



**Institute for Research on
Race and Public Policy**

Research that Makes a Difference



**BEYOND ERASURE
AND PROFILING:
CULTIVATING STRONG AND
VIBRANT ARAB AMERICAN
COMMUNITIES IN CHICAGOLAND**

Beyond Erasure and Profiling: Cultivating Strong and Vibrant Arab American Communities in Chicagoland

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Arab American Action Network (AAAN)

The Arab American Action Network is a grassroots, non-profit organization that serves to strengthen Arab American communities through organizing, advocacy, education and by providing social services. Established in 1995 out of the Arab Community Center, the AAAN has continued the legacy of providing social services and serving as a hub for the Palestinian and Arab American communities within Chicago. Based in the West Lawn neighborhood of Chicago and a satellite office in Palos Hills, AAAN offers a wide range of services to primarily low-income and working-class Arab immigrant and Arab American communities. Services include case management, youth organizing and programming, adult education, an Arab Women's committee, housing advocacy, and referrals.

Arab American Family Services (AAFS)

Established in 2001, Arab American Family Services is a non-profit social service agency based in Worth, Illinois, serving the diverse Arab communities throughout the south suburban Chicagoland area. AAFS is a non-political, non-religious organization that focuses on building respect and understanding between Arab Americans and the mainstream-American culture. Their safety net services include case management, community health and education, domestic violence prevention, immigration services, and programming for the elderly and youth. AAFS primarily supports Arab immigrants of diverse backgrounds throughout Chicagoland including Syrian refugees, and most recently, Afghan refugees.

Middle Eastern Immigrant and Refugee Alliance (MIRA)

Founded in 2009 as The Iraqi Mutual Aid Society, the Middle Eastern Immigrant and Refugee Alliance was established by newly arrived Iraqi refugