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A CENTURY OF ARAB-AMERICANS: FROM IMMIGRANTS TO CITIZENS

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Abstract

The United States of America has been the land of immigration that experienced successive waves of immigration since the 17th century. The Arab immigration is a part of that history. This paper looks at the history of Arab immigrants in the USA. It illustrates how these immigrants became American citizens within a century focusing on political, social, and economic factors that have pushed these immigrants out of their original homelands. It draws attention to the distinctive waves of the Arab immigration and how each wave had contributed in the formation of an Arab-American identity. Most of the previous researches on Arab-Americans concentrate on their literary works examining issues such as hybridization, 'double consciousness', and the feeling of being "out of place". This paper, however, introduces the idea of how the Arab-Americans, through different generations and circumstances, have achieved their goal in creating an official existence that formed 'a nation within a nation', despite the fact that they have been shattered and traumatized by social and political issues both in the 20th century and the new millennium. Hence, this paper highlights the importance of history in transforming the Arab-American identity from an Arab immigrant to an American citizen. However, it concludes that this new nation might return to being a nation of immigrants at the end of the road with the new presidency and its extreme chauvinistic politics.

Keywords

Arab-American History, Arab Immigrant, Arab-American, American Citizen, Politics

1. Introduction

American history is complicated. It is a history that “is particularly complex because it is not the history of just one people but many – some who strived to become one people and some who resisted” (Bayor, 2003: p.241). The Arabs in the USA, for example, are just a collection of many racial and ethnic groups who started to come to the USA in the late 1870s and were integrated into American society, in which they created a unique history; a history which gave birth to a new identity (Haddad, 1994). Eventually, the USA became a nation of immigrants.

To the early Arab immigrants, the USA was ‘the land of dreams’. Their journey began with individuals travelling for the sake of knowledge and the love of discovery, then, before long, many of them started travelling in large groups. In the year 1660, there was an interest, which later prompted many Arab immigrants to immigrate to North America. In this year, Elias Moussally, an eastern Iraqi bishop, travelled to the New World and stayed there for twenty-three years. His trip was the first Eastern journey to America. From his experience, he wrote his famous Arabic book entitled *Rihlat Awal Sa’ih Sharqi Ila Amreeca* (The Journey of the First Eastern Traveller to America), which is considered to be a unique, engaging document, geographically, historically, and religiously speaking. In his book, he mentioned the great wealth and fortunes of the New World, which later attracted many Arabs.¹

Yet, many Arab-American researchers, such as Randa Kayyali and Gregory Orfalea, claim that Arab immigration to the USA did not actually begin until the late nineteenth century. Therefore, this paper is divided into three chronological parts covering three major periods of the Arab immigration to the USA: first, dating from the 1870s to the 1940s; second, dating from the mid-1940s to the 1960s; and finally, dating from the late 1960s to the present day. These periods highlight the significant history of the three distinctive waves of the Arab immigration to the USA. They present the variety of experiences of the Arabs’ immigration and their achievements in the formation of “a nation within a nation”, that exists today and which is reflected in the works of many contemporary Arab-American writers.

2. The First Wave of Arab Immigrants

The first wave of Arab immigrants began to arrive in 1870 and, because there were no records until 1898 to identify the identity or place of origin of these Arabs, they were classified

¹ Information derived from Mohammad El-waraq, Ba’thh un Iidaad Almuqtaribeen Alsurieen Almuhajereen munthu Awal Qarn” (A Research on the Preparation of the Syrian Immigrants since the Beginning of the Century), *Kuluna Shuraka* (2009); www documents <<http://all4syria.info/content/view/8192/80/>>.

under immigrants arriving from one place i.e. Greater Syria, now known as Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and parts of Iraq. There were no borders between these Arab countries at that time, and their people were identified as ‘Shawam’ because they were under Ottoman domination, which lasted more than four hundred years.² The Ottomans were the Turks who governed the entire Arabic speaking world until the beginning of the twentieth century. British commander John Glubb, who guided and trained the Arab Legion between 1939 and 1956, once wrote “from first to last, 1517 to 1917, the Ottomans had never been able to feel much sympathy for their Arabic-speaking people” (in Orfalea, 1988:p.64). As a result, Arabs strived to find refuge.

It is significant to note that the government officially prohibited Arab immigration during the Ottoman period; however, smugglers practically permitted it. Orfalea explains in *Before the Flames: A Quest for the History of Arab Americans* that Arab immigrants began to arrive as individuals, such as Joseph Arbeely, who discovered economic opportunities in the USA. Then, gradually, the immigration process expanded and the Arabs began to come in groups from Bethlehem, Palestine and Lebanon. Then, other parts of Greater Syria followed. These Arabs, as Orfalea explains, left their lands for many reasons. First, the Ottomans’ “taxation, lawlessness, crop snatching and conscription” was unbearable (p.64). Second, there was the economy of Greater Syria, which went through a very difficult time in the mid-1880s, wherein poverty, misery, and the negligence of agriculture and industry were the fate of many people. For example, in the 1890s a louse epidemic invaded Lebanese farms and almost wiped out and destroyed them. Thus, with the increase in population and the limited abilities of the traditional family lands, the people of Greater Syria faced many agricultural problems. Finally, and most importantly, commercial campaigns, which were organized by American cultural organizations and which highlighted industrial and economic growth in the USA, attracted many immigrants including the Arabs. Hence, these immigrants hoped to find new opportunities in what they believed to be ‘the promised land’.

The number of Arab immigrants started to increase at the beginning of the twentieth century, with this new century starting with new aspirations. Immigration was the ambition of young single men, who arrived to raise some money and send part of it to their families in their homeland, so that these young men and their families could afford a more decent lifestyle. They worked hard in order to obtain their goals. Most of them, in most cases, were illiterate or to some extent educated but did not speak English because the majority of the educated intellectual Arabs

²Shawam are the people from Al-Sham, which is another name given to Greater Syria. They were referred to as Shawam because they are the descendants of Shem, the son of Noah.

were invited to migrate to Egypt “to contribute in its reformation and modernization programs aimed at establishing a modern state similar to the European example ... ” (Darwweesh, 2003:p.8). Because the Arab immigrants of the USA lacked the English language, most of them were confined to work as peddlers because peddling was a job that did not require an education or a knowledge of English. Professor Philip Hitti, author of many books on Arabs and the Arab-American community, once wrote, “[Peddlers] wandered with their kashish from street to street and from town to town until they covered almost every city in the United States. Snow and rain did not stop them, nor did they lose heart”³ (in “Arab American Historical Foundation: Preserving and Disseminating Arab American History” 2011). Carrying their goods on their shoulders from door to door gave them the opportunity to learn the English language and to accelerate the process of merging into American culture. In other words, their contact with American people helped them to assimilate socially, culturally, and linguistically.

Being from Al-Sham, the Arab immigrants in the USA were influenced by the trading heritage of their original country and became businessmen in the New World.⁴ When enough money was saved, they would send it to their families back home in order to help a new member come to the USA. They would help the newcomer establish his own business but on the condition that he would not work in the same area in order not to affect their business. The new immigrant would have to pay back the debts, which he owed his relative who had helped him in the immigration process. Hence, this is how the Arab community spread through North America, and owing to their success, most decided to stay.

As for their women, they were much fewer in number. Few of them peddled because they still followed their cultural and traditional teachings, which dictate, “Women should stay at home” (Reimers, 2005:p.209).⁵ However, those women who peddled found their chance in the USA “where they could earn more than men in the same occupations – peddling, sewing garments, and millwork” because most, if not all, of their clients were women, who felt more comfortable and secure in trading with the same sex (Kayyali, 2006:p.77). It is worth mentioning that most of these women peddlers did not do overnight trips and a close male relative usually accompanied those who did. This means that, although there was some kind of liberty experienced by most of these early immigrants, there were some who were still holding on to

³Kashish is a material in which the Arab immigrants carry their goods.

⁴ Throughout Arab history, trade was one of great importance and the main foundation of Arab economic life, which was centred in Al Sham. This was due to its strategic location, which made it the crossroads for trade.

⁵Reimers based his assumptions on *Becoming American* by the Arab-American historian, Alixa Naff. She was the creator and archivist of the Naff Arab-American Collection.

their traditions. It was estimated that “between 75% and 80% of the Arab women in the US peddled during the period 1880-1910” (Kayyali, 2006: p.38). In contrast with the Arab traditional norm during that era, these Arab women in the USA gradually became independent and encouraged subsequent generations of women to be active in social and political issues.

Being under Theodore Roosevelt’s government, which brought social justice and allowed those who lived in the USA to become ‘Americanized’, many ethnic groups found their opportunity. American historian Andrew Heinze (2003) asserts in his article “The Critical Period: Ethnic Emergence and Reaction, 1901-1929” that the era “was an era of emergence for ethnic minorities. [He adds] Between 1900-1930, immigrants and their children continued to constitute roughly one-third of the US population ...” (p.131). However, the Arab immigrants did not intend to become American citizens yet, although they were, as Heinze explains, “eligible to become naturalized citizens [because] the courts ended up classifying them as members of the Semitic branch of the Caucasian race” (p.138). Their refusal was not due to their sense of being Arabs, as was understood after World War II, because Arab nationalism was still in the formative phase and was not yet deeply rooted in them. Rather, their loyalty and sense of belonging was to their town, village, religion, traditions, customs, and, most importantly, their language, which they missed. Like other ethnic groups in the USA, such as the Africans, these Arab immigrants had faced many problems, despite the fact that, unlike the Africans, they had entered the USA willingly. In fact, throughout the history of the USA, race was and still is a visible political issue. This interrelation between race and politics is a major issue tackled in the writings of many Arab-Americans.

Nonetheless, temporary settlement changed into permanent communities, the single Arab men decided to bring their women to the USA, and the formation of families began. Since then the number of Arab women began to increase. Arab-American writer Evelyn Shakir (1997) declares that,

The theory is that the first *Syrian* men here, out to make as much as they could as quickly as they could, soon realized that it made sense to send for wives, sisters, or daughters, whose earnings could supplement their own and thus hasten the day of their return. The tendency to send for women (or bring them in the first place), it is said, only accelerated as time went on and it became increasingly clear that the family’s future lay in America. (p.28)

However, by 1910, peddling was in decline but the immigrants’ lives had improved. These immigrants, both men and women, were known for their love of adventure and appreciation of knowledge. Samir Mattar (2001), an influential Arab writer, states that although

their work “was as hard as the work they left behind, they discovered a robust sense of challenge and fulfilment in boundless opportunity.” Therefore, the immigrants of the first generation made many sacrifices to ensure a better education for their children, which contributed to the following generation gaining places at different colleges, such as medical, engineering and law colleges.

Consequently, these first generation immigrants found that education in the USA was the key to better conditions and a source of consolidation for their children and grandchildren in accomplishing social and economic success. However, these Arabs, following their traditional doctrine, believed that education was more important for a boy than a girl. Since then, Arab girls in ‘the land of liberty’ have found their chance to demand their freedom and protest against narrow-minded parents. One immigrant wrote, “I call on you, *Syrians*, to educate your daughters” (in Shakir, 1997:p.54). These Arab girls had become more conscious of their position. They, as an immigrant girl declares, “want more freedom. They are going to demand it –and will get it” (in Shakir, 1997:p.72). Socially speaking, this vocal protest is unusual coming from an Arab woman at that time.

Living in the USA, these early Arab immigrants gradually became more open-minded and began to campaign for equal rights. Some of the Arab women being ‘backed up’ by their men had, as Shakir asserts, “opportunities for exercising their powers and developing their talents, for leading rather than following, for being public as well as private people” (1997:p.62). Since then both men and women made many contributions. They gradually began to merge in the American society, but they neither gave attention to nor were concerned with political life yet. This, as Hajar and Jones (2008) declare, was because many of them were busy “working hard to assimilate rapidly into mainstream American society.” In fact, Hajar and Jones (2008) assert that most of these immigrants who were Christians “anglicised their names, joined Western churches, and focused their energies on becoming financially successful.” It is significant to note that such eager and desperate actions to assimilate into the American culture are evident in the writings of the early Arab immigrants in the USA, such as Ameen Rihani and Gibran Khalil Gibran.⁶

