

**The Levant Migration To the United States:
*The development of communal identity and patterns of
political participation***

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ABSTRACT:

This paper delineates the political ethos and praxis of the Arab-American community. I contend that this ethnic community is heterogeneous and went through two main historical stages, WWI and the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict, in the formation of its political identity. Through examining four aspects of political participation, namely protest politics, interest-group politics and organizations, office holding and the Arab vote, we are able to have a clearer view of the nature of Arab-American political identity. I argue that the Arab-American political praxis emerged mainly, but not exclusively, in the sixties and developed in the eighties with the formation of different ethnic institutions and the Jesse Jackson presidential campaign. Nevertheless, it still suffers to this day from many problems among which the negative stereotypes prevalent in the American culture that ascribe an essentialized otherness to the Arab as an alien, the lack of financial resources, weak block vote of Arab-Americans, a strong nemesis embodied by the well-structured and generously-financed Israeli lobby...etc. Still, Arab-Americans made a cogent progress in the political realm as they are a visible community now. There might be a need to seek political alliances with other dominated minority ethnic groups like the Latinos or the African Americans to be able to advocate effectively on issues of interest to this constituency.

Introduction:

The term ‘Arab-American’ refers here to individuals and groups speaking Arabic, whether as a mother tongue as it is the case for the pioneers who migrated first to the new world, or as a language spoken at home while the first language is English. In this second category, I include Arab-Americans from the second generation onward, who have English as their mother tongue because of their American education while they speak Arabic, be it a little, with their parents at home. This term encloses also those who hardly speak any Arabic at all because as time goes by the later generations lose the original language. The fact that I use this term does not necessarily imply that I am referring to a cohesive and homogenous community. In fact, this is a highly heterogeneous group both in terms of religion and nationality of origin¹. The term ‘Arab-American’ itself, did not find a common usage until recently, since especially during the early phase of immigration, members of this community referred to themselves as Syrians or Syrian-Lebanese. The term ‘Arabians’² was not unusual also. My contention here is that the coining of this term went through the same phases as the formation of the community it describes. Indeed, we are dealing here with a budding community and hence an emerging constituency, for which the search for a common identity and group cohesiveness is of paramount importance.

The historical development of Arab-American identity:

When it comes to the early Arab community, I have to point out at the outset that the study of the political praxis of the early generation is sketchy and cursory. But the small literature that exists on the subject, and which is based on oral interviews, secondary sources and some personal accounts, holds out a community that did not pay much heed to politics in general and even less to local US politics. While this picture does not seem completely accurate to me, I am of the view that several reasons explain this attitude. First, the early Arab immigrants, from 1870 until World War I, were driven out of their homeland mainly because of economic necessities and hence considered themselves while on the American soil as sojourners and guests, who after they better themselves financially would return home. Of course, the idea of return turned out to be a complete myth. Secondly, in the rare occasion where Arab-Americans ventured into politics they lacked the knowledge that would have enabled them to be an effective player in the American politics arena. Moreover, they brought with them a distorted political paradigm from the homeland countries, with their vertical system of power that yields negative political identities to its subjects³. They acted more like citizens of the Ottoman Empire⁴ living temporarily away from

¹ There are 22 Arab countries according to the definition of the Arab League. The community living in the USA today, is composed of Arabs from different countries, mainly Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Yemen, Iraq but also and more recently from Morocco and Algeria.

² For the usage of this term, see ‘Arabian Colony’, Detroit Journal, July 21, 1897.

³ The use of the term ‘subjects’ is important since ‘citizens’ have usually rights and a possibility to express opinions more or less freely.

⁴ Before World War I, most Arab countries were under the Ottoman rule. This is why they were referred to as Ottoman citizens or Turks in the immigration documents. Until today, in many parts of Latin America Arabs are referred to as ‘Turcos’, the Spanish equivalent term for ‘Turk’.

