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# Thinking Outside the Box: Arabs and Race in the United States

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T W O

## Thinking Outside the Box

*Arabs and Race in the United States*

LOUISE CAINKAR

ARABS HAVE HAD A UNIQUE EXPERIENCE with race in America. In their one-hundred-plus-year history in the United States, their social status has changed from marginal white status to a more subordinate status that shares many features common to the experiences of people of color. Just as one can document and measure the process of becoming white (Omi and Winant 1994; Roediger 1991) a downgrading of the social status of Arabs in the United States through racial formation processes is measurable in public policies; in mainstream representations; in social patterns of discrimination, separation, and exclusion; and in self-identification. Although the early Arab American experience (1880–1930) was largely similar to that of white ethnics as measured by structural rights, such as land ownership, employment, voting, and naturalization (although there are some localized exceptions; see Cainkar forthcoming), and social patterns, such as freedom of movement and residential and marital commingling among whites, the Arab American experience since the late 1960s has been decidedly different. After that point in time, dominant themes of the Arab American experience have been exclusion, prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping, and selective policy enforcement, themes evidenced in scholarly research produced during this period (e.g., Suleiman 1999; McCarrus 1994; Suleiman and Abu-Laban 1989; Cainkar 1988; Shaheen 1984, 2001; Abraham and Abraham 1983; Bassiouni 1974; Hagopian and Paden 1969). Indeed, the most important pan-Arab American organizations founded since the 1960s—the Association of Arab American University Graduates, the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), the Arab American Institute,

and the National Association of Arab Americans—had reversing these conditions and dismantling the propositions of innate cultural difference that lay at their root as primary organizational objectives. One of the first historic studies of Arab American communities commissioned by an Arab American organization noted:

At a time when the United States is more receptive to cultural pluralism, and ethnicity is no longer socially unacceptable, Arab Americans remain primary targets of defamatory attacks on their cultural and personal character. Thus, much of the activity of the Arab-American community has been directed at correcting the stereotypes that threaten to produce a new wave of anti-Arab racism in the United States and endanger the civil and human rights of the Arab-American community. (Zogby 1984, 21)

The racialization processes experienced by Arab Americans differ in both historical timing and pretext from that of other groups in the United States. Historically afforded some of the benefits and protections of whiteness, such as in their eligibility for homestead lands and legal and voting rights, the exclusion of Arab Americans from social and political perquisites postdates the historic exclusions of other negatively racialized groups. It cannot therefore be perfectly tied, in its genesis, to ideas about race and the superiority of whiteness that have existed since the founding of the United States. Rather, the fall of Arabs from the graces of marginal whiteness is traceable to the emergence of the United States as a global superpower. This sociopolitical relationship, although not framed in racial terms, is acknowledged in some of the earlier scholarship on Arab Americans. For example, Suleiman and Abu-Laban note that the source of bias against Arabs in the United States relates “more to the original homeland and peoples than to the Arab-American community” (1989, 5), nonetheless producing substantial negative domestic repercussions. In the 1984 Zogby report noted above, domestic “images of greedy oil sheiks and bloodthirsty terrorists” are tied to political and economic events in the Middle East. More to the point, Fay states that “the source of today’s defamation of Arab-Americans might be described as the domestic counterpart of the Arab-Israeli conflict” (1984; 22). My research on Palestinians in the United States (Cainkar 1988) showed how adopting an American identity was fraught with conflict for Palestinian Americans, who were portrayed by the media as a culturally barbaric group and treated by the U.S. government as

the enemy within. How can one be American and America's enemy at the same time? The Palestinian case exposed the racialized nature of the challenge: the Soviet, Cuban, and Sandinista enemies were about governments and ideologies, the Arab enemy was about innate cultural dispositions to violence.

The domestic transformation of Arabs from marginal white to subordinate status was facilitated by the flexibility of whiteness and the historic and "observable" racial liminality of Arabs (a concept that can be extended to South Asians). In the decades prior to 1920, Arab whiteness was contested by local court clerks and judges trying to block their naturalization in locations such as Detroit, Buffalo, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and parts of the South (e.g., Georgia and South Carolina) (Samhan 1999). These experiences, however, were neither universal nor indicative of the totality of the early Arab American experience and can be counterposed, for example, by the freedom of movement experienced by Arabs engaged in commerce. These disparate experiences highlight the notion that race is socially constructed and that racial projects are embedded in local social relationships (Gualtieri 2004). But at its core, the social exclusion of Arabs in the United States has been a racial project because Arab inferiority has been constructed and sold to the American public using essentialist constructions of human difference. In the 1990s, when Islamist challenges to American global hegemony became more powerful than Arab nationalism, these constructions were extended to Muslims and became grander; they became civilizational. Seen as recently as 1943 as persons who shared "in the development of our civilization" by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), affirming their whiteness and justifying their eligibility for naturalization, by the 1990s the "clash of civilizations" view (Huntington 1996), positioning Arabs (and Muslims) as the cultural Other, had become an accepted scholarly perspective. The seemingly race-neutral lens of essentialized cultural and religious differences was evoked after blatant racism had lost its power as an effective hegemonic tool (a consequence of the civil rights movement, according to some critical race theorists). Nonetheless, all the components of a racial project were there: the assertion of *innate characteristics* held by all members of a *group*. Power then comes into play when positive or negative valence is attached to innate characteristics and dominant societal institutions are utilized to inform, reward, control, and punish based on these determinations. Because race remains one of the fundamental tools for claiming rewards and organizing discipline in American society, and is something Americans know and understand, these notions of essential human



difference have been corporealized, as if they were about color. Thus, race became the operant reference category for a woman opposing the construction of a mosque in her suburb when she testified: "I have no ill remorse for the Muslim race at all. I wish we could all live in peace, but . . ." <sup>1</sup> The corporealization is also evident in the actionable but sloppy phenotypic category "Arabs, Muslims, and persons assumed to be Arabs and Muslims," terms without which one cannot accurately describe hate incidents in the United States after the 9/11 attacks.

The racialization of Arabs is thus tied to larger global policies of the U.S. government. The domestic aspect of this project is in the manufacture of public consent—needed to support, finance, and defend these policies. For this reason, the most noted features of Arab exclusion in the United States are tactical: persistent, negative media representations; denial of political voice; governmental and nongovernmental policies targeting activism; and distortions of Arab and Muslim values, ways of life, and homelands ("civilizational" distortions). All of these actions are tied to the disenfranchisement of dissenting voices and delegitimation of Arab claims so as to assert information hegemony.

Since the darkening of Arabs began in earnest after the beneficiaries of the U.S. civil rights movement had been determined and the categories of "non-white" and "minority" had been set, Arabs have experienced the double burden of being excluded from whiteness *and* from mainstream recognition as people of color. They are still officially white and ineligible for affirmative action (Samhan 1999). This exclusion also has been evident in political mobilizations and in multicultural pedagogy. Political exclusion of Arab voices has been reinforced in mainstream civil society institutions by issue control, through which organizational leadership silences discussion of issues that challenge U.S. policies in the Arab world if their assertion is deemed to hinder other organizational objectives. In pedagogy, Arabs have been excluded from race and ethnic studies, and when mentioned, often treated differently than other groups (Cainkar 2002b). Consider the following quote from a race and ethnic studies textbook that implies that unlike other groups, Arabs are responsible for their own stereotyping:

Perhaps more serious (than discrimination faced by Muslim women) is the persistence of negative stereotyping that has plagued Middle Easterners in the US. The activities of *Arab terrorists* in the ME and elsewhere *have created a*

1. Field notes, Orland Park, Illinois, mosque hearing, Apr. 2004.

sinister image of Arab and other Middle Eastern groups—an image that was greatly exacerbated by the attack on the World Trade Center in 2001. (Emphasis added) *Magis* 2003, 165.