In 1914, immigration declined dramatically because of conditions during World War I. During this war, the Turks, through their dictatorial leader Jamal Basha, made a plan to exterminate as many Arabs as they could. Jamal Basha seized whatever he could and transferred it to his soldiers and to the Germans, who were his country’s allies. He left the Arab nation of the Middle East victims of hunger and sickness, and exposed to death and destruction. It is worth

⁶ Both Rihani and Gibran are the founding fathers of Arab-American literature.

mentioning that the USA until 1914, in contrast to the European countries, was following an isolationist policy, which meant that it had no effectual connections with the Middle East. Therefore, with this lack of communication, the Arab immigrant in the USA considered that his/her country was geographically and culturally far from him. In addition, what added to the sense of isolation was the lack of identity. Because the Ottoman government was the dominating power in the Middle East culturally, politically, and socially, all evidential documents which the immigrant carried were issued from Turkey. As a result, the American government did not differentiate between Arabs and Turkish. Therefore, visas issued during that period used both terms: Syrian or Turkish, as if they carried the same meaning.

Most of the early Arab immigrants “planned to return home after a while” but changed their minds after acknowledging the new circumstances in their homelands (“Arab American History,” *Arab American National Museum* n.d.). These new conditions resulted from their leaders’ confidence in their Western allies after World War I and the Agreement of Versailles in 1919. Instead of declaring the Arabs’ independence, the allies announced their guardianship and distributed the Arab lands. These new developments were based on the Sykes-Picot Agreement.⁷ The immigrant, then, decided not to return and the idea of settling in the new land began to crystallize in his/her mind.

Between the years 1920 and 1945 the groups of immigrants, including the Arabs, had somewhat diminished due to three reasons. First, there was the American legislation, which limited the number of immigrants. Second, there was the intensification of the economic crisis and the increase in unemployment rates, which were the result of the 1929 Stock Market Crash. Finally, the devastating conditions of both world wars, which resulted in death, sickness, and poverty for so many people around the world, including the Arabs in the Middle East.⁸ This period, as a result, was referred to as the Depression era because many families suffered and struggled financially. Consequently, the Arabs in America returned to peddling for quick income. Kayyali (2006) claims, “As the Depression continued, however, some Arab Americans, particularly women, reverted to peddling to subsist” (p.42). In addition, Reimers (2005) adds that, “the drop in immigration after World War I cut the flow of new arrivals. ... That picture

⁷ The Sykes-Picot Agreement occurred in October 1916. It was a private agreement between France and Britain with the approval of Russia. It was based on the division of Greater Syria and the delimitation of the dominated areas after the downfall of the Ottoman Empire. Since then, Greater Syria was divided into small Arab countries.

⁸ The Stock Market Crash was known as the Wall Street Crash of 1929. It was the most devastating stock market crash in the history of the USA. Though this second decade of the twentieth century gave signs of enrichment to many people, it turned out to be a shattering one specifically for those who had put all their money and life savings into buying stocks.

would not change until the post-World War II era, when new waves of immigrants entered and altered Arab America” (p.209). This indicates that the post war period marked a beginning of a new life for many racial groups, who demanded equal rights.

3. The Second Wave of Arab Immigrants:

In the years following 1945 came the second wave of Arab immigrants. This new wave included a large number of Muslim Arabs from the Middle East: Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Egypt. Reimers (2005) states “[w]hile Egypt is part of Africa, Egyptians have many social and economic characteristics in common with their Arab neighbours. ... Many Americans identify Egypt as part of the Middle East, and thus Egyptians are usually perceived as Middle Eastern” (p.210). Although these Middle Eastern immigrants represented a variety of people from different religious groups, they carried one identity: ‘the Arab identity’.