the homeland in the United States but not as part of the host country, both culturally and politically. The gradual weakening of the Ottoman Empire leading to its downfall after World War I, led the members of this community towards altering their relationship with their homeland and hence changing their attitude towards the host country⁵. Up to WWI and as previously stated, Arabs in the United States saw themselves as sojourners not citizens but they were also seen, when European-Americans paid attention to them at all, as a nuisance worth of disdain and all-out rejection⁶. This is a fact of paramount importance since this external perception of the Arab community will impact its members and give birth to different approaches to life within the American society: Isolationists and Integrationists. The former approach, which was widespread in the early period, advocated staying on the margin of the American society and devoting one's time to the business of making money with the least interaction possible with European-Americans in order to avoid conflicts and problems. Hence, Arabs who believed in this approach stressed the virtue of law-abiding, living a good moral life and not to let their intestine fight go public so as to require police intervention. They felt that as guests in a foreign land, they had to behave in order not to gall their hosts. The second approach appeared later on by World War I. Its champions believed in the virtues of assimilating in the American society but not on an ideological ground. They simply thought that they should contribute positively to the United States as an expression of gratitude for the prosperity they encountered in their host country. They urged members of the community to join the US armed forces to fight in Cuba and later on in the Philippines, during the Spanish-American war⁷. Whatever the approach was, the locus of Arab political activity was intersectorian and intracommunal. In other words, there was no such thing as an Arab identity or an Arab community, let alone an organized political activity in the service of a single, homogeneous community. There were competing and rival sects whose members were vying to glorify their sect and vilify the opponent one. Most if not all literature written about the early period of the Arab presence in the USA agree on the idea that sect was a substitute for and an incarnation of the community, country and nation⁸. But, international political developments would eventually change this reality.

Indeed, the end of World War I affected deeply Arab Americans. The Ottomans lost the war and their empire was divided between the allied forces. The Arabs living in the USA felt cut off the homeland and consequently came closer to each others and a sense of solidarity started emerging. Furthermore, as US media emphasized the ideas of nationalism, patriotism and military service to prepare the public opinion for the US entry into war siding with the allies against, partly, the Ottomans, the trend of assimilationism received momentum. It is worth noting that this trend was already gaining strength through the US-born children of the early Arab immigrants. The final blow came with the introduction of very strict and restrictive immigration quota system

⁵ This does not mean that all of the Arab community agreed on one single position regarding the State in the homeland. *Kawkab America* (Planet America), the first Arabic-language newspaper established in the USA in 1892 declared, in its first issue, its unambiguous support for the Ottoman State and Sultan. Later on this attitude will melt away. Nevertheless, another newspaper of the same period, *Al-Ayam*, was a fierce opponent of the Sultan. It even called for rebellion and urged Arabs living in the USA to exercise their democratic rights and call for freedom and democracy in their homeland. This fact relatively confutes the idea that there was no political activity of any sort within the early Arab community.

⁶ Corsi, Edward, *In the Shadow of Liberty* (New York, Macmillan, 1935), pp. 265-66. On stereotypes targeting Arabs in the USA, see Ronald Stockton's *Ethnic Archetypes and the Arab Image*, University of Michigan 1994.

⁷ Ward, Gabriel E., *The Syrian Soldier in Three Wars* (New York: Syrian-American Press, 1919.) In *Arabic Language*. See also the website of the Arab-Americans in the US Army: <http://www.patrioticapaam.org/index.html>, accessed April 2005.

⁸ For an account of the experience of early Arabs in America, see Hitti, Philip K., *The Syrians in America* (New York: George H. Doran, 1924). For the intersectorian altercations in the Arab community, see *The New York Daily Tribune*, Aug. 28th 1905.

by 1920 in the United States. This system halted immigration from the Arab world and set the size of the community. Only after World War I could we speak of an Arab-American community (M. W. Suleiman, 1994) because members of this community realized that there was no possible return to the homeland, especially that by then they had American-born and educated children. This shift in attitude had substantial consequences on the political praxis of Arab-Americans: intra and inter-sectarian conflicts waned, members of the community started looking for unity and solidarity, a stronger identification with the host country combined with a desire for a greater involvement in American political process⁹, more efforts were exerted to improve the image of the Arab community in the American society and serious budding attempts were made to get the government of the United States to support policy positions championed by the Arab community, especially regarding Palestine, mainly with the establishment of the Arab American Affairs in New York City later on¹⁰. By World War II, the Arab American community had assimilated and settled. Some students of the early period of the community claim that the assimilation was so thorough that a near extinction of the Arab ethnicity took place (Philip, M. Kayal and Joseph M. Kayal, 1975 / M. W. Suleiman, 1994). The political identity of Arabs was entirely American. Several political developments will reverse this trend though. Among the main factors lies the colonization of Palestine and the subsequent creation of the state of Israel, which led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of refugees around different parts of the world, among which the United States, where some of these refugees had relatives already settled. Furthermore and because of the turmoil in the Middle East caused by the struggle for independence and later on by the postindependence uncertainties and instabilities, many discontented intellectuals and professionals would set sail to the new world where they could achieve a better career¹¹. Many of these intellectuals already had an idea of what to expect since they graduated earlier from American universities. Hence, when liberalization of immigration laws took place in the United States, they seized the opportunity and migrated to the new world.