The isolation of Arab Americans and their organizations from mainstream vehicles of dissent left them with few powerful allies from the 1960s onward (although they have had some local successes), allowing their challenges to hostile media representations, textbook biases, and selective policy enforcement to be ignored without a price.<sup>2</sup> Perpetuation and reinforcement of stigmatized views and political isolation of Arab Americans left them open targets for collective punishment after the 9/11 attacks on the United States.

Because the formation of Arabs as a unique racial group (separate from whites as well as others) was a racial project with timing and purpose different from historic American racism, its objective manifestation also differs from that of traditionally subordinated groups: African American, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans. Its impact is not well measured by indexes of income, occupation, education, and residential segregation because the racialization project intervened in the ongoing trajectories of historically successful Arab American communities and because a large percentage of post-World War II Arab immigrants arrived in the United States with significant amounts of human capital. These facts have allowed Arabs to overcome some of the economic outcomes that usually correlate subordinate status; at the same time, they mask deep impacts on Arab American communities with low levels of human capital.

For similar historic reasons, some Arabs may see themselves as white (especially if they have benefited or seek to benefit from historical whiteness) while others may not, and Arab American communities may vary in their political alliances and understandings around race. Arab Americans may have racial options (a variation of Waters's [1990] concept of ethnic options) that members of other groups do not possess, but these options do not alter their grounded realities as a negatively stigmatized group. For these reasons of experience and aspiration, a person's racial identity may change over the course of his/her lifetime. Racialization and racial identity formation should be seen as unfolding and ongoing processes for Arab Americans.

2. See Fay (1984, 23), where she discusses the isolation of Arab Americans and ADC's efforts to establish ties to other ethnic and racial groups to forge antiracist alliances.



The ways in which Arabs, Muslims, and persons assumed to be Arabs and Muslims were held collectively responsible after the 9/11 attacks should alone provide convincing evidence that their racial denouement had been sufficiently sealed before the attacks occurred.<sup>3</sup> The public attribution of collective responsibility required an understanding that collective status trumps the individual. This phenomenon is reserved for persons from cultures represented as backward or barbaric, where persons operate in Durkheimian mechanical solidarity "in so far as they have no action of their own, as with the molecules of inorganic bodies. . . . In societies where this type of solidarity is highly developed, the individual is not his own master" (Giddens 1972, 139). Allegations of primitive culture correspond to Western racism as they have historically been used to describe communities of color. Inherently lazy, violent, familialistic, and unassimilable groups have been held responsible for their own bad fates, not the structure that denied them rights, as they were seen to block progress in the name of manifest destiny and the white man's burden. In contrast, a primary correlate of whiteness is the attribution of modernity, rationality, and individuality, including individual culpability. When someone who is white does something interpreted as wrong or reprehensible, it is depicted by the organs of power as an individual act, one that has no reflection on the values and beliefs of other members of the group. On the other hand, the virtues of whiteness that are positive are presented as shared characteristics. Thus, during World War II, Japanese in the United States were interred as potential enemies, but neither Germans nor Italians were so treated. Hitler, Mussolini, and their agents are portrayed as deviants and outliers, not reflections on white, European, or Christian culture. But the violent act of any Arab or Muslim is rendered to represent entire societies and cultures and is portrayed as a mechanical, civilizational act. These racialized ways of thinking require a priori stigmatization and cultural constructions.

Widespread acceptance and use of the "clash of civilizations" thesis by scholars, filmmakers, publishers, the media, the Christian right, and certain members of the U.S. government cemented the racialization of Arabs and Muslims and established the preconditions for collective backlash after 9/11. Because the

3. I am speaking domestically here, but the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and other features of the war on terror (Guantanamo, torture, renditioning, disappearances) suggest that a global collective responsibility has been imposed.

majority of backlash has been perpetrated by whites, the backlash can be viewed as actions defining the boundaries of whiteness (Cainkar 2004a). Research conducted in Chicago shows that those who perpetrate these acts are often simultaneously displaying American flags, suggesting that these acts can also be viewed as symbolic attempts to define the boundaries of the nation, and who lies outside of it. While there is no doubt that concerns about personal safety and national security were behind some of the backlash and government policies that followed the 9/11 attacks, it is in their unbridled collective nature, their inclination to target anyone who appeared to be part of *the group*, that makes these responses racialized. Only members of groups that have been "othered" experience collective discipline and punishment, irrespective of any individual's relationship to a particular event, activity, or location.

The remainder of this chapter presents data collected in an ethnographic study of the impact of 9/11 on Arabs and Muslims in the Chicago metro area.<sup>4</sup> It amply demonstrates the imposition of collective guilt on Arabs and Muslims through public policies and popular actions, an outcome (not a beginning) of their racialization. It also demonstrates an achievement of the racialization project by showing that a majority of Arabs interviewed in the study do not think Arabs are white, although they are officially considered so, and know which box they are expected to check on forms. The various reasons Arabs give for this determination support a racialization thesis.

Arabs and Muslims in the United States have experienced, and continue to experience, collective punishment for the 9/11 attacks, irrespective of the fact that they did not perpetrate them. Their looks and names mark them as targets. At the same time, because "whiteness" bears the privilege of individual culpability, negative actions such as the abuse of Iraqi, Afghani, or other Arab or Muslim prisoners are represented as the work of lone "bad apples," thereby effectively circumventing the implication of higher-ups and the system they represent or an examination of the roots of these actions in cultivated racialized hatreds and essentialized, civilizational discourses. Applause-generating statements such as the following can be made by high-level military commanders without fear of discipline:

4. The Russell Sage Foundation funded the study of the impact of 9/11 on Arab Muslims in metropolitan Chicago.



Actually, it's a lot of fun to fight. You know, it's a hell of a hoot. I like brawling. You go into Afghanistan, you got guys who slap women around for five years because they didn't wear a veil. You know guys like that ain't got no manhood left anyway. So it's a hell of a lot of fun to shoot them. (Lt. Gen. James Mattis, quoted in NBCSanDiego.com 2005)

#### GOVERNMENT POLICIES AFTER 9/11

The United States government implemented a range of domestic policies in the name of national security and the war on terrorism after the attacks of September 11. Most of them were designed and carried out by the executive branch of government, bypassing public discussion or debate. Twenty-five of the thirty-seven known government security initiatives implemented between September 12, 2001, and mid-2003 either explicitly or implicitly targeted U.S. Arabs and Muslims (Tsao and Gutierrez 2003). These measures included mass arrests, secret and indefinite detentions, prolonged detention of "material witnesses," closed hearings, secret evidence, government eavesdropping on attorney-client conversations, FBI interviews, wiretapping, seizures of property, removals of aliens with technical visa violations, and mandatory special registration. At the very minimum, at least one hundred thousand Arabs and Muslims living in the United States personally experienced one of these measures.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the number of Arabs and Muslims able to study, work, and attend training, meetings, and conferences in the United States has plummeted (Cainkar 2004a). The profiling of Arabs and Muslims at U.S. airports, via special security checks and removal from airplanes, dampened their desire to travel domestically or abroad. A February 2002 article in *Arab-American Business* magazine provided special safety tips for Arab American travelers in a sidebar entitled "Flying While Arab." While many Arabs say these selective airport procedures have ended, others remain reluctant to fly.<sup>6</sup>

5. Some 83,000 persons living in the United States underwent call-in special registration, according to the Department of Homeland Security. At minimum, at least 20,000 additional Arabs and Muslims nationwide have been affected by one or more of the numerous post-9/11 national security initiatives.

6. Interview data from the study of the impact of 9/11 on Arab Muslims in metropolitan Chicago funded by the Russell Sage Foundation.