These newcomers differed substantially from the early ones, in the sense that they carried with them new ideologies, such as ‘Arab Nationalism’. The Arab Nationalism Movement began to form secretly between individuals after the Western colonization and the distribution of the Arab countries, but it was formally recognized after World War II. Munif Razzaz (1971), a former Secretary General of the Ba’th Party (Renaissance) in Syria, states that Arab Nationalism: is the driving force behind the Arabs in their struggle to create a unified progressive nation that can hold its own among the nations of the world. It was born as a response to the challenge of Western colonialism, but it has outgrown this simple reflex action and become a genuine movement on its own merits. (p.359)

Therefore, it was clear that this movement provoked to defy “the challenge of Western colonialism”.⁹ As a result, these new immigrants entered the USA with a sense of pride in their Arab origin and with a political consciousness, which was not obtainable for the first wave of immigrants. However, like their predecessors, they were dissatisfied with the conditions of their countries. Orfalea (1988) declares that,

The economic concern, the search for a better livelihood, was the primary reason most early Syrians came to the United States, with political deterioration and warfare a secondary reason. ... [However] unlike the first wavers, many [second Arab immigrants] were refugees and exiles who had lost a land that was not to be regained and would be transformed beyond recognition. (p.140)

⁹ The idea of ‘National Unity’ of all Arabs is a very new concept. The Islamic doctrine declares that all Muslims are one nation, whether Arabs or not.

In spite of this, they were better educated, better qualified, and in better financial positions than the earlier wave of immigrants. This was due to the Western colonization, which occurred in Greater Syria, and which ironically helped in a cultural exchange between the Westerners and the Middle Easterners. This kind of association helped in the development of social, educational, and economic institutions. For example, after the Western imperialism, the Arab immigrants of the Middle East were taught to speak languages other than their mother tongue, which ironically was one of the advantages that they gained from colonization. In other words, the experiences of cultural exchange and ‘mingling’ with Western civilization in fact had a positive influence on those Arabs who emigrated to the USA, in the sense that they were competent to help in the construction of the Arab individual and community.

Furthermore, the number of Arab immigrants in the USA increased rapidly after World War II. They worked in their fields of specialization and some joined universities in order to gain degrees. As a result, most of them gained remarkable academic positions in the new land, such as Edward Said, the Palestinian academic, James Abourezk, the attorney, senator, and congressman, Donna E. Shalala, the educator and administrator, and many more (Kasem, 2002: p.2-12). By the 1960s, these Arab immigrants began to change completely. They transformed from an immigrant community, most of whom were tradesmen and young peddlers, to a new generation who are now both intellectuals and successful businessmen and businesswomen. Thus, the Arab community began to flourish in a world, which provided a secure haven for them. This includes the status of women, which also changed.

Earlier in the century, the immigrant woman was a woman who looked after her home and the needs of her family but from the second half of the century things became different. Shakir (1997) asserts that the “women – many of them second, third, or even fourth generation – play a more prominent and occasionally a dominant role” (p.97). This new group began to be integrated in American society and to move to different parts of the USA. As a result, many small Arab community groups settled in many places, and an indication of unity and solidarity between those immigrants clearly became apparent.

4. The Third Wave of Arab Immigrants

In the late 1960s, the third wave of Arab immigrants arrived. They were more diverse than the previous waves in terms of their countries of origin, religion, and socio-economic status. Most of these immigrants were Muslims from the Middle East as well as North Africa. Concerning the Middle Easterners, they were like their ancestors in that they were escaping the social and political issues in the Middle East, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the two

civil wars in Lebanon and Yemen. These wars had a significant impact on Arab immigrants, with disastrous heir consequences affecting the Arab world, particularly the Palestinians. However, wars, such as the one between Israel and Palestine, have become effective factors in both strengthening Arab nationalism and also strengthening Arab roots within the Arab communities in the USA, be they Christian or Muslim or from the first, second or third wave. For example, Orfalea (1988), referring to the life of Edward Said, states that, “the June war of 1967 was an important date in his [Said’s] evolving self-consciousness as a Palestinian” (p.157). This is clearly expressed in Said’s *Between Worlds*, wherein he writes about his personal experience of self-consciousness, which he believes helps the self-invent as well as resist and break free from both traditional and political systems. I personally believe that Said’s call for an Arab-American awareness has been the basis and foundation for the subsequent Arab-Americans who followed.