Because of their high educational achievements, new Arab immigrants were markedly distinct from the earlier generation. They also came with an all-out different state of mind since they were conscious that they were immigrating once and for all in order to start a new life and not as mere sojourners in search of saving money to return home one day. Another difference with the pioneers lies in the fact that their identity was Arabic or rather Pan-Arabic¹² and they were eager to work for the advancement of the Arab nation and causes. Having said this, these new comers did not jump into the American political arena right away after their arrival. Rather, it took a while to build up the necessary courage to be politically active. Once again, another international political event will play the determinant role in cueing this political appearance on stage, i.e. the 1967 Arab-Israeli war¹³. Indeed, the shameful defeat of the Arab armies had a devastating effect on the Arab community within the United States and awakened the third generation of Arab-Americans to the Arab component of their identity. By then, the circle became full and the American-born Arabs stopped seeing themselves as Americans from Syrian or Lebanese background but rather as Arabs.

As I mentioned briefly earlier, the Arab-American community is not monolithic but heterogeneous. There are differences, mainly in the perception of the political praxis, between the

⁹ This trend started with registration for vote, partisanship and some public and political service on the local and state levels. Syrian Republican Clubs and Syrian Democratic Clubs emerged in different parts of the USA.

¹⁰ See Arab American Affairs Bulletin 5, n 7, January 15th 1950.

¹¹ Zahlan, A.B., *The Arab Brain Drain* (London: Ithaca Press, 1981).

¹² Pan-Arabism as a political movement was created by a group of intellectuals, particularly Michel Aflak, and embodied mainly in the charismatic political figure of Gamal Abdel Nasser, former Egyptian president.

¹³ A huge body of literature exists on the subject. A good example of how Arab-Americans reacted to this war can be found in Late Edward Said's biography, (Former Professor at Columbia University), *Out of Place*, First Vintage Books, 2000, and other writings of his.

pre-1967 generations and those who came after¹⁴. Besides, the members of the community come from different countries¹⁵ with diverse religious affiliations. They have not spent the same number of years within the USA and did not have the same degree of interactions with the non-Arab segments of the American society¹⁶. Finally, there is a generational, a gender and a socioeconomic hiatus. Nevertheless, they all have a common language i.e. Arabic, they share the same Arab/Islamic culture and they have suffered from negative stereotyping and political exclusion¹⁷. The 2000 U.S. census reveals that Arab-Americans are relatively better off than the general population and have higher educational achievement and income as they hold managerial and professional positions. Nevertheless, the results of this census fail to give us an accurate picture of the socioeconomics of the Arab community. The poverty rate is at least 4 points higher (16.7%) within the Arab community than in the general population (12.4%) and this figure is even higher among the youth (22.2% and 16.6% respectively). Home ownership rates are also lower within the community (55.4%) than in the general population (66.2%)¹⁸. Moreover, socioeconomic disparities exist among the Arab community i.e. young Iraqis and Palestinians have the highest poverty rates while Egyptian Americans for instance have the highest percentage of high school and university graduates (Brittingham & de la Cruz. 2005). In order to delineate a political profile of the community, we will examine four aspects of political praxis: protest politics, interest group politics and organizations, office holding and the Arab vote.

In the first part of the twentieth century besides building small organizations which provided mainly social services, Arab-Americans engaged in various forms of industrial labor strikes as a means to defend the rights of their community. In 1912, textile mill workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts went on strike and Arab Americans played an important role in it. The strike was justified by the reduction of work hours and consequently of wages. Some of the meetings of the strike committee were held at St Anthony's Maronite Church and several Arab-Americans were among the organizing committee¹⁹. Out of 30 000 union members, 2500 were Arab-Americans²⁰ and two of them died during the violent events that occurred sometimes during this social movement. Yet, the community was not unanimous in supporting the strike as some of its members, through community newspapers condemned it²¹. In the 1970s, another social movement was triggered for foreign policy issues this time. Arab-Americans, members of the United Auto Workers, who worked in the auto plants in the Detroit area protested against the UAW's use of the pension fund to buy Israeli bonds²². Moreover, the settlement in the USA

¹⁴ Suleiman, W. Michael. "Arab-Americans: A Community Profile," 5 Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs 1 (1983), pp. 29-35.

¹⁵ In this regard, a comparison with the Latino community is highly interesting as both communities show similar characteristics in their political ethos and praxis.

