in family. Family was the fountain from which everyone drank.
In many ways, the family is the self, the self by itself a highly foreign existential concept, only a puff of air. Family is a vindication of the multiplicity of existence and in it the lessons and responsibilities of life are learned deeply or not at all. The paradox of gregariousness of the Arab-American is that it is rooted in ancestral isolation—the isolation of Druze and Christian mountaineers and the more ancient confrontation with empty space that the desert presented the Arab. The colloidal suspension of minorities in the millet system of Ottoman Turkey made for a fragmented society but bullet-tough families, families woven as tightly as a prize carpet. (Orfalea 87)

As many settled in, gradually acquainted themselves with American ways, for example learning to converse in English and appreciating new customs like Thanksgiving Day celebrations. Many were amazed by the freedom enjoyed by American citizens. Police’s friendliness and workers’ strike were a rarity in Arab world. Their discovery of American ideals like democracy, freedom and equal opportunity is seen as crucial factor which propelled them to become permanent citizens. “May God continue to bless this country” was a popular phrase that they learnt very early (Naff, Arab Americans 59).

World War I brought an end to this lucrative enterprise. Peddling became outdated as consumer goods became abundant in department stores and mail order, the fashionable alternative. Arabs themselves changed with the time. They opened restaurants, dry fruits stores, movie houses, retail businesses etc. Some, lured by high wages, started working in factories. For example, Ford Motor Company increased wages up to five dollars a day for eight hours of work. Many immigrants settled in the outskirts of industrial centers like Toledo (Ohio), Michigan City (Indiana), Highland Park (Michigan). By 1916, in Dearborn, Michigan, in the suburbs of Detroit, where Ford built its main plant, Arab immigrants settled in large numbers. Today, Dearborn hosts the largest Arab American community in the United States.

Post World War I brought the second great wave of immigrants to the US. Contrary to the first wave immigrants; they were well educated professionals from affluent families. Moreover, second wave immigrants were predominantly Muslims. The second wave was dominated by the debacle of Palestine. It also marked the beginning of what would be called the brain drain from newly independent countries such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and North African Arab States. Some were
dissatisfied with the series of coups that occurred frequently in these new states, some wanted a better standard of living and some were political exiles from intra-Arab squabbles and the Arab-Israeli crisis. Large numbers of them were Palestine refugees who lost their land when State of Israel was created in 1948. According to US Immigration and Naturalization Service records, more than 300,000 entered US since the end of World War II. However, this figure does not represent Arabs who moved to US through other countries like Canada and South American countries, following a short period of time. Palestine refugees still outnumber all other Arab nationals owing to continuing hostility with Israel. Among others, Egyptians from wealthy, middle class families deprived of their property by government nationalization program, fled their country. Victims of border disputes, regional conflicts, Arabs abandoned their homes, searching for a better life elsewhere. In 1990s semi-educated Arab merchants, exasperated by wars and violence of the Middle East, came to America in large members. Trained professionals like doctors, lawyers and engineers desired settling in, than returning mainly for two reasons: scarcity of employment opportunities and the fear of death and persecution by their oppressive rulers. Similarly, students, who came for higher studies decided to remain in the US.

Second wave immigrants, unlike their predecessors, were more conscious of their Arab identity. The formation of Arab League in 1945 encouraged Arabs as well as the rest of the world to recognize them as members of a rich civilization and to think beyond geographic boundaries. New comers brought along with them sentiments of Arab nationalism and unity and revived Arab American communities established in America. Immigrants of the Second wave had superior education, skills and knowledge of English language, and this helped them to adapt to the sophisticated post-World War II American society quickly than their peddler and factory laborer forbearers. The combination of distinctive differences between the second wave and the first, and the third wave kept these communities separate and distinct for many years, until the cataclysmic wars of 1967, 1973 and particularly 1982 drew them into a unique political cohesion.

The period from 1967 to the present is considered a distinct third wave of Arab immigration to the US. The largest segment of Third Wavers was probably Palestinians, though they may have come to the United States through Jordan, Syria,
and Lebanon and Arabian Gulf countries. Most of them shared much with those who immigrated during the second wave.

Naff documents that between 1965 and 1976, 15 percent of Arab immigrants to the United States were professional and technical workers, once again mostly Palestinian. On September 16, 1983, Middle East International reported that half of all Arab science and engineering Ph.D.s had left the Arab world. (Orfalea 77)

It is said that the Third wave is three times larger than the second wave mainly due to loosening of US immigration restriction in 1965. Other contributing factors were, intensifying Israeli aggression and heightened intra-Arab warfare at a scale not seen since the mid-nineteenth century. For instance, Iraqis, Lebanese and Syrians were not just leaving situations that had been shaken by change of rule or new economic structures as in Egypt. They were leaving societies wrecked by abysmal violence. After Palestinians, Lebanese constitute the second largest group of Arab immigrants from the Third Wave. The intolerable barbarism of the civil war and Israel’s 1982 invasion, brought more and more Lebanese to the US. For the first time, Iraqis too began to immigrate in large numbers, mostly professionals who fled the country to escape the war with Iran, which caused over a million casualties during a period of eight years. Syrian economy which began to plunge by the mid-eighties, also contributed to the Third wave immigration.

Similar to the Second wave, the Third wavers were mostly Muslims. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism throughout the region and the continuing occupation by Israel fuelled the Third wave to a great extent. The Third wave Arab immigrants carried a greater burden of internecine conflict than did previous waves and thus it is less likely that they consider going home. Also, because so many were highly educated Palestinians, they feel more inclined to participate in the new Arab-American political groups that grew in the wake of 1967 war.

Among the Arab immigrant groups, there is no group comparable to the Yemenis. Most of them were young males, semi-illiterate or illiterate with little knowledge of English. Years after immigration many have not taken root in the US. They shuttle back and forth from Yemen to US buying homes back there with the money earned.

In short, the Yemenis - with some exceptions-constitute the most definitely “Arab” of any migrating group from the Arab world over
this century, and may be considered -as a group - more temporary workers than immigrants. Their presence in the Detroit area, especially in the south-end of Dearborn is the most concentrated of any Arab population in the United States. (Orfalea 181)

The large majority of Yemenis coming to America emigrate from (capitalist) northern Yemen and not the socialist regime of southern Yemen. However, the few hundreds from South are far more educated and urbane than their northern counterparts. Yemen became united on 22 May, 1990 and is presently called the Republic of Yemen.

For immigrant Arabs, World War I marked a turning point in their lives: The introduction of quota system put an end to the first phase. Thus the immigrant community was disconnected from their homelands. On the other hand, ensuing separation and remoteness led to solidarity among different sects and to assimilation into American society. For the first time the notion of permanent citizenship entered their minds. Prior to World War I, immigrants considered themselves as temporary residents and resisted Americanization. Their metamorphosis was steady and challenging.

As sojourners, money earned was sent back to their families. In other words modern day comforts and luxuries were alien to them. As peddlers, they lived in crowded rooms in farm houses and shacks. Investment in housing was purposefully avoided. Working along with fellow Arabs, they established few contacts with Americans. Arabs of same community of same religions frequented each other. They identified themselves as “Al-Nizala” or temporary settlers. Marriage out of community was discouraged. In short, they successfully confronted assimilation. Appropriately, they were called “clannish, alien and inassimilable”. Americans considered them inferior, especially because of their color. US officials and journalists were not quite content with Arab attitude. In terms of trade and commerce, Arabs were seen as parasites draining the American economy.

Once the assimilation process intensified, their objective of acquiring wealth gave way to projecting a better image of themselves. During the World Wars, Arabs fought on the side of the Americans. They shifted from over crowded shacks to more respectable residential quarters. For example, they moved from dilapidated dingy rooms of Manhattan to charming environs of South Ferry. To succeed in their task, they openly embraced American culture, its manners and social attitude. Some changed names and many spoke with an America accent. By the 1920s, children of
early settlers looked more American than Arab. "Whereas first generation Arabs in America managed, as best as, they could in an alien environment, their children were thoroughly immersed in American society and culture- and their first or only language was English" (Suleiman 5).