However, while these wars were unifying the Arabs, they were developing a certain kind of American hatred towards them. Professor Martin Carnoy (1994) declares, “Politics cannot be avoided in a discussion of race because race is inherently imbedded in politics. The very discussion of racial inequality is political, drawing deep into our individual and collective political souls to elicit emotionally charged opinions about fundamental aspect of human relations and morality” (p.49). Therefore, the Arabs had to understand that the racial discrimination they have faced and will face is all interrelated with political issues connected to their original homeland.

Moreover, despite the fact that the Arabs had not been greeted with open arms, members of the middle and the upper classes were still coming to the USA. They felt the urge to leave their countries due to, again, political and social changes. Disturbances like these united the different groups in the Arab communities, including the second and third generations who were born in the USA, and gave them a motive to join and participate in political as well as social activities. Kayyali (2006) notes, “after the 1967 Six Day War and the influx of new immigrants, some Arab American academics, professionals and politicians formed organizations to galvanize the community and to reach out to non-Arab American audiences” (p.132) One of these organizations that was established is the Association of Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG). It was formed in 1968 to present “accurate information about the Arab world” (Kayyali,2006: p.133). With the formation of this organization, the name ‘Arab-American’ came into existence. Shakir (1997) claims that, “beginning in the late 1960s, a good number of us – both Lebanese and Syrian – added on the label Arab” (p.1). Later the term ‘Arab-American’ became “a popular, overarching identity for many Arab Americans and it is a term widely used in the media and by community organizations today” (Kayyali, 2006: p.xv). Like

other 'overarching' identities, such as the African-American's, the Arab-American one has searched for an existence as well.

Furthermore, while in 1973 Egypt and Syria tried to liberate their occupied lands from Israel by force, the USA played an important and significant role in providing Israel with all the support it needed. This war reinforced the Israeli-American alliance, and changed the American political approach towards the Middle East. As a result, during the same year, the oil issue occurred between the Middle East and the USA and the Arabs of the Middle East decided to cut off the oil supply to the USA. This, according to media critic Nabeel Abraham (1991) in "The Gulf Crisis and Anti-Arab Racism in America", stirred up the Americans' rage against the Arabs and that includes the Arab-Americans, who were a part of the Arab world. Thereupon, the stereotypical images given to the Arabs in the USA generally became more powerful, and effective, as they had been nurtured through "film and media" (Akram, 2002: p.61). One of the opinion polls in the 1980s found that "44 per cent of respondents considered Arabs to be barbaric or cruel, while half thought they were treacherous or cunning. More than half thought they were warlike and mistreat women" and as a result negative images concerning Arabs circulated "at all levels of the society" (in Marvasti and McKinney, 2004:p.xi). Accordingly, this paper points out that such images have become inseparable features of the Arab identity according to European and American heritage, which I believe affected not only some Europeans and Americans but also some Arab-Americans.

Thus, the American prejudice compelled some Arab-Americans of the new generation to reconsider their loyalty to their "Arab-ness". Blending in the American 'melting pot', some Arab-Americans allowed themselves to neglect their traditional teachings and adopt a culture that somehow contradicts their tradition and sometimes their religion. Accordingly, they found themselves facing the problem of whether to resist or assimilate or to take a neutral position. That is to say, whether to confess that they are a part of the Arab world and do something about it or relinquish their origin, heritage and Arabism or just adopt the wait and see attitude, i.e. to be passive observers. Portes and Rumbaut (1990) emphasize in *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, that the world of these immigrants was torn between "old loyalties and new realities" (p.96). Therefore, the leaders of the Arab communities in the USA decided to engage themselves actively in both the social and political fields, which aimed at building the Arab image in the American public opinion. There is no doubt that the Middle East struggle during that era, particularly the 1980s, which included the Iran-Iraq War, airplanes being hijacked and other extreme and excessive incidents, were exploited in order to propagate negative representations of the Arabs and those related to them such as the Arab-Americans.