¹⁶ Maloof S. Patricia, "A Comparative Analysis of Assimilation Patterns of Three Lebanese American Communities," M.A. thesis, George Washington University, 1974.

¹⁷ The common experience of discrimination and persecution proves to be a strong binding mechanism among members of a single community. Some communities who suffered an intense historical trauma have cultivated a strong sense of mnemonic duty. The historical experience of suffering among the Jewish community offers a good example of 'lachrymal' history. For an excellent exploration of this idea see: Benbassa, Esther, *La Souffrance Comme Identité*. Paris, Fayard 2007. The 1967 Arab defeat and the trauma post-9/11 attacks can be considered as unifying moments and politically mobilizing events for Arab-Americans.

¹⁸ Brittingham, Angela and de la Cruz Patricia, "We the People of Arab Ancestry in the United States: Census 2000 Special Report," U.S. Census Bureau, Mar.2005.

¹⁹ Ghosn, Farid. "The Lawrence Strike," Meraat-ul-Gharb (Feb.12, 1912) p.4. (in Arabic).

²⁰ Ghosn, Farid. "The Lawrence Strike," Meraat-ul-Gharb (Feb.2, 1912) p.4. (in Arabic).

²¹ Ghosn, Farid. "The Lawrence Strike," Meraat-ul-Gharb (Feb.5, 1912) p.3. (in Arabic).

²² Ahmed, Ismael. "Organizing an Arab Workers Caucus", MERIP Reports 34 (1975), pp. 17-22. and Jabara, Abdeen. 'Workers, Community Mobilized in Detroit,' AAUG Newsletter (June 1974), p. 10.

confronted the Arab community to the issue of color and race. Even though, Arab-Americans were generally considered as white, in 1913 a federal judge from Charleston, South Carolina denied Farid Shahid's application for naturalization arguing that Syrians were not white. Another case took place in 1914 as George Dow applied for citizenship and was turned down since, as a Syrian, he was considered from Asian background and Asians were barred from citizenship according to the 1790 citizenship Act. The Syrian community challenged these decisions legally for nearly a decade and after a series of court cases, Arabs were finally accepted legally as whites and therefore eligible for citizenship in 1924. When the civil rights movement broke out in the sixties, Arab-Americans partook in it but could not reap some of its rewards like other third-world minority groups, as they were considered white²³. After having fought so hard to achieve "whiteness" in a society fixated on issues of race and ethnicity, Arab-Americans came to suffer later on from this status. They are white but not thoroughly²⁴.

As previously noted, many organizations were created in the aftermath of the 1967 war and the subsequent awakening of Arab-Americans to their common political ethos. Undoubtedly, previous to the 1967 Arab defeat, the Arab-American political ethos was inchoate and latent and its praxis practically nonexistent. Generally, some Arabs retreated to their religious and ethnic communities while others mainly Christian Lebanese and Syrians from the second-generation fully assimilated and remained apolitical with regard to the issues of the homeland of their parents. The Christian Arabs embraced fully the American culture and some of its members achieved prominence in various fields such as former Senator George Mitchell and former Governor and White House chief of staff under George Bush senior John Sununu, etc... Besides, Arab-Americans abstained from speaking out loud on Arab issues as they felt that the American political field²⁵ was inhospitable to such demands. They feared to face social and economic repercussions by challenging the dominant pro-Israeli creed²⁶ and Arab Muslims refrained from wearing their religious values on their sleeves in a society which considered Protestantism the true religion chosen by God²⁷. It is safe to say that the Palestinian question provided the ideological core around which Arab-Americans coalesced. Arab-American ethnopolitical rise came at the same moment as the civil rights movement was unfolding and with it an increased acceptance of ethnicity in American society. Activists developed a consciousness tinged with a deep sense of dissatisfaction arising from the stereotypes and clichés surrounding Arab and Muslim culture and values in America. A real effort was made to build institutions aimed at

²³ Majaj, Suhair Lisa, "Arab Americans and the Meanings of Race" in Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt, eds., *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity and Literature* (University Press of Mississippi, 2000), pp. 320-337.

²⁴ Naber, Nadine, "White-but Not Quite?": An Examination of Arab American In/Visibility," 13 AAUG Monitor 3 (Dec 1998), pp. 1-16.