For Arabs, national identity comes in second to that of family and community. In America, their communities were known in terms of their sect and religion Maronite, Orthodox, Druze, Muslim etc. “Because these identities were strong, a "national" identity could remain amorphous or at least indeterminate, shifting from one orientation to another with relative ease and without much psychological dislocation” (Suleiman 7). The importance of an identity dawned on them as they struggled to establish themselves and to be naturalized. Unity among Arabs was thus advocated. To become part of the American society inter-sectarian disputes had to be overcome. By 1930s and 1940s, inter Arab rhetoric became promising and less personal. Instead of forming regional federations, national federations were encouraged. In the political arena Democratic and Republican clubs were established in order to introduce Arabs to American politics. An outcome of Americanization was that it had negative effects on this ethnic community. Their children grew up, ignorant of their heritage except for few Arabic words, food and music. Assimilation was understood by many as "shedding old loyalties, traditional customs and Arabic language" (Suleiman 8). The question of identity to be Arab or American supported by the arrival of second wave immigrants drew their attention back to their roots.

1967 marked a watershed for the entire Arab American community. Six-day war between Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Israel shook the community. On one hand, they were appalled by continuing violence in the Middle East, and on the other, they were stunned and disillusioned by pro-Israel attitude of the U.S. government and the media. Their solace lied in strengthening their community. As a step forward, they identified themselves as “Arabs” for the first time. Old and new immigrants committed themselves to this movement of self-promotion. Voluntary organizations and pressure groups were created to reinforce ethnic identity and to protect interests of their home countries. In late 1967, the Association of Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG) was established. This organization is seen as the “first post World War II national, credible, non-sectarian organization seeking to represent diverse elements of the Arab-American community and to advance an Arab rather than regional or country orientation” (Suleiman 11). The work of AAUG was continued by other
organizations like the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA) formed in 1972 to promote Arab interests and defend their causes. The formation of the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committees (ADC) is seen as a response to counter growing anti-Arab sentiments while AAI or Arab American Institute, to entice Arabs to become more engaged in American politics.

These organizations gave the Arab community a voice to express their dissatisfaction against Arab discrimination and pro-Zionist attitude. Since 1970s, a number of government investigations and legislations, aiming to combat terrorism had a negative impact on Arab-Americans and violated their rights in the United States. Arab-American intellectuals, students and professionals came forward to fight against American predisposition. However, to influence American policy makers, who are pro-Israel was a Herculean task. The concept of “Arabism” was met with far-reaching animosity, including from the general public. The two main political parties, Democrats and Republicans, both have declared their support to Israel. Ironically the government of United States had significant military presence in the region and boasted of good relations with Arab nations. However, Arabs received approval and encouragement from individuals like Senator William Fulbright and minority groups who openly criticized American administration and its foreign policies.

In order to fight negative stereotypical image often associated with Arabs, it was necessary to convince the general public that all Arabs are not terrorists, extremists or fanatics.

In both popular culture and government policy, anti-Arab stereotypes since the 1970s have affixed a stigma on Arab ethnicity in America. The first wave of immigrants did confront nativism, ignorance, and anti-foreign sentiments of the prewar period, but they were rarely singled out. This changed with the development of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which created a highly-charged political arena in which the United States became a strategic player and a strong supporter of the state of Israel. (Samhan, Arab-Americans 3)

Unfortunately, events taking place in the Middle East often gave them a negative reputation. For example suicide bomb attacks, hijackings and kidnappings triggered widespread anti-Arab feelings.

The Arab as villain has been favorite scapegoat for acts of discrimination and bigotry that have affected Arab-Americans at home
and resulted in a range of reactions. In the most assimilated circles, personal pride in Arab heritage did not always reach the public realm, where the stigma of unpopularity and controversy motivated some to mask their ethnicity, particularly in such arenas as the entertainment, media, and academic fields. (Samhan 4)

However, Arabs contributed in many ways to defend themselves. Many worked with establishments such as AAI to pressurize the US government. Some set up conferences and published books, wrote poetry, affirming their blessings and loyalty to Arabs and their causes.