In the 1980s, many Arab-American intellectuals acknowledged the importance of speaking aloud. They began to use their pens as a means of a weapon, as the proverb says, “The pen is mightier than the sword”. Therefore, they seriously began to confront the American media in order to fix the distorted image of Arabs and bring into view new representations of Arab-Americans. Accordingly, more organizations developed, such as the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) in 1980 and the Arab-American Institution (AAI) in 1985, which helped in the construction of an Arab-American individual and community. These new organizations include individuals of both genders from different Arab communities, who try to put forward the Arab and the Arab-American features, as they perceive them. They started on a difficult path, where there were numerous responsibilities, one of which was to try to change the American public’s view and convince it that there is a positive picture of Arabs living in the USA.

In the late 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s, the Arab-Americans were again affected by instability. More destruction came upon the Middle East such as the Upsurge (the Intifada) in 1987 in the occupied areas of Palestine, which added to the trauma, and then finally followed by the Iraq-Kuwait Gulf War in 1990, which doubled the pressure on the Arabs. This war violated political, national and religious laws. It had no justification and only brought more terror to the Arab world. As with the previous wars, this war had great social and political effects on the Arab communities in the USA and as a result prejudice increased against the Arab-Americans.

Then came the Oslo Accord between Israel and ‘the Palestinian Territories’ at the beginning of the 1990s.¹⁰ Despite the fact that there was optimism regarding a successful outcome, there was a large number of Arab-American intellectuals, such as Edward Said, who indicated the gaps, the shortcomings, and the weaknesses in this agreement as became evident in the bloody events that followed.¹¹ Not long afterwards, a second Intifada took place in 2000; the Palestinian revolt had become very powerful. As a result, the Arabs in the USA again divided into those who supported and those who opposed these events. Thus, the turmoil of the Middle East and the terrorism issue convinced many Arab-Americans to become more politically, socially, and culturally active again. The Arab-American ‘pen’ re-activated and was stimulated into analysing various issues, such as the political events, the Arab world, and the Arab mind.

¹⁰ My reason for highlighting this wording aims to stress the idea that Palestine is still not nationally recognized as an official state, although in my opinion, and many other Muslims, it is.

¹¹ The Oslo Accord was officially called the Declaration of Principle (DOP). It was a face-to-face agreement between the Palestinians and Israel, which agreed that Israel has the right to exist. This agreement took place in Oslo, Norway, on 20 August 1993, but was not officially signed until 13 September 1993 in Washington, DC.

In 2001 came the 9/11 attacks, which shocked the whole world including the Arabs. Coming from the Arab world, the attackers, as Joe Feagin (2004) claims, were never looked upon as “individuals, but rather as representatives of their countries and culture” (p.xi). Although there is no evidence that their countries were involved, many in my opinion assume that these countries are extreme in their social, political and religious settings, which eventually created their citizens as terrorists. In other words, as Feagin is hinting, because most of the attackers were from the Middle East, some Americans viewed all the countries in that area as the core and the base for the creation of terrorists, which many Arabs, including myself, assume to be an unfair judgement.

Consequently, as recognized by the ADC’s official reports, some Americans directed their anger at anyone with an Arab identity, including Arab-Americans, despite the fact that according to a Gallup Organization poll, 93 per cent of Muslims worldwide, including the Arabs, condemned these attacks.¹² Nevertheless, they received the blame, and harassment began. Kayyali (2006) states, “In the nine weeks after 9/11, the ADC reported that there were more than 700 violent incidents targeting those perceived to be Arab-Americans, Arabs, or Muslims” (p.145). Therefore, instead of living a comfortable, decent life, now the great grandchildren of the Arab immigrants, who ran away from the outrage and tyranny of their original homeland, were experiencing new kinds of discrimination in their discovered one. September 11, as Marvasti and Mckinney claim, has been described as “the day that changed everything” (2004: p.xvii). Both authors argue that, “Many might find this phrase a melodramatic exaggeration, but for Middle-Eastern Americans that tragic day was indeed transformative” (p.xiii). It has been transformative both negatively and positively: negatively, in the sense that some Middle Easterners in the USA “have become the object of greatly enhanced and unwanted attention, particularly from Americans with power and influence” (Marvasti and Mckinney, 2004:p.x); positively, in the sense that many of them have become recognized after being marginalized. Whatever the case is, many of them were in a state of shock and terrible fear. These strained conditions are visibly manifested in the works of many Arab-Americans.