²⁵ I use the term field (*Champs*) the way the French sociologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu defined it i.e. "as a network or configuration of objective relations between positions which are defined objectively in their existence and in the determinations they impose on those who occupy the field, on the agents and institutions, by their actual or potential situation (*Situs*) in the structure of distribution of different types of power or capital whose possession controls the access to specific gains at stake within the field and hence by their objective relations to the other positions (*domination, subordination, homology, etc*)". A field can be compared to a market where producers and consumers of goods interact. The producers, individuals who possess specific types of capital confront each others in order to control the amassment of the type of capital that ensures the domination of the field. Bourdieu, Pierre and Wacquant, L.J.D., *Réponses ... Pour une Anthropologie Réflexive*. Paris, Le Seuil, 1992, p. 72.

²⁶ Ismael S. Jacqueline and Ismael Y. Tareq, "The Holy Land: The American Experience: III. The Arab Americans and the Middle East," *Middle East Journal* 30.3 (Summer 1976): 402.

²⁷ Karpat, H. Kemal. "The Ottoman Emigration to America, 1860-1914," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17 (1985): 183.

ethnic self-affirmation²⁸. Consequently, organizations started appearing like AAUG (Association of Arab-American University Graduates) in late 1967. This organization had an Arab agenda seeking to advance Arab causes and not small ethnic and sectarian interests. This group consciousness was necessary especially that both Democratic and Republic Parties were completely one-sided in their support of Israel. The AAUG attempted to change what they perceived as a biased position by siding with some politicians that advocated different views, like Senator William Fullbright²⁹. The priority of the AAUG was to provide reliable and rigorous information about the Arab world and Arab-Americans. It also sought to educate both Arab countries and Arab intellectuals and political leaders about the US policies and political process. Because, there were no other organizations at that time, AAUG felt obliged to perform other tasks, that it probably lacked the tools and the funds for, like political lobbying, countering defamations and discrimination against Arabs in general and Arab-Americans and promoting political activism among the Arab community in the United States³⁰. In 1980, former U.S. senator James Abourezk founded the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), today's most important grass-roots Arab-American organization. It aims mainly at traversing negative stereotypes of Arabs in the media and discrimination against Arabs in the professional, social and political life³¹. The genuine desire of the member of this ethnic community to stop being a hidden minority is reflected in the theme of the first convention of this organization: "Arab Americans Come of Age". The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon was another turning point in Arab-Americans political mobilization as the membership of ADC and the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA)³² swelled. Nevertheless, this intense communal mobilization failed to translate into tangible political gains and mainly in congressional condemnation of Israel's role in the massacres of Palestinian civilians in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila or withholding of U.S. aid. Jaded after this intense emotional involvement with the Lebanese crisis and disillusioned with the fratricide fighting among Arabs, many Arab-Americans simply lost hope in political activism as a tool to make a change³³. In 1984, intestine schisms led a faction headed by a co-founder of ADC, James Zogby, to leave the organization and create the Arab American Institute (AAI) together with a Palestinian-American lawyer George Salem. The AAI advocated a greater bipartisan involvement in the American political system both as voters and candidates for political office. While James Zogby was involved mainly with the Democratic Party, George Salem was a Republican who had previously led Ethnic Voters for the Reagan/Bush ticket in 1984 presidential elections and worked as a solicitor in the U.S. Department of Labor³⁴. The motto of AAI is to create an enabling political environment for Arab Americans, whether Democrats, Republicans or Independents, to seek office and get elected. However, more often than not when Arab-Americans acted as champions of political issues of interests to them they were not successful. Besides rationales endogenous to Arab political mobilization and organized

²⁸ Higham, *Ethnic Leadership in America*, 2. cited in Shain, Yossi. *Marketing the American Creed Abroad: Diasporas in the U.S. and their Homelands*. Cambridge University Press, 1999.

²⁹ A good account of this issue and how the Israeli lobby counter-attacked can be found in Paul Findely's book, *They Dare to Speak Out* (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill, 1985).

³⁰ These different activities are carried nowadays by two main organizations Arab American Institute AAI and American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee ADC, both Washington D.C.-based and created respectively in 1985 and 1980.

³¹ See ADC website: www.adc.org and Nabbel A. Khoury, "The Arab Lobby: Problems and Prospects," *Middle East Journal* 41.3 (Summer 1987): 382.

³² An organization founded in 1972 which focuses mostly on issues of U.S. foreign policy.

³³ Orfalea, George. "Sifting the Ashes: Arab-American Activism during the 1982 invasion of Lebanon," 218-222.