Yet, their activities were for most part unsuccessful. Prejudice and discrimination weighed heavily upon on their lives. Improvement on American foreign policy was inconceivable. The most likely explanations could be ignorance on the part of general public, regarding the political situation in Middle East. False information provided by pro-Israel media further damaged Arab reputation. Such groups intended to discourage Arabs from fighting their cause. Arab candidates standing for elections faced similar situations. Often they became victims of politics of exclusion and smear campaigns. Apart from Middle East politics, another interesting observation could shed light on this matter. Looking at the situation from historical point of view, it is safe to assume that deep-rooted racism in the American society shifted from other ethnic groups to Arab-Americans. For example, African Americans experienced rigid marginalization and discrimination for a long period of time. Being different in terms of race, religion and skin color generates prejudice and injustice. However, Arabs discovered an interesting approach to challenge American attitudes. It is an undisputable fact that Americans were the masters of science and technology. Without contesting this popular belief, Arabs proudly claimed that, on spiritual grounds that East was superior. As natives of the Holy land, they were better poised to guide Americans on matters concerning Christian faith and Jesus Christ.

Apart from counteracting racism in American society, they faced many other difficulties. Obtaining American citizenship unfolded numerous challenges. Their racial identity further complicated matters. Their classification varied from “Turks” to “Syrian” and to “other Asian”. “The plethora of names by which they were known in the New World, reflects their lack of “national” identity and ignorance or confusion on the part of the host society” (Suleiman 12). US obsession of categorizing each and every racial group was a dilemma for the Arabs. Secondly, they were denied US
citizenship on account of not being "white". To overcome this ordeal, they looked for Arab or Caucasian racial roots to procure eligibility. In 1914, George Daw's claim was rejected "because, as a Syrian of Asiatic birth, he was not a free white, within the meaning of the 1790 US statute" (Suleiman 7). However, finally he was granted citizenship by presenting the argument that Syrians are akin to Europeans. Till 1923 to 1924, naturalization process remained an uphill task for Arabs. Another case, during World War II period, attracted attention due to its harsh treatment. In 1942, a Muslim Arab from Yemen suffered humiliation when his petition was denied with following comments. "Arabs as a class are not white and therefore not eligible for citizenship" (Suleiman 7).

Arabs were not considered "white" by US officials. However, their efforts earned them the racial status "honorary whites" or "white, but not quite". Early settlers, discounted yet submissive while facing discrimination, strive to portray a better image. Lobby groups like the Arab-American Institute, demands their community to be classified as a minority. Among younger generation and educated women, there is a strong inclination for the term "People of color". However this places them among various ethnic groups who are not "white". Some have proposed a multifactor identity for Arabs: male, female: Arab-American: Muslim, Christian. Unfortunately, a lasting solution to this enigma remains elusive. "The search for an adequate or comfortable identity for Arabs in America has been guided and perhaps complicated by the need to feel pride in their heritage and simultaneously avoid prejudice and discrimination in their new homeland" (Suleiman 15). Marginalization has, at times resulted in complete Americanization by certain Arabs. Some opt for nationalism and prefer to be identified as Egyptians, Lebanese etc. Desperation has driven a few to choose an entirely new identity such as Greek or Italian. Some recent immigrants opposed to assimilation, live in ethnic isolation. Campaign for total acceptance is mainly led by middle class Arab-Americans who believe in a strong natural link between Arabs and Americans.

Early immigrants, when they established themselves in small settlements, organized social clubs, built religious institutions and published Arabic language newspapers. Preservation of Arabic heritage and promotion of acculturation were expected from these organizations. First Arab American churches were built between 1890-95 in New York, for Maronite, Melkite and Eastern Orthodox people. Protestant Syrian Society was formed in 1892, in order to teach English and American
customs to immigrants. Similarly the Arabic press played a key role in safeguarding Arabic culture. The first Arabic language newspaper was launched in 1892. Kawkab Amrika (The Star of America) of Arbeely brothers began as a weekly, and was turned into a daily later on. Other newspapers that became part of Arabic press were, Al-Ayam (Days) launched in 1897, Al-Hoda (Guidance) in 1898, Mir’aat Al-Gharb (Mirror of the West) in 1899, Al-Bayan (Declaration) and Al-Sayeh (Traveller) both in 1910. Al-Mahahajer (Immigrant), Al-Jami’a (League) and Al-Funun (Arts) were also in circulation (Naff, Early Arab 319). By 1919, 70 000 immigrants supported 9 Arabic language newspapers, many of them dailies (Hitti, The Syrians 120). The most important publication in terms of the literary evolution of Arab Americans was a journal, The Syrian World, founded by Salloum Moharzel in 1926.