Consequently, Arab-Americans, as Kayyali (2006) declares, strived for a complete identification with American society. As a result, many “responded to the attacks by emphasizing and outwardly displaying their patriotism for the United States” (p.145). Since then

¹² The Gallup Organization focuses on human nature and behaviour. It was established by Dr. George Gallup, who is a pioneer in the science of polling. Dr. Gallup formed the Gallup Poll, which is a reliable and accurate source of information that is based on the public opinion of countries around the world. Information derived from The Gallup Homepage (2010); WWW documents <<http://eu.gallup.com/Corporate/114574/Gallup.aspx>>. Accessed 26 September 2010.

some Arab-Americans again changed their Arab names, some denied their original identity, and some totally withdrew from any kind of cultural, political, and religious activities that had any connections to their original roots. This, according to Kayyali (2006) was not strange for the Arabs of the “second, third, and fourth generations”, who not only were born and brought up in the USA but who “do not speak Arabic” (p.xv). In other words, these Arab-Americans, who identify ‘America’ as their only home, do not consider themselves as Arabs, a perspective that can be justified when one refers to the definition of being an Arab, which is basically linked with the Arabic language. Besides, some explain that this kind of revolt against one’s original identity was America’s fault. For example, an Italian-American historian once wrote, “America has taught children to be ashamed of their parents” and perhaps this is what happened for some Arabs in the USA (in Shakir, 1997: p.81). In other words, most of them stressed their ‘Americanism’ more than their ‘Arabism’ and what is left of their Arabism was their fathers’ features and some delicious Arabic food.

Nonetheless, the USA had increased its security procedures and eventually immigration from the Arab countries again declined. Reimers (2005) asserts that, “in 2000 and again in 2001, the Immigration and Naturalization Service reported no Middle Eastern nations among the top twenty nations sending emigrants to America” (p.210). Accordingly, in recent years, immigrants have been considered as foreign people who would bring their ideologies with them, which are rejected in the USA.

5. Conclusion

In the new millennium, Arab-Americans are immersed in the big, chaotic American world and are dispersed throughout the states of the USA. Marvasti and Mckinney (2004) assert that “sixty-six per cent of Arab Americans [sic] live in the U.S. states; and 33 per cent live in only three states: California, Michigan, and New York. Today, the Detroit, Michigan area is still the one with the largest populations of Middle Eastern Americans” (p.13). However, recent population figures by the American Community Survey have been published. They claim that “census ancestry data have historically undercounted the Arab American population, and community leaders estimate the undercount to be by as much as two-thirds” (in *Arab American Institute* 2012). Despite the fact that the Arabs in the USA are considered American citizens and have established their own large communities, they are still disturbed, confused and unsettled. As a result, the intellectual Arab-Americans once again began to reactivate their pens to educate the world about their Arab-American culture, which includes an Arab culture, and to survive in what they believe is their homeland. As a young Arab-American declares,

Being a young Arab-American living in the post 9/11 climate now comes with the responsibility to educate people about what our culture is really about, and not what the media portrays it to be. . . . It was our parents who brought Arab culture to this country and now it is our responsibility to make it flourish (in Kayyali, 2006:p.144).

Unfortunately, post 9/11 represented the Arabs as one of the disfavoured groups in the USA (Jacobs-Huey, 2006:p.61). Hence, feeling as the new "niggers" of the USA stimulated many Arab-Americans' anxieties and therefore encouraged them to put forward the bright image of the Arab-American identity.

Today with the newly elected President of the USA, Donald Trump, Arab-Americans are shocked with the opposition Trump has created to the immigrants' and Muslims' existence. This new president has shown extreme chauvinistic politics towards immigrants in general and Muslims in particular. In the final Republican debate of the year, Mr. Trump declares that the Muslims are "not coming to this country if I'm president. And if Obama has brought some to this country they are leaving, they're going, they're gone."As a result, the great grandchildren of the early immigrants who ran away from their homelands are now terrified and traumatized with the unknown future that has yet to come.

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