³⁴ Samhan, H. Helen. "Arab Americans and the Elections of 1988," 229. She is the executive director of the Arab American Institute Foundation.

activities (such a failure is over-determined in my view), a “politics of exclusion”³⁵ is still persistent towards them in the American society due to the inherited stereotyped vision of the Arab as the enemy in the time of the Crusades³⁶, negative media coverage and the persistence of the Israel-Palestinian conflict and the strong political nemesis embodied by the energetic Israeli lobby in the United States. When members of the Arab community engaged in collecting funds for candidates during political campaigns, the money was returned³⁷ because it came from “Arabs”. The design of this symbolic violence had been to discredit the Arab community as alien and strip its members of their “Americanness”. Arabs have yet to free themselves of this political racism and achieve full membership in the social fabric of the American society.

Regarding Arab-Americans in national political office, table “A” gives a good account of Arab-Americans who were elected to the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate³⁸. Except for John Sununu, who is of Palestinian descent, all the other officials are Christian Lebanese with a majority of Democrats. The eleven Democrats came from South Dakota, Maine, Indiana, Missouri, California, Louisiana, Texas, Connecticut, Ohio and West Virginia. The six Republicans came from South Dakota, Michigan, California, Illinois, New Hampshire and Louisiana. When we compare the figures of Arab-American senators to the States they come from, we notice that they were not elected thanks to an Arab-American vote or financial backing. In terms of Arab-American population, South Dakota ranks 42nd among states but elected two senators of Arab origins (Abourezk and Abdnor), a Democrat and a Republican respectively. Maine, 39th in Arab-American population according to the 2000 Census, elected a senator and a congressman (George Mitchell and John Baldacci). Finally, John E. Sununu was elected to the Congress then to the Senate as a representative of New Hampshire, a state ranking 35th in terms of Arab-Americans. If Arab-Americans were really a decisive factor in these elections, one would expect to have an elected official from the Dearborn, Michigan area, the largest concentration of Arab-Americans. Senator Spencer Abraham was indeed elected from Michigan but the statistical data indicates that the Arab-American vote was not decisive in his election³⁹. Moreover, with the notable exception of Senator James Abourezk⁴⁰ (co-founder of ADC), most elected Arab-Americans do not support issues of interest to the Arab-American community. After all, if politics is a game of give-and-take, one might argue that since they were not elected thanks to Arab-American votes why should they be indebted to this community?

³⁵ Zogby, James and Samhan H. Helen, *The Politics of Exclusion: A Report on Arab-Baiting in the 1986 Elections* (Arab American Institute, 1987); Samhan H. Helen, ‘Politics and Exclusion: The Arab American Experience,’ 16 *Journal of Palestine Studies* 2 (Winter 1987) pp. 11-28.

³⁶ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Vintage Books, New York, 1979. and Said, Edward W. *Covering Islam*, First Vintage Books, New York, 1997. Shaheen, Jack G., *Reel Bad Arabs*. Olive Branch Press, New York 2001.

³⁷ Political candidates Wilson Goode (Philadelphia Mayoral race, 1983), Robert Neall (Maryland congressional race, 1986), Joseph P. Kennedy II (Massachusetts congressional race, 1986), Walter Mondale (Presidential race, 1984) and Hillary Clinton (New York Senate race, 2000) all returned Arab-American financial contributions.

³⁸ “Roster of Arab Americans in Public Service & Political Life 2006” at http://aai.bluestatedigital.com/page/file61bf4d1f1b5868b202_64m6b9e8y.pdf/2006_Roster.pdf; <http://www.aaiusa.org>.

³⁹ *The Arab Population 2000: Census 2000 brief* (U.S. Census Bureau, Dec.2003). See also: *We The People of Arab Ancestry in the United States: Census 2000 Special Report* (U.S. Census Bureau, March 2005).

⁴⁰ Abourezk G. James, *Advise & Dissent: Memoirs of South Dakota and the U.S. Senate* (Lawrence Hill Books, 1989).

If the outcome of World War I was a crucial historical moment in the process of integration of Arab-Americans in the American society, the candidacy of Rev. Jesse Jackson in 1984 and, especially the 1988 presidential elections marked the birth of the Arab-American constituency⁴¹. Truly, for the first time Arab-Americans as a community backed the candidacy of a once single challenger. *‘1984 and 1988 Jesse Jackson campaigns for President gave further energy and direction to the growing Arab American community. While the recognition and unity gained by the community through its national organizations was significant, the 1984 Jackson campaign thrust the new community onto the national stage and gave it formal recognition as a political constituency...The Jackson campaign created the first ever “Arab American committee” in national politics...The recognition gained in this campaign spread. Even the Reagan-Bush campaign of 1984 followed suit and added a formal Arab-American committee to its structure.’*⁴²For the first time, a presidential candidate embodied the political concerns of the Arab community and the Palestinian issue became a legitimate item in the political agenda of American politics.