Arab sectarianism was again reflected in their press. Newspapers gave a voice to religious and sectarian leaders. Kawkab Amerika represented the orthodox. Al-Hoda (The Guidance) was launched to serve the Maronite community. Al-Bayan (The Explanation) launched in 1910 became the leading Muslim and Druze newspaper. Mirat-al-Gharb (Mirror of the West) supported the Eastern Orthodox. By 1930, an estimated fifty Arabic newspapers were in the circulation. “Within each community there were rivalries, and competing newspapers, each claiming to be the best defender or representative of its sect” (Suleiman 4). As a result of fierce competition some newspapers struggled to survive and eventually ceased to exist.

Arabic newspapers, once launched, had to take a stand on political grounds. Kawkab Amrika declared its support to the Ottoman Empire, and gained reputation as a pro-Ottoman newspaper. It glorified the virtues of Ottoman sultan and power of the Empire. Its rival was Al-Ayam, a fiery critic of Ottoman rulers, who exposed cruelty and corruption in their native country. The newspaper supported rebellions to overthrow the oppressive regime and at the same time pushed its readers into active political venture. Among other newspapers, Al-Hoda and Mirrat-al-Gharb maintained a balance between these two extremes. However editors often encouraged their readers to adjust in to a new life style and through their newspaper articles. They introduced American social economic and political life to their readers. Today print and broadcast media that carry Arabic or bilingual material, are expanding in large population areas such as Detroit, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C. In 1991, the Arab Network of America (ANA) became the first to produce and nationally broadcast Arabic programs.
A positive bearing of Arabic press was that it nourished the contemporary Arab culture. Works of immigrant writers and poets were often published and distributed by them, both in America and in the Arab world. The creation of literary society “al-Rabitab-al-Qalamiyah” or the Pen Bond Association was a milestone for Arabs in America. Formed in 1920, to nurture Arabic literary movement in America, the league had the patronage of the acclaimed writer, Khalil Gibran. Writers of this new movement remained faithful to age old Arabic poetic tradition. However they revolutionized Arabic literature by adapting “free verse”. Most of their work was published in Arabic newspapers. Unfortunately, due to the decline of Arabic language in US, the Pen Bond Association was dissolved in 1931. However Gibran’s success as a writer was awe-inspiring. Born in 1883, Gibran immigrated to New York in 1912. A novelist and a poet, he wrote both in Arabic and English. The publication of The Prophet in 1923 brought him international recognition. Regarded as a best-seller, it has been translated into over twenty languages. His message to young Arab-Americans is to “be proud of being an American but... also to be proud that your fathers and mothers came from a land upon which God laid his gracious hand and raised his messenger” (Naff, Arab Americans 71). These words are often repeated by many writers. Using English language appealed to the new generation Arab-Americans. Salloum Mokarzel published The Syrian World “to breed in them a consciousness of appreciation for their racial qualities and inheritances so that they may comport themselves with a befitting sense of honor as citizens of this great American nation” (Naff, Arab Americans 80).

In a new society, Eastern churches and Muslim mosques had their share of duties to perform. They were a powerful force in guaranteeing the survival of Arabic culture. Churches and mosques brought people of same faith together, gave them the opportunity to practice their rituals and beliefs. In addition they encouraged harmony among families and especially taught Arab children values and importance of their heritage. Before churches and mosques were constructed in their communities, they often gathered in their homes for prayers. Some eagerly anticipated visits from imams or priests, who traveled from one community to another. They occupied an important place in their lives.

Apart from performing religious rites, they conducted civil services such as baptisms, marriages and funerals. Further, they offered spiritual guidance for those in despair. However many immigrants, upon their arrival, joined American churches:
Maronites and Melkites selected the Roman Catholic Church while followers of Eastern Orthodox faith chose Episcopalianism. Eastern churches lost many of its congregation to western churches. They began to translate part of the liturgy and to conduct services in English, to attract more Christian Arabs. Church-sponsored social, educational and welfare programs were launched and priests played an active role in community activities. Muslims living in a non-Islamic society faced many difficulties. Adjustments had to be made in order to observe Islamic rituals like Friday prayers and especially fasting during the Muslim Holy Month of Ramadan. Mosques organized Arabic language classes to awaken young Arabs, to rekindle their interest in the language and their religion. Druze immigrants constructed a place of worship as late as early 1990s. Strict laws prohibit Druze religious leaders to migrate from their home country. Anyhow Druze immigrants before long joined Christian churches.