Government measures began with the roundup and detention of some twelve hundred citizens and noncitizens, most of Middle Eastern descent, directly after the September 11 attacks. While their names have not been revealed, the conditions under which persons were arrested and detained indicate profiling based on looks, names, and being in the wrong place at the wrong time. More than five hundred of these detainees were deported for visa violations, after long incarcerations waiting for security clearance; none was charged with connections to terrorism. (U.S. Department of Justice 2004). Subsequent measures included mandatory holds on all nonimmigrant visa applications submitted by men aged eighteen through forty-five from twenty-six countries, most of them Arab, subject to special security clearances; interviews with some five thousand individuals who came to the United States from Arab and Muslim countries after January 1, 2000, on nonimmigrant visas; and a second round of interviews with an additional three thousand persons. The Justice Department asked local police departments to participate in interviewing Arab residents of their towns, placing them in the position of monitoring persons they are supposed to protect.

In January 2002, the INS (now a division of the Department of Homeland Security) launched an initiative to track down and deport six thousand non-citizen males from (unnamed) Middle Eastern countries who had been ordered deported but had never left the United States. Although they are less than 2 percent of the estimated 314,000 so-called "absconders" in the United States, Middle Easterners were the government's target. In a meeting with members of Chicago's Arab American community, government officials claimed that they were not engaging in racial profiling, as other communities would be approached next.<sup>7</sup> They never were. In June 2002 the Department of Justice issued an internal memo to the INS and U.S. Customs requesting that they seek out and search all Yemenis, including American citizens, entering the United States. Yemeni Americans were removed from planes and boarding lines, waiting hours for security clearances. In July 2002, the INS announced that it would begin enforcing section 265(a) of the Immigration and Naturalization Act, which requires all aliens to register changes of address within ten days of moving. There

7. Statement made by U.S. Attorney Fitzpatrick at a public meeting with Chicago region federal government officials and members of Chicago's Arab and Muslim community. Burbank, Ill., Mar. 2002.

is nothing to prevent the selective enforcement of this rule. In fact, in one region, an INS official openly stated that this rule was not intended to be enforced for everyone.<sup>8</sup> In North Carolina, a Palestinian legal immigrant stopped for driving four miles over the speed limit was detained for two months and finally charged with a misdemeanor for failing to report his address change. The INS sought his deportation. A local immigration judge later ruled that he could not be deported for this technical infraction because he did not willfully break the law.

On August 12, 2002, Attorney General Ashcroft announced the implementation of the special registration program requiring tens of thousands of foreign visitors from Arab and Muslim countries to be fingerprinted, photographed, and registered. The domestic call-in part of the program required nonimmigrant males aged sixteen to sixty-four from twenty-three Muslim-majority countries, plus heavily Muslim Eritrea (and North Korea) to report and register with the U.S. immigration authorities during a specified time frame, be fingerprinted, photographed, and questioned, and thereafter submit to routine reporting.<sup>9</sup> Credit cards, licenses, and other documents were photocopied and sometimes not returned. Registrants were checked against lists for terrorist connections. Persons cleared of terrorist connections but found to be in violation of their visas or out of (immigration) status were jailed, required to post bond, and issued removal orders (deportation).

The INS produced flyers to advertise the call-in program. "This notice is for you" was splayed across the top, reminiscent of the notices posted for Japanese living in the western United States during World War II. The arrest and detention of hundreds of registrants, mostly Iranians, in southern California during the first period of special registration sparked national protest, as persons seeking to comply voluntarily with government rules were handcuffed and led off to jail for visa violations. Some reported verbal abuse and body-cavity searches. Men were confined to rooms holding fifty or more people, in leg shackles, and

8. National Immigration Forum national conference call, Aug. 15, 2002. Participation at the offices of the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights.

9. "Nonimmigrant aliens" includes all immigrants who are inspected by the INS upon entry to the United States and are not U.S. citizens, permanent residents, applicants for permanent residency, or applicants for asylum. The rule for special registration excluded nonimmigrants who are diplomats, persons working with international organizations, and a few other narrow categories of nonimmigrants (categories A and G).



forced to sleep on concrete floors.<sup>10</sup> Most of these detainees were working taxpayers with families who had otherwise lived lawfully in the United States for decades. Many had pending applications for permanent residency. Eventually, most of the detainees were released on bail, but the INS started removal proceedings at the same time. As a result of this initial handling of special registrants, the INS allowed persons found out of status, but cleared of terrorism, to post bail until their removal hearing.

The domestic call-in part of the program ran for nine months. In May 2003, after stating for months that the program was not targeting certain groups because it would eventually be expanded to all visiting aliens, the government announced its phasing out. According to the Department of Homeland Security, 82,880 Arabs, Muslims, and others from the selected countries had been “specially” registered through domestic call-in. Of these, 13,434 were issued removal orders for visa violations, all of them affirmatively cleared of terrorism or terrorist connections.<sup>11</sup> Another 127,694 persons were registered at their port of entry; none were found to have connections to terrorists. Of the more than 200,000 Muslims, Arabs, and persons from Muslim-majority countries registered, less than 50 were found to have criminal records. The rounding up for removal of more than 14,000 persons for visa violations—a highly select group comprising less than 1 percent of the estimated 3.2 to 3.6 million persons living in the United States while “out of status” and the 8 million undocumented—has few historic precedents in the United States. It far outnumbers the 556 foreign nationals deported for their political beliefs during the infamous 1919 Palmer Raids, but modestly compares to the 3.8 million Mexicans deported during Operation Wetback in the 1950s (Gourevitch 2003). The purpose of special registration, according to the executive associate commissioner of the Office of Field Operations of the INS, was to facilitate the “monitoring” of aliens whose residence in the United States warranted it “in the interest of national security” (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service n.d.). The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (2003), which took over immigration functions from the now-defunct INS, referred to special registration (using its NSEERS acronym) as a “pilot project focusing on a smaller segment of the nonimmigrant alien population deemed to be of risk

10. Reuters, Dec. 18, 2002.

11. Carol Hallstrom (Department of Homeland Security, Community Relations), in personal communication with the author, Chicago, June 2004.



to national security.” These statements make explicit the government’s view that Arabs and Muslims *as a group* are considered a security risk for the United States. This view is found in other Bush administration programs, such as FBI director Mueller’s January 2003 initiative to tie FBI field office goals for wire-tapping and undercover activities to the number of mosques in the field area.<sup>12</sup>

An examination of the legislative history upon which Attorney General Ashcroft legitimated special registration provides useful clues about its ideological and racial boundary making. Ashcroft cited legislative authority for this program that encompasses a history going back to the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts, which were primarily aimed at restraining and deporting aliens living in the United States who were considered subversive. Ashcroft specifically cites as his authority the 1940 Smith Act, which was passed to strengthen national defense against communist and anarchist influences in the United States. The Smith Act was not aimed only at foreigners. It also prohibited American citizens from advocating or belonging to groups that advocated or taught the “duty, necessity, desirability, or propriety” of overthrowing any level of government by “force or violence.” It was the first peacetime federal sedition law since 1798 and was the basis for later prosecutions of persons alleged to be members of communist and socialist parties. The 2002 special registration program thus lies within the family of policies permitting the government to monitor, restrain, and remove persons whose political beliefs and ideologies it perceives as a threat.

On the other hand, because the special registration program named its targets by their countries of birth, not their beliefs, it shares features of the family of U.S. policies based on ideas about race (beginning with slavery, abolished in 1865, and Indian removal), such as the 1790 Naturalization Law, denying naturalized citizenship to nonwhites, repealed in 1952; the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, repealed in 1943; the Asia Barred Zone; and immigration quotas, enacted in 1921, revised in 1924 and 1952, and abolished in 1965, signaling the end of an era in which U.S. immigration policies were based principally on race. Although most of these laws referred to geographies and countries, their explicit purpose was racial. After 1965, it was considered against liberal democratic principles to discriminate blatantly in immigration policies by country of birth. But in 1981 the regulation of persons from certain “foreign states”

12. See, for example, Isikoff (2003). For a list of some of the earlier programs, see Louise Cainkar (2002a).

reemerged in immigration law when the attorney general was permitted to require "natives of any one or more foreign states, or any class of group thereof" to provide the government with address and other information upon ten days' notice. Interestingly, the Iran crisis of 1980 was specifically mentioned in the House Judiciary Committee report submitted for the 1981 law, thus connecting two reemergences: geographically based immigration procedures and political Islam (U.S. House Judiciary Committee 1981). Attorney General Ashcroft used this law to authorize call-in special registration.<sup>13</sup> Selective policies by country of birth emerged again in 1991 when Attorney General Dick Thornburgh required the special registration of persons holding Iraqi and Kuwaiti passports and travel documents. In sum, since the end of quotas and the dawn of the civil rights era, punitive or controlling special immigration policies based on country of birth or nationality have been applied solely to Arabs and persons from (non-European) Muslim-majority countries (with the exception of North Korea). These place-based discriminatory policies flourish at the nexus of assumptions about the relationship between "race" or national origin and culture and ideology. As they locate Arabs and Muslims and place them in subordinate status through laws and policies specially geared for them, they reinforce the appropriateness of maintaining essentialist ideas about members of these groups.