‘Because Arab-Americans are a reliable voter group who go to the polls in larger percentages than other groups, they could deliver the difference for candidates who listen to their concerns...’⁴³ According to a poll conducted in 2000 by Zogby International, 88.5% of Arab-Americans are registered to vote. This is a high registration rate which if compared to the other ethnno-racial minorities, is surpassed only by African-Americans. In 2000 election season 14.5% of Arab American voters contributed to a presidential campaign and the national Arab-American registered voter database shows that Arab American voters are well represented in 55 congressional districts across the country. They thus constitute between 1.5% and 4.5% of the total population.

Arab-American population in key states:

California	650 000
New York	410 000
Michigan	400 000
Florida	270 000
New Jersey	250 000
Texas	190 000
Illinois	180 000
Ohio	160 000
Massachusetts	160 000
Pennsylvania	150 000
Virginia	140 000
Maryland	60 000
New Hampshire	60 000

We can construe the data in tables 1 to 7 by arguing that Arab-Americans are almost equally divided between the Democratic and the Republican Parties (Table 4) but

⁴¹ Dr. James Zogby during an interview with the author.

⁴² Dr James Zogby’s address to the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, June 1st 1999.

⁴³ Dr. James J. Zogby, President of the Arab American Institute.

their vote during the presidential elections should not be taken for granted since it depends on the challenger's and the incumbent's views on many issues and mainly ones regarding the Middle East (Tables 5 and 6) more than on partisanship. Party affiliation might have a greater importance in local and State elections. If we look at the data keeping in mind the developments on the Middle East front, we will notice that the Democrats lost the Arab-Americans' support during the 2000 presidential election mainly for the following reasons: Failure of the Camp David peace talks between Chairman Arafat and Prime Minister Barak, brokered by Bill Clinton, the latter's poor handling of their outcome and his mendacious blaming of Yasser Arafat for the insuccess of the negotiations, the outbreak of the second Intifada⁴⁴. Moreover, Al Gore, who managed to catch the vote of only 75%⁴⁵ of Arab-Americans Democrats, picked Joseph Lieberman as vice-president; a choice that did not play in his favor, mainly for Lieberman's stance on Middle East issues and not because of his Jewish background⁴⁶. Finally, only 33% of Arab Americans who voted for Ralph Nader indicated that they were motivated by his Arab American background (Table 7). This figure can be interpreted in two ways. Either, Arab-Americans are not driven necessarily by the ethnic background of the challenger, in the presidential elections, or they cast a practical ballot trying to choose between 'the less of two evils' instead of giving their vote to a candidate, be it from their own ethnic community, who cannot win. What is sure though if we look at the pattern of the Arab-American vote during the presidential elections from 1996 until 2004 (Tables 1, 2 and 3), we can safely argue that it is a protest vote; a vote against a candidate, the incumbent's vice-president in 2000 and the incumbent himself in 2004, rather than a vote for a specific candidate⁴⁷. Having said that, it will be wrong to think that all that Arab-Americans think about when they vote for a president is foreign policy issues in the MENA region, since available data show that they do give great importance to issues like economy, health care, taxes⁴⁸ ...

⁴⁴ According to a Zogby International poll performed in January 2000, 36.5% of 505 Arab-Americans randomly interviewed said that American foreign policy in the Middle East was not evenhanded, while this figure went up to 60.5% in a poll conducted in November 2000. Likewise, there was a decline in the confidence of Arab-Americans in the Clinton administration's handling of the Middle East issue. In January 2000, 68.5% expressed their satisfaction while in November of the same year this rating dropped to 42.5%. Consequently, 80% of those who were dissatisfied with Clinton's foreign policy voted either for Bush or Nader. It is worth noting that Arab American voters who supported Nader were those who gave an extreme importance to the Middle East issue. In fact, according to AAI, 90% of Nader voters were staunch advocates of Palestinian rights. These voters traditionally vote Democratic or Republican but did not trust either Party's candidates in 2000. This fact impaired Gore the most since 10% of Arab-Americans voted Nader while a substantial portion of the 31% of progressive independents who supported Nader might otherwise have supported the Democrats as they did in 1996.

⁴⁵ Data provided by Zogby International.

⁴⁶ In the same poll, a question regarding this issue was posed to Arab-American respondents. An overwhelming majority said that Lieberman's Jewish background was not the issue.

⁴⁷ Bill Clinton benefited, during his first election, from the opposition of Arab-Americans of the first Gulf war.