Due to the steady increase since the 1950s, Arab Muslims represent the fastest growing, albeit still minority, segment of the Arab-American community. Muslim Arabs in America have many more religious traditions and practices that are unique to their faith and may compete with prevailing American behavior and culture.

The beliefs of Islam place importance on modesty, spurn inter-faith marriage, and disapprove of American standards of dating or gender integration. Religious practices that direct personal behavior-including the five-times-daily prayers, the month-long fast at Ramadan, beards for men, and the wearing of the hijab (head cover) for women-require special accommodations in such places as work, school, and the military, thereby making Muslims more visible than most religious minorities and thus often vulnerable to bigotry. Concern for retaining customs among their mostly U.S.-born children has prompted Arab Muslims in large communities to open private Islamic schools.

(Samhan 1)

Arab American women were instrumental in building communities in the New World. Christian Arab women surprisingly immigrated with males from the very beginning. Some came alone, leaving their families behind, other came to join families in United States. As peddlers or factory workers, their contribution to the Arab economy was immense. Their position in the family and in the society gradually gained weight and prominence. Apart from their traditional roles as mothers and house wives, they worked hard to improve family businesses. As women, they faced a
different dilemma. Women from traditional backgrounds found themselves more confined and greater restrictions. “This is primarily the result of an inability on the part of traditional husbands, fathers and brothers to deal with the nearly complete freedom accorded to women in America” (Suleiman 14). On the part of women their poor knowledge of English, little access to education and their ignorance of American customs cut them off from mainstream Americans. For some the cultural shock was overwhelming. Few regretted their lives in the Arab world.

First generation Arab-American women integrated fairly well into the new society. They were quite content with their life style. On the contrary, third and forth generation girls born and brought up in the United States refused to abide by traditional restrictive customs. A clash between old and new generation was unavoidable. Educated Arab women openly discussed their problems. They were often victims of discrimination. Additionally they had to deal with American criticism of Arab mistreatment of women. Women fought for independence and rights to improve their lives and challenged conservative family values and patriarchal authority. Interference by men into their lives was thoroughly rejected.

In particular, they want to reject the notion that family honor resides in women and that the way a woman behaves, especially concerning her modesty and sexuality, can bring honor or dishonor to the family. They do not wish to be conveyors or transmitters of tradition and culture - at least not as these are defined by men or as they prevail in the old homeland. (Suleiman 14)

Arab-American women have come a long way, from performing household duties to running family businesses, organizing fund raisers to the highest level in professional careers.

Most Arab values are based on pride of family ancestry, community and commitment to their religion. Family is of paramount importance to them. On one hand, it breeds clannishness and factionalism within their community, on the other, obligation to protect and enhance family honor and status produced a competitive spirit that in turn bred an ethic of hard work, thrift, perseverance, shrewdness and conservatism. Fear of bringing shame and dishonor to the family name, seemed to discourage most Arab-Americans from committing crimes and accepting financial assistance from the government. (Naff, Arab Americans 65)
During the Great Depression of 1930s, only an inconsiderable number of Arabs came forward to obtain financial support and even less were seen on criminal court. Due to strong family bonds, inter-racial marriages were discouraged for a long period of time. Arab men of early generations brought brides from their native countries. These customs however changed with times. Single women expressed desire to choose a husband by themselves. Extended patriarchal families gave way to nuclear families. Families invested money in their children’s education. Early Arab children, on the contrary, were expected to help family business from an early age. Large number of girls and boys enrolled in higher educational and professional institutions. According to 1990 census, Arab-Americans with graduate or higher degrees average better than the rest: 15.2% against a national average of 7.2%. Among household income, Arabs fair better than the average American family.

Arab-Americans have accomplished much, in the political, social, economic and professional arena. Since 1960, U.S. congress had at least one representative from the Arab community, like James Abourezk, Mary Rose Oakar, Mark Joe Rahall II etc. George Mitchell is among those who served in the US senate. Others have served as state governors (Victor Atiyeh), and many individuals of Arab background reached enviable positions in the US government. Among famous Arabs, Ralph Nader occupies a special place. His achievements are exceptional. Born to immigrant parents in 1934 he grew up in a small town in Connecticut. He graduated from Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University. Later, he studied at Harvard Law School. Following his graduation in 1958, he served in US military. As a lawyer he campaigned for consumer safety, accusing American corporation, particularly the automobile industry of irresponsibility and corruption. He established number of advocacy groups to expose consumer hazards and government inefficiency. He was an influential figure in creating a number of organizations such as Environmental Protection Agency, Occupational Safety and Health Administration and Consumer Product Safety Commission. His decision to run for US presidency from the Green Party in 2000, though unsuccessful, stunned the whole nation.

Among Arabs, who have excelled in the domain of public service, Philip Habib outshines all others. Born in Brooklyn New York, in 1920, he was the son of an immigrant grocer. After graduating from University of Idaho, he served in the army during the World War II. He completed his Ph.D. in Economics from University of
California in Berkley, and soon after he entered Foreign Service. During his illustrious career as a diplomat he served as the US ambassador to the Republic of Korea and assistant secretary of State. His expert knowledge on Southeast Asian matters made him invaluable as a peace negotiator. Habib worked under five US presidents, both Democratic and Republican. He is respected as a born negotiator. His contribution at the Paris peace talks in the aftermath of Vietnam War and efforts to bring economic and political stability to Laos-Cambodia are praised and remembered by many. He earned the highest post open for career diplomats, when President Ford named him in 1976, under secretary of state for political affairs. His highest accomplishment in his long career as a distinguished diplomat came in the form of a historical meeting between Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. This event resulted in a peace accord ending many years of war between these two countries.

Donna Shalala is one of the many Arab-American women who reached highest levels in their respective fields. Appointed by then US president Bill Clinton, as secretary of health and human services, she played a critical role in improving welfare system and health care delivery. Shalala claims the honor of being the first ever Arab-American to be appointed to a cabinet position. Her impressive academic record boasts of a Ph.D. from Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University and a designation as chancellor of the University of Wisconsin at Madison.

One of the well-known Arab-Americans is a journalist by the name of Helen Thomas. Born to immigrant parents and brought up in an Arab community in Detroit, Michigan, she won a White House press assignment for thirteen years. She followed Presidents Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon on their tours and reported on Presidents Carter, Reagan and Clinton as White House bureau chief. She became the first woman to be appointed president of the White House Correspondents Association.

Among prominent Arab-American writers, the Lebanese-born poet-artist Khalil Gibran perhaps is the most widely read and appreciated by the American society. Palestine-American writer, Naomi Shihab Nye, Samuel Hazo and most notably the critic Edward Said are well established in the American, if not international literary circles.

Among other Arabs, who made their name on American soil, Doug Flutie, the quarter back of New Jersey Generals, and Rong Seikaly, the basketball player from
Syracuse, dominate in the field of sports. In the world of entertainment, Casey Kasem and Murray Abraham are honored and loved by the American society. Casey Kasem, one of America’s best loved voices, earned his star on Hollywood walk of fame. Murray Abraham, the legendary movie star enjoyed his moment of glory, when he won an Academy Award for Best performance by actor in a lead role for *Amadeus*.

Despite their achievements, at the highest level in all most all professions, prominence is given to negative publicity. In the case of role models such as Ralph Nader, his Arab background is hardly mentioned by American media. However, political candidates, openly display ethnic roots and pride in their heritage at local, state and national levels. “Lists of prominent Arab-Americans occasionally are published in the press to inform the public about the community’s accomplishments, but the fact that such lists are compiled indicates that Arab-Americans feel the sting of negative stereotyping and try to correct the bad publicity” (Suleiman 16).

Middle East politics reflect negatively on the community especially in post 9/11 America. Though Arabs themselves condemned the terrorist attacks, they became victims of American anger and outrage. Continuing violence in Israel and Palestine, and more recently in Iraq, intensify discrimination. Arabs on the other hand, who have been living in America for more than a century, hope for total assimilation and full integration into the American society. Their community and their identity are shaped by many factors including interaction between the old and new world, their self-portrayal in the host society and how their image has been accepted by others. If one day their success, unity and solidarity in America as an ethnic group, be complemented by peace and stability in the country they left behind, it’ll be their greatest achievement.