These programs link to the racialization of Arabs and Muslims because they give concrete meaning to essentialized, undifferentiated representations of Arabs and Muslims. The discourse of security risk and assumptions about the innate characteristics of persons who inhabit the grand categories of Arab and Muslim are institutionalized through homeland security and war-on-terror policies. These discipline and control programs tied to dominant institutions in American society establish boundaries of the nation inside the nation, effectively removing whole populations from legal protection. Operating in tandem with anti-Muslim discourses found throughout American society, these policies entrench the criminalization of Arabs and Muslims in the United States. Understanding that race is a historically located social construct that has no fixed meaning, that it differentiates between human beings using discourses of human essences, and that a racial project is one that creates or reproduces structures of domination based on these categories and understandings, we must ask: Can policies that target persons from two continents, three world regions, and

13. U.S. Public Law 97-116.

through their messiness incorporate persons from three major religions, be considered racist and part of a racialization project?<sup>14</sup> The answer, I believe, is yes, because the targets of these policies are categories of humans constructed on the basis of essentialized understandings. Implementation of these policies produces structural outcomes of inequality and further entrenches popular notions of a “terrorist” phenotype. This global project that includes multiple subordinate populations has been amalgamated into a civilizational racial project.

#### POPULAR SUPPORT FOR COLLECTIVE POLICIES

After the 9/11 attacks, public opinion polls showed broad support for the special treatment of Arabs, *as a group*, in the United States. A poll conducted in mid-September 2001 found respondents evenly divided over whether all Arabs in the United States, including American citizens, should be required to carry special identity cards (Smith 2001). Two late September Gallup polls found that a majority of Americans favored profiling of Arabs, including American citizens, and subjecting them to special security checks before boarding planes.<sup>15</sup> A December 2001 University of Illinois poll found that some 70 percent of Illinois residents were willing to sacrifice their civil rights to fight terrorism, and more than one-quarter of respondents said Arab Americans should surrender more rights than others.<sup>16</sup> A March 2002 CNN/Gallup/*USA Today* poll found that nearly 60 percent of Americans favored reducing the number of immigrants from Muslim countries. In August, a majority of the American public said that there were “too many” immigrants from Arab countries.<sup>17</sup> In December 2004, a Cornell University study found that nearly 50 percent of respondents in a national poll believed the U.S. government should curtail civil liberties for Muslim Americans (Nisbet and Shanahan 2004). These polls indicate that the essentialized representations of Arabs and Muslims, propagated by the media and film industry, uncontested in pedagogy, and reflected in government policies and actions, have been extremely effective in garnering public support for treating Arabs and Muslims as a special

14. “Essentialist” refers to a belief in real, true human essences, existing outside or impervious to social and historical context. See Omi and Winant (1994), 71.

15. *Chicago Sun-Times*, Oct. 2, 2001.

16. *News Sun* (Ill.), Dec. 20, 2001.

17. Gallup News Service, Aug. 8, 2002.



group possessing fewer rights than others. These views would not have emerged suddenly after 9/11 had they not been cultivated prior to the attacks. Otherwise, the hijackers would have been seen in ways similar to Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, or to members of the Irish Republican Army—as extremists whose actions do not reflect on an entire race, religion, or civilization.

ARABS AND RACE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE  
OF ARAB MUSLIMS IN METROPOLITAN CHICAGO

Data from interviews conducted with Arab Muslims in metropolitan Chicago as part of a post-9/11 ethnographic study provide insight into how Arabs view their place in the racial structure of the United States. One hundred and two study participants (see table 2.1 for sample demography) were asked: “There have been discussions about whether Arabs are white or not, with different points of view. Do you think Arabs are white, not white, or what?” Sixty-three percent of respondents said Arabs were not white, 20 percent said they were white, and another 17 percent gave equivocal responses. Study data indicate the elements of social life persons bring to bear on their assessment of the “racial place” of Arabs, which in theory could be phenotypical, experiential, observational, relational, local, national, or global.

Individuals who said Arabs were not white made this assessment on the basis (in order of frequency) of: their treatment in American society, skin color and other phenotypic criteria, the fact that Arabs are multiracial, cultural/historical differences from white Europeans, and Arab distinctiveness (“Arabs are Arabs”). Many invoked multiple criteria. A majority of persons who said Arabs are white and about one-third of persons who said Arabs were not white moved immediately into an unprovoked discourse about forms—especially census forms and job and school applications. In other words, the discussion of race became a discussion of categories and boxes and their views on these boxes and on the way that American society groups people by color. Arabs know that they are supposed to check the “white” box on forms, and a majority say they do so, even if they have serious problems with the concept, and even if they believe Arabs are not white.

Q: There have been discussions about whether Arabs are white or not, with different points of view. Do you think Arabs are white, not white, or what?



Table 2.1  
Cainkar Study: Arab/Muslim Sample Statistics

Demographic	Percentage
Female	45
Income	
Poor/low income	18
Middle class	62
Upper middle class and wealthy	20
Age	
19-29	30
30-49	56
50 and over	14
Education	
High school or less	14
Some college or BS/BA	43
Postgraduate	42
Born in U.S. <sup>a</sup>	29
N	102

<sup>a</sup>Includes for sociological reasons persons who migrated to the United States before age ten.

A: This confuses me every time I fill out an application. We are not white, black, Hispanic, or Asian. We are Arab. I put white. If there is another, sometimes I put that. But I put White because I know we are not other. (Jordanian-born female)

Most interviewees made a distinction between what they write on forms and what they see as their reality. In other words, Arab American responses on forms are social constructions in themselves, and must be understood as the products of a larger social context. This man speaks about how he writes "white," meanwhile knowing it's not "true."

We used to report quarterly on affirmative action and I always asked my boss "what should I do?" Should I put myself as a minority or not?" He did not know either, so we called the company headquarters and they said you will be

considered white. But of course in real life we are not. As far as statistics go, that's what they say, legally. (Palestinian-born male)

Still, some insist on checking the "other" box. Most who do this do not know that persons who check "other" and can be determined to be Arab, or who write in "Arab," are recoded as white by the Census Bureau.

I always choose other. I'm not white and I'm not going to check white. (Puerto Rican-born male)

A large proportion of persons who said Arabs are white said they knew Arabs were white because they were told that was the case.

I was really surprised when I learned that we were Caucasian. (U.S.-born woman)

Geographically, Egypt is in Africa but they classify all the Arabs as white, so I write white. (Egyptian-born male)

Many Arab Americans see being required to participate in a project that socially constructs their identity in ways that match historic American ideas about race but denies their real experiences and refuses them minority benefits as yet another layer of discrimination.

I am resentful that I have to put down white. I don't look white. I am not treated as white. (1.5-generation female)

I felt I was at a disadvantage to have to check "white." I don't think it's fair because it is not who I am. I just don't feel that I'm a typical white American, you know, Anglo-Saxon, because if you look at me I'm not. I feel that I am a minority. Why should I be grouped with these people and not have a chance to obtain a scholarship? (Libyan-born female)

Sometimes you put other but what is other? Other could be anything. You feel like inferior, you know. Like the minority of the minorities. We're not defined. . . . Officially we are white but we're not white. Somebody can say I don't

have to hire you because you are white and I have a lot of white people here. But you're not white! (Palestinian-born male)

Placement in the "white" category effectively hides the discrimination that Arab Americans face by removing them as subjects in the study of social inequalities.

If we were recognized as a minority it would be acknowledged that oppression and discrimination occur. Socially we are not accepted in white circles. (Chicago-born female)

ARABS ARE NOT WHITE: RESPONSES BASED ON HOW  
ARABS ARE TREATED IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

The largest response category among persons who said Arabs are not white (36 percent) revolved around how Arabs are treated in American society.<sup>18</sup> In other words, they saw their racial place as nonwhite because they do not benefit from the statuses, assumptions, and rewards that accrue to whiteness. These respondents note the political exclusion and discriminatory treatment in schools and among the public that Arab Americans experience. The overwhelming majority of interviewees who gave this type of response were born in the United States, suggesting that deep understanding of the relationship between race and inequality of experience are particularly American, formed as part of an American upbringing. Their responses, in that they invoke issues that existed before 9/11, support the thesis that the racial project excluding Arabs from the benefits of whiteness was in place long before 9/11.

We have always been told we should be classified as other, then white. But if I go to Mississippi with my brother named Ahmed, there is no way he'd be treated as white. (Chicago-born female)

Arabs are definitely not white. That categorization comes from the treatment of a community by the institutions of American society. Arabs in the schools face the same institutional racism as other students of color. (Chicago-born male)

18. Because these are open-ended ethnographic interviews, some persons offered responses that fall into multiple categories.

The issue is, are you part of a privileged group of people that can dominate others, and I do not think we are part of that. Arabs are not part of the white or European ruling structure. We are politically excluded. (U.S.-born female)

One interviewee sees Arabs claiming whiteness as a survival mechanism developed in an earlier era, but one that is no longer effective in today's cities and suburbs, where Arab Americans face dominant culture oppression.

There is a great proportion who are going to say white because when the court allowed them [Arabs] to come into this country, one of the most racialized societies in the world where there is a white/black dichotomy, identifying with white was a way of surviving. But as kids grow up in urban areas and in the suburbs, I think they reject whiteness as oppression. Many are gravitating toward the black experience and black culture as something closer to their experience. Young Arab kids growing up here definitely do not see themselves as white. (Jordanian-born male)

Since 9/11, the racial Otherness of the Arabs has been reconstructed as the foreign enemy, leading many Arab Americans to fear for their long-term safety in the United States.

You understand that there is racism even if it is not personally inflicted on you. Being a first-generation Egyptian American and Muslim is a difficult thing—to form an identity of your own and feel like an American and that you fit into this country when you feel you really don't anyway. So, there's always been this sort of racism. . . . That outlook was always there, it was just exaggerated [after 9/11] making you feel like the enemy. That you're the bad one, and you're definitely a foreigner and do not belong in this country. I'm just as much American as anyone else. I feel like maybe I need to get the hell out of this country because something bad is going to happen to our people here. (U.S.-born female)

#### ARABS ARE NOT WHITE: RESPONSES BASED ON SKIN COLOR AND OTHER PHENOTYPIC CRITERIA

The second most common response (28 percent) among persons who said Arabs are not white was about skin color and other phenotypic features. Both U.S.- and non-U.S.-born respondents made such statements, although immigrants



frequently spoke of how they learned about social systems organized around skin color only after arriving in the United States.

You know it's funny, nobody ever discusses color once you step out of the United States. I think it only matters in this country. This country is very race conscious, color conscious I mean. My sister married a very dark man and when you look at him you would say he is black. We never thought that was unusual. . . . I complained about my hair once at school and they said oh, yeh, you have that Semitic hair. I never thought of my hair being Semitic. Sometimes the girls would say to me "well you are olive-skinned." I don't see myself that way. So, I think in their minds they have a perception of gradations of color, and I don't have that. (Jordanian-born female)

If not white, what color are Arabs? Some respondents tried to place themselves on a color chart, citing olive, brown, gray, or black.

I'm not white, I am olive. To certain people it matters if you're white. (Chicago-born female)

People look at me and they don't know what I am. They know I am not white or black. People think I am Hispanic. Brown is in the middle. (U.S.-born female)

Clinically, Arabs have dispersed around the world enough to fall into both categories. Clinically they are a people of color. I consider myself gray (between white and black). (Palestinian-born male)

I am from a country that is not white, for sure. (Sudanese-born male)

Arab Americans who say Arabs are not phenotypically white also point out that more than skin color enters the equation; there are also distinguishing facial features and types of hair.

We don't look white. What matters in the U.S. is not Caucasian blood but skin color. This has a huge impact on us. And you see nappy hair, even if blue eyes and light skin. (Chicago-born female)

In this suburb, it is lily white. We don't belong here. I am very aware of my skin color and looks. (Kuwaiti-born female)

Many respondents were extremely uncomfortable with the very concept of race and color. After stating that Arabs were not white, some respondents explained that they found the very idea of race useless, irrelevant, or offensive and some observed that racism is abhorred in Islam.

We are definitely not white. But the whole idea of color makes no sense to me. My neighbor is black according to census forms but she is lighter than I am. There are Arabs that are lighter than white people. I don't think people should be classified like that, by color. I don't agree with it at all. If I was to classify myself, I would consider myself brown. I would not consider myself white. My youngest and oldest child would be white and my middle child brown. It does not work for me. (Kuwaiti-born female)

You are not the color of your skin. It is ridiculous to try and categorize everybody into certain groups of skin color. You are who you are because of what sits in your heart and the experiences you have encountered in your life. (U.S.-born male)

I don't feel comfortable classifying people by color anyway. It is against my ideology, my thinking, and my religion. (Egyptian-born male)

We do not talk about this issue in our community. We feel that we are Muslims and that is what matters to us. (Palestinian-born male)

ARABS ARE NOT WHITE: THEY SPAN A RANGE  
OF GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS AND SKIN COLORS

The third most common response (24 percent) among persons who said Arabs are not white was that Arabs cannot be a racial group because the Arab world encompasses many geographic regions and skin colors. As such, it is not possible to assign a color to Arabs.

I think Arabs should have a different category until things change. . . . If you look on the map, Arab countries cover two continents, and the white-white and dark black. If this is my cousin and he's dark, and he's from Africa, are you going to call him white? (U.S.-born female)

It does not matter to me because in the Arab community we have white, black, and yellow. As Muslims, there is no difference between colors. (Palestinian-born male)

Arabs are distinct upon themselves, and the Arab world encompasses both black and white. (U.S.-born female)

Arabs are a race of colors, many colors. (Lebanese-born male)

ARABS ARE NOT WHITE: ARAB HERITAGE IS DIFFERENT  
FROM CAUCASIAN/EUROPEAN

The fourth most common response (20 percent) among persons who said Arabs are not white was about culture and heritage. To these Arab Americans, being white means being Caucasian and European, and Arabs are neither.

I don't see myself as white. We have a different background. I think of Europeans. We are more African than European. (Lebanese-born male)

Most Arabs think Caucasians are Europeans. (Kuwaiti-born male)

For those who said being white means being European, then allowing your history to be subsumed into that of Europe means denying your own Arab culture and heritage.

White in my mind means European, but since I am not European, I feel like I am lying. Why should I write white? (Egyptian-born male)

I have a culture and heritage; being white denies that. (U.S.-born female)

Their history and culture is quite separate from Europe's. I find it a disgrace that the Arab people should be so blatantly insulted by the disregard of their history. (U.S.-born female)

The following comments from a young man living in a middle-class Chicago suburb show how Arab is counterposed to Caucasian/white/American at the grounded neighborhood level:

I was with a group of friends. These Americans, Caucasians, drove past us and yelled out remarks—racial remarks. They turned around and they ran at us and we started to fight. In Chicago Ridge everyone was Arabic mostly, our



whole neighborhood was Arabic, so no white person or American would say something about us unless it was in school, but in Orland, it's a little different. Arabic are like, they are not the minorities over there.

Q: Have women been affected in any special way?

A: They've been affected because it's more hard for them to walk down the street especially if they are in more of a Caucasian neighborhood, people like to stare and talk like behind their backs and Arabic women might not like that but Arabic women can't say things back. Things like that. (Jordanian-born male who came to the United States at age one)

Seventeen percent of respondents gave what may be called equivocal responses to the race question, marking the difficulty they have with the very idea of race and of pigeonholing Arabs into a racial category. The following quote expresses this ambiguity as it reveals (along with some of the quotes above) the socially constructed nature of the way Arabs respond to the formulaic race question.

I don't really know. I think, for me, it's always been white because of what I look like. I consider myself white. That's probably a personal reflection because my skin color is white. I've always thought all Arabs were white. I've never really thought of them as being nonwhite. But, again, why do we say we're white, because we're not white. Like people say, "you put 'white,'" and I think that it just doesn't make sense. I don't know what white means in terms of technical definition. Is it people who live north of the equator? I don't know how the experts have defined it. If you ask anybody, they say to put white as a race. Do I think we're white? I don't think so. (Chicago-born female)

#### THE BOX MATTERS IN A SOCIETY BUILT ON RACE

Even though the race question was not formulated as a discussion of forms and categories, responses nearly always invoked them at some point, signaling both a learned relationship between racial identification and state categories and a deep tension between the Arab experience in the United States and the phenomenon of racial categorization, which may be ideological, religious, or experiential. Nonetheless, when asked whether racial identification matters, 30 percent of persons interviewed said racial position is important in American society, whether they like the concept or not, because it is used to determine one's benefits. As

neither white nor nonwhite, Arabs accrue neither the benefits of whiteness nor the protections of minority affirmative action. They feel this exclusion is unfair and further indicates their subordinate status. While quite a few respondents said Arabs should have their own separate category, like Hispanics, since they do not fit into any existing categories, many think the whole discussion is absurd, except that American institutions work on these premises.

Hmm. Does it matter? It might matter, actually, I'm not really sure. I guess if you're looking theoretical, it shouldn't matter, but when you look on social and political and all that stuff, I think it does matter because of the way institutions in our society run. If you have affirmative action at your university and you're African American, there are rights of having a qualified percentage. We probably wish it doesn't matter, but it does. On résumé applications, they look at what your application says. I think it would be foolish to think that they don't look at what your race is. (Chicago-born female)

The formation of Arabs as a unique racial group (separate from white) was a racial project with timing and purpose different from historic American racism, leaving Arabs in the position of having no racial category (box) that makes sense to most of them. Arabs were in the midst of a new racial formation process that rendered them nonwhite after the categories of race—white, black, Hispanic, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Native American—had been set. While a new multiracial category has been developed, Arab American claims asking for a special category have been declined by the Census Bureau. Although largely rejecting the concept of the racial box, Arabs know that in a racially constructed society, thinking inside the box matters.

Arab Americans may have racial options that members of other groups do not possess. Some may be able to decide from one moment or context to the next whether they are white or not, whether they will select the box as they have been told or think about skin color, or contemplate how they are treated. Their racial identity may change over their lifetime, based on their own experiences, preferences, and demands. Racial identity is an unfolding, ongoing, contextual, and socially constructed process for Arab Americans. As the research data show, when Arab Americans select the "white" box, it does not necessarily mean that they identify with whiteness. But when they check "other," they become lost, a group that is paradoxically hidden yet the object of social obsession. These options do

not alter their grounded reality as a negatively stigmatized group; on the contrary, they offer proof of their racially subordinate status.

Study data from metropolitan Chicago show that the majority of Arab Muslims view their social position in American society as subordinate and translate that status to a nonwhite racial position in a race-based societal hierarchy. Unfortunately, one cannot conclude from these data if religious affiliation plays any role in this outcome because Arab Christians were not part of the study. It is notable, however, that religion and religious discrimination were rarely invoked in responses to this question, except in statements that Islam does not condone racial distinctions.

DISCRIMINATION AND SAFETY IN THE POST-9/11  
ARAB MUSLIM EXPERIENCE

Prejudice, discrimination, and a compromised sense of safety are historically correlated with racial subordination in the United States. These experiences have ranged from lynching, mass removals, quarantining, law-enforcement profiling, and sentencing disparities, to inferior employment, housing, and educational opportunities. Study participants were asked if they had experienced discrimination since 9/11; 53 percent said yes and 47 percent said no. Among those who responded "yes," specific instances of discrimination were reported in the following social sectors: employment (39 percent), public space (22 percent), schools (11 percent), law enforcement (11 percent), commercial transactions (9 percent), government offices (9 percent), airports/airplanes (7 percent), and civil society institutions (6 percent). When one reads the interviews fully, however, one discovers that these responses are related to a specific interpretation of the meaning of the term discrimination, which is to be denied something or treated in a different way than others. For example, many people did not interpret hate speech as discrimination. The same applies to feeling unsafe or fearing removal from the United States, which came up many times in the interviews, or having to change one's name to avoid prejudice.

Q: Have you experienced what you would consider discrimination?

A: No. I have not done anything to trigger it. I have not flown on a plane or applied for a job, where someone could say I couldn't. I have done things to protect me. I got tired of these things. I served in the military. People



question your loyalty. I got veterans plates from the state. I thought it would make a difference if someone sees me, or the police, or going somewhere they would know there is such a thing as the Arab face and serving in the military. (Palestinian-born male)

Many respondents said they felt watched while conducting routine activities, such as loading their car trunks, but did not indicate that as discrimination. Others changed their normal life patterns to avoid placing themselves in situations in which they expected to experience discrimination, by eating separately or changing jobs. Many persons who used to travel domestically changed their travel patterns after the attacks; they either stopped traveling or drove to their destinations. These actions indicate that the policing and control of members of the group has moved inside the mind of the individual, what Hatem Bazian (2004) has called "virtual internment" and Nadine Naber (2006) has termed "internment of the psyche." In the following quotes, Arab Americans talk about changing their names and their friendship groups to avoid verbal harassment or abuse.

No. The only problem I have is my name "Osama." When people ask me, I say Sam. (U.S.-born male)

I changed my circle of friends from Caucasian small-town girls [at NIU] to Arabs and Muslims and people of other ethnic backgrounds. I stopped going to bars and clubs and anywhere people made ignorant comments. Caucasians lack tolerance. (U.S.-born female)

I can feel too much discrimination in people's eyes when they gaze or stare at me after realizing I'm Arabian. Actually my appearance is kind of tricky. I'm very white, so at the first glance people would think I'm American or belong to some other nationality, therefore, they treat me nicely. But, when I tell them I'm Arabian, their looks would change suddenly. . . . In the past, I gave my business card to customers to call me whenever they need a ride, but they never did. It is only after I changed my Arabian name to be American that I have started to receive many calls from my customers. (Palestinian-born male; taxi driver)

The overwhelming majority of study interviewees reported being verbally harassed after 9/11, although the harassment took different forms depending

upon the context in which it occurred. Public spaces such as streets and shopping malls were primary sites of abusive behavior, where Arabs were marked as foreigners to be spit at, sneezed upon, and sometimes threatened with worse.

Once, we were in our car, and because my wife wore the veil, some people spit-  
ted on us, swore and insulted us. Many times while walking down the street, we  
found ourselves subject to many insults such as turning someone's face, spitting  
and using rude expressions that we didn't understand. (Palestinian-born male)

One lady said to me "If I had a gun I would shoot you." (Palestinian-born  
female)

We were driving and some teenagers shouted to us, "go back to your country.  
We need to get rid of you guys, kill you off." (Chicago-born female)

The public schools emerged as another site of harassment after 9/11, but my  
research has consistently shown schools as sites of discrimination long before  
9/11. Here the pedagogical bias against Arabs and Muslims emerges; dominant  
discourses that demonize them are located not only in the media; they are also  
taught in the schools.

On 9/11 I was the only Arab in the class. We were watching TV and the teach-  
er's way of dealing with me changed. He showed pictures of Osama bin Laden  
and said [pointing to the respondent], "Ask him if you have any questions."  
(Palestinian-born male, community college student)

On a personal level my family was not harassed but kidded around a lot in  
school. Like you are an Arab, and therefore you must go to prison now? Camel  
jockey go home and this sort of verbal harassment. As well as the teachers, one  
of the teachers at — school, right after 9/11 said something to the effect of  
the Muslims, their religion allows them to become terrorists. This is part of  
what they believe is jihad. Of course my son was extremely humiliated by such  
a statement and was not able to respond because it was a figure of, you know  
a teacher and educator. But he told me about it and I verified it from another  
Muslim student in the same class. Then I went to talk to the school. And then  
we started a whole series of workshops to educate educators about Islam and  
who are the Arabs and a basic 101. So that was on a personal level, it touched  
home. (Saudi-born female)

In many school settings, discrimination against Arabs and Muslims has become institutionalized. This institutionalization appears to be particularly true in schools where Arabs and Muslims are a significant minority population and may be located in the statements and actions of administrators and secretaries, as well as in the lunch talk of teachers, forming a kind of local school culture.

I remember specifically one of the administrators . . . we were doing a reenactment in case anything ever happened at the school like a terrorist attack. The public schools had to have some type of a plan and one of the administrators said, "Well, if a terrorist comes in, don't argue with that person about your religious ideology." Kind of insinuating there would be a Muslim as a terrorist. I kind of thought that was a bit of a discriminating remark, because you wouldn't have someone say . . . if you were contemplating that it was a racial issue, don't stand and discuss your race with that person, insinuating there would be a black American. So, I was a bit offended by that. So, remarks like that, I think, are, you know, I would define as discrimination. (U.S.-born female; teacher)

The day after 9/11 I was in the lunchroom and one of my colleagues said he saw a woman at the grocery store "with that thing on her head" and he wanted to hit her. Another colleague said "that would be stupid, they did not do it," and another colleague said "how do you know that, those people who did it were living here." I got up and left. I did not say anything. I was angry, and at the same time angry at myself for not having guts. After that, I was confiding in one of my friends what I felt and she said "if someone like you was next me on an airplane, I'd get nervous. (Egyptian-born 1.5 female; teacher)

I feel I'm discriminated against while at my children's school. The secretary there deals differently with Arabs. She never greets Arabic parents or smiles at them, while she always acts normally with other parents. (Kuwaiti-born female)

Many interviewees reported discrimination in the context of commercial transactions, especially in businesses located in primarily white suburban areas.

Shopping—people give an attitude, a look everywhere. Once I was with a friend at Kohls. I bought a lot of stuff. Expensive. The lady said after I paid for everything, she wants to check my stuff. She thought I stole. It was so embarrassing. I said bring your supervisor. She thought I'm afraid, that I don't



she speak the language. She started screaming at me. She called the supervisor. She checked. Everything was right. Asked cashier to apologize and she would not. I feel pressure is too high. She really embarrassed me. (Jordanian-born female)

I was at Linens and Things in Naperville with my friend and my curtain rod was hanging over the cart. I turned to the guy behind me to apologize for my rod (it did not touch him). I apologized and he said "turn around and don't talk to me." I said "someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed." He said "It's none of your business what side of the bed I woke up on. Why don't you wake up and go back where you came from." I was just floored. (Kuwaiti born female)

In addition to discrimination in public spaces and schools, some interviewees reported attacks on their homes.

Well, my van in front of my house was covered with eggs several times, about one or two months ago. I didn't report it . . . also some garbage was put in our mailbox, like ice cream cones and wrappers, stuff like that. . . . Once we called the police because it wasn't just the cars but also the house! They pelted the door with eggs, so I called the Oak Lawn police and he came and looked around. I showed him above the door and the van, and I wasn't happy with it and he said "Well, maybe these are kids" and I said, "Yeah, I know they aren't adults but they did it on purpose, not just because they were just having fun because it's only my house and my car." On the street, there are so many cars parked but only my cars were the ones hit. He said, "I recommend that you have a garage," and I said, "Yes, I do." He said I should put the cars in the garage and I asked him "Officer, what should I do with my door? Put it in the garage too?" (Palestinian-born male)

Discrimination was also reported in the context of work and applying for jobs. In the job application process, sometimes names triggered discrimination, other times it was triggered by looks.

Actually I face it personally like when I go fill out applications or go fill out papers because of my Arabic name—when you hear my name you know I am 100 percent Arabic of Arabic descent. When I write my name—it's like—I don't know like if they saw my name and some kid named "Mike" they're going to pick the "Mike" kid instead of me. Well I don't know for sure but I know where I went to a place that has 110 percent hiring and there was two kids with

me—one of them Arabic and one of them white—and all three of us filled out the application and the white kid got the job. (Jordanian-born male, migrated at age one)

Besides the physical and verbal abuse, I applied for a job and I feel that it's not just that I'm imagining it. They said, "We don't know if we want someone who covers." Obviously, this is illegal but this was when I was going to school and I was trying to get a job in retail. For example, "It's not part of the image we want to have, especially now being a negative connotation and with you covering and the whole post-9/11 thing." In that regard, I have absolutely been discriminated against. But I always have. That just goes with being covered—I was always discriminated against pre-9/11 but especially post-9/11. I went to talk to the corporate manager of that retail chain and said it was uncalled for. They basically apologized and offered me a job but I didn't want to work there because of the bad experience I had and because I would probably be working with other people who probably felt the same way. Someone who's not working in the shop but at the headquarters is different. Originally, I did talk to a lawyer and they were going to go into it but I didn't go further than that. (Libyan-born female, migrated before age ten)

Discussions about Arab or Muslim terrorists were encountered by some interviewees in the daily context of work.

I have heard we should kill all Arabs/Muslims from people at work. (Egyptian-born male, migrated at age one)

Here in Chicago I would say not blatant, but right after 9/11 I took a job with a huge insurance brokerage firm and I was an underwriter for them and I basically assessed their risk for specific types of insurance coverage. And I had to deal a lot with the terrorism act that was made mandatory by Bush for all insurance policies. So when we were meeting about this and I was having to underwrite coverages and implement the terrorist act in there, there was . . . I dealt with a lot of bullshit comments and meetings from a lot of white people that were like you know how do we underwrite if . . . how are we supposed to underwrite if Ahmed or Mohammad get crazy and decide to throw another plane into a building and I am just like . . . I am sitting in this room and I am trying to maintain my composure and my managing director looks at me, she and I had a pretty good relationship, she was kind of like my mentor, she

knows that I am just like brewing and steaming and she's like well first of all we shouldn't assume that it's going to be an Ahmed or a Mohammad you know and I quickly interjected, it could be a Timothy McVeigh, you know but either way you've got to underwrite it, figure out how to underwrite the risk that's involved. And everybody just kind of looked at me and I was just like it's the truth. (U.S.-born female)

One interviewee noted that discriminatory sentiments existed well before 9/11 and that they were more openly expressed in less diverse work environments:

I had more problems in my work after the Oklahoma City bombing than September 11. The Oklahoma City bombing wasn't Arab. I used to work in Ohio and I remember what happened in Oklahoma City, and it happened about noontime and I came back to the office and the guards who worked with me, they were joking and they asked me "where you been? You been to Oklahoma?" They told me what happened and they kind of put the finger on me like you guys did it, you know. I didn't feel comfortable, but the next day, when they found out who did it, things changed. I was working with another company two years after that, there was a guy who joked with me, I don't know if he was serious or if he was joking, he said, "if you want to bring a bomb here, just let me know, I'll leave the building before you come." I told him, "Listen, this is not a joke. Don't joke with me like that." This happened way after Oklahoma City and before September 11. I think the difference is the kind of people I work here with is different. In Ohio, there's not international or foreign people a lot. Most of the companies I worked with, I was the only one who had an accent. I'm the only one who's not white, you know. I look different and I have an accent and so on. Here in Chicago it's different . . . different nationalities, different languages. A lot of people have accents and people here, Americans and others, are used to that a lot. I feel more comfortable working in Chicago. (Palestinian-born male)

#### LACK OF SAFETY

Similarly, despite the fact that many interviewees said they had not experienced discrimination, a majority said that there are places where they do not feel safe in American society. A sense of lack of safety in public spaces appears to be gendered, as women, especially *muhajibaat* (women wearing headscarves) express this feeling significantly more than men. A large number of women interviewed,



*muhajibaat* or not, report feeling afraid for their safety in certain types of public places. These places are almost always connected to whiteness. That is, while some men and women said they feel unsafe *as individuals* in neighborhoods associated with criminal activity, those who felt unsafe *as Arabs or Muslims* felt that way only in all-white or dominantly white areas. One woman said, "You won't find me in a park or a forest preserve"; another said, "Soccer moms scare me the most." Suburban shopping centers and malls were mentioned frequently as places where women endured stares and insults. The purpose of being made to feel uneasy, as they see it, is that Arabs and Muslims understand that they will not be granted the same rights and privileges that accrue to members of white society, including the privilege of being treated as an individual. Individuality lies at the opposite end of the pole to collective responsibility. The marking of these differences did not emerge as a result of the 9/11 attacks; the process was set in motion long before, creating the conditions for the attribution of collective guilt for the attacks.

Feeling unsafe is not limited to the public sphere. Interrogations, arrests, home invasions, and computer and property confiscations enacted by federal government authorities appear random, unfocused, and discriminatory to members of Arab and Muslim American communities. The government's use of secret evidence, closed hearings, arrests on terrorism charges that cannot be substantiated, eavesdropping on attorneys, and special registration have not built community confidence that Arab Americans will be treated fairly by the government or that the government's target is limited to terrorists and people who support them. Consequently, nearly everyone in the community feels vulnerable to a certain degree, even in their own homes. Thus, while some persons in the study said they felt safest in their homes, others said they felt the hidden eyes of surveillance, assumed their phones were tapped and computers monitored, and were concerned about the right of government agents to enter their homes at any time without permission or without leaving a trace.

Such matters of safety and security, where one is not safe even in one's home, are historically tied to racial subordination in American society: Native Americans lost their land and were placed in camps; African Americans were sold as property and segregated; Latinos were expropriated, attacked, and expelled in waves; and Asians were relegated to urban ghettos, denied property rights, and, in the case of Japanese, interred. The circle of closure that Arabs and Muslims feel is often not physically tangible, but many fear it could become so if another

attack occurs. A majority of persons interviewed for this study said that they no longer feel secure in the United States and many fear a mass deportation, revocation of citizenship, or internment camps. Those with resources have adopted strategies to anticipate these potential outcomes: they have sent their children to universities in other countries and begun building homes in their countries of origin.

This feeling of "homeland insecurity" is exacerbated by the post-9/11 increase in discourses about civilizational differences between Arabs and Muslims and people with Western values. These ideas are published and broadcast in the mainstream American media and used as justifications for a range of government actions by neoconservative and Christian-right spokespersons, some of whom have described Islam as a religion outside the pale of human values and Muslims as "worse than Nazis" (Lee 2002). A booklet entitled *Why Islam Is a Threat to America and the West* (Lind and Weyrich 2002) argues that Muslims are a fifth column in the United States and "should be encouraged to leave." Televangelist Pat Robertson called Muslims potential killers on his *700 Club* TV program (Nimer 2003). Franklin Graham, who has called Islam an "evil and wicked religion," delivered the 2002 Good Friday homily at the Pentagon (Helal and Iftikhar 2003). While he was still in office, former attorney general Ashcroft stated in an interview with syndicated columnist Cal Thomas that "Islam is a religion in which God requires you to send your son to die for him. Christianity is a faith in which God sends his son to die for you."<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Arab and Muslim Americans feel quite uneasy about the close alliance between the Bush administration and the anti-Muslim Christian right in a country that espouses equality and religious pluralism.

#### CONCLUSION

The racialization processes experienced by Arab Americans differ in both historical timing and pretext from that of other groups in the United States. Unlike the historical argument of racial superiority and inferiority used to buttress the development of the United States as a country of white privilege, the fall of Arabs from the graces of marginal whiteness is traceable to the later emergence

19. See Mohamed Nimer (2003) and the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (2003) for more documentation of these types of comments.

of the United States as a global superpower. The seemingly race-neutral lens of essentialized cultural differences and innate violence was promoted in the media and left to percolate by the educational system, thereby building support for government policies that targeted Arab Americans and justified their political exclusion. The cultural barbarism approach was effective and powerful because by the time it was needed to buttress U.S. foreign policies, blatant racism was no longer an effective hegemonic tool in the United States. The racial project that moved Arabs into subordinate status began clearly to mark the Arab American experience in the late 1960s and was the rationale behind the foundation of the most important pan-Arab American organizations. In the 1990s, when Islamist challenges to American global hegemony became more powerful than Arab nationalism, these essentialized constructions were extended to Muslims and became grander; they became civilizational. Both Arabs and Muslims were represented as persons of inherently different values and dispositions from "Americans." In time, American foreign policy ambitions also became grander, purporting to bring freedom to the subjects of Muslim civilization.

Race is something Americans know and understand and newcomers quickly learn. Despite all the efforts of the civil rights movement and affirmative action, race still has tremendous significance in American society. Like others in the United States, Arabs learn what their official racial group is. But many find a disjuncture between their assigned category (white) and their experiences, because race is understood as a phenomenon with experiential correlates. For decades, Arab Americans have faced challenges from the public over their beliefs, values, opinions, and culture, and over their claims that they were being disenfranchised in the pursuit of American foreign policies. Challenges have been based largely on notions that Arab American claims are invalid because the people making them are constitutionally different, flawed, less civilized, and more violent than others. The widespread display of this message, attesting to the notion of inherent differences among humans and representing Arabs as other than civilized people, has been an object of Arab American protest for more than thirty years. These representations of Arabs are embodied, displayed in images of dark haired, olive-skinned, hook-nosed, head-covered caricatures. Well in place before the 9/11 attacks, this corporealization came to life when "Arabs, Muslims, and persons assumed to be Arabs and Muslims" were physically attacked after 9/11. Notions of collective, civilizational responsibility justified imputing Arabs and Muslims with collective guilt for the attacks. As persons



purportedly of a different civilization, the Arab/Muslim became counterposed to the American and to the white—Arab and Muslim Americans became the suspected, unsafe, and virtually circled.

The social and political exclusion of Arabs in the United States is an objectively verifiable racial project with global goals. Arab inferiority has been constructed and sold to the American public using essentialist constructions of human difference in order to manufacture public consent for global policies. The most noted features of Arabs' exclusion have been persistent negative media representations, denial of political voice, governmental and nongovernmental policies that target their activism, and civilizational distortions of Arab and Muslim values, ways of life, and homelands. Since the darkening of Arabs began in earnest after the beneficiaries of the U.S. civil rights movement had been determined and the categories of "nonwhite" and "minority" had been set, Arabs have experienced the double burden of being excluded from whiteness *and* from mainstream recognition as people of color. Their isolation from mainstream vehicles of dissent left them with few powerful allies to contest their treatment in American society, leaving them open targets for collective punishment after the 9/11 attacks on the United States. While many Arab American activists recognized long ago that their road to political inclusion and curtailment of discrimination is in alliance with people of color, their "untouchable" foreign policy issues and domestic economic relationships at the local level placed strains on these relationships. Perhaps one of the positive developments in the post-9/11 United States is the greater willingness of these groups to accept Arab Americans into their ranks.