⁴⁸ Data that shows important issues for Arab-Americans is available from surveys conducted by AAI, but the scope of this short essay does not permit to tackle all these issues.

Conclusion

There are roughly 3 million Arab-Americans in the United States today; more than 75% of this number is composed of the descendents of immigrants. According to US census data, Arab-Americans have one of the highest per capita incomes among ethnoracial minorities. They also achieve a high degree of education and have the highest per capita self-ownership of businesses and participation and managerial position. The first Arab-American organization grew out of the interaction between the descendents of the first generation of immigration and the second-generation immigrants who were more educated, more politically aware and more conscious of their identity as Arabs, willing to work for the advancement of the Arab cause. This meeting produced the Arab-American identity we know today. The fact that Arabs are subjected to stereotypes and hostile propaganda, especially after 9/11 attacks, reinforces a feeling of persecution and draws the members of this community closer together. Discrimination and attempt of exclusion from politics especially by Zionist groups⁴⁹ help united, and still does, the activist among the community in their attempt to overcome the obstacles in the way of their complete integration and their real political participation. Without a doubt, Arab-Americans have still a long way to go in order to assert their position within the political spectrum in the US and achieve a balance in US foreign policy in the Middle East. But it is incontestable that Arab-Americans did really make a cogent progress in their political empowerment. Nowadays, one can speak of an Arab-American constituency while it was unheard of 25 years ago. Inarguably, we are talking about a constituency that still cannot win the debate but can at least take part in it and put forward a contending opinion. It remains to see if this community will manage to build on this momentum and keep progressing. There might be a need for them to negotiate alliances with other ethnoracial minorities whose political power is growing faster like the Latinos and with long-established political forces like the African-Americans. What is sure though is that the words uttered by President Truman some fifty years ago, in which he dismissed the role of the Arab community, may and will most probably never be heard again.

⁴⁹ This is an important element in the formation of Arab-American organizations and feeling of solidarity between Arabs in the USA. The limited scope of this short essay does not permit an extensive study of this important element.

Table A

Congressional Session	86	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100	101	102	103	104	105	106	107	108	109
Calendar Year	1959-60	67-68	69-70	71-72	73-74	75-76	77-78	79-80	81-82	83-84	85-86	87-88	89-90	91-92	93-94	95-96	97-98	99-00	2001-02	03-04	05-06
Abdnor R-SD																					
Abourezk D-SD																					
Abraham R-MI																					
Baldaci D-ME																					
Benjamin D-IN																					
Boustany R-LA																					
Danner D-MO																					
Issa R-CA																					
John D-LA																					
Kasem D-CA																					
Kazen D-TX																					
LaHood R-IL																					
Mitchell D-ME																					
Moffett D-CT																					
Oakar D-OH																					
Rahall D-WV																					
Sununu R-NH																					

R: Republican / D: Democrat. Followed by the initials of the States. – **House of Representative** – **Senate**

1996 Arab American vote: (1)

	Party affiliation	Congressional vote	Presidential vote
Democrat	38%	43%	51.5%
Republican	35.5%	44%	31.5%
Independent	23%	6%	8.5%

Source: Zogby International

2000 Arab American vote: (2)

	Party affiliation	Congressional vote	Presidential vote
Democrat	40%	43.5%	38% (Gore)
Republican	38%	44%	45.5% (Bush)
Independent	22%	6.5%	13.5% (Nader)

Source: Zogby International

2004 Arab American vote: (3)

	Overall	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Bush	28.5%	9%	68.5%	15
Kerry	63%	86.5%	25%	71
Nader	2.5%	0%	3%	7.5

Source: Zogby International (Poll of Arab-Americans in Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Florida.

4- Arab-American party affiliation: (4)

	Total	Born in the US	Born overseas	Male	Female
Democrat	39%	35%	51%	38%	40%
Republican	31%	35%	19%	30%	32%
Neither	14%	--	--	--	--
Not sure	16%	--	--	--	--

Source: Zogby International, 2002 poll.

Importance of the Middle East issue in Arab-American vote: (5)

	Total	Born in the US	Born overseas
Very important	48%	44%	59%
Somewhat	29.5%	32%	20.5%
Not important	20%	2.5%	15.5%
Not sure	2.5%	2%	4%

Source: Zogby International, 2002 poll.

Arab-Americans' view of Bush administration's policy on the Middle East: (6)

Favorably	28%
Unfavorably	67%

Source: Zogby International, 2002 poll.

Was Ralph Nader's Arab American background a factor? (7)

Yes	33%
No	66%

Source: Zogby International, 2000 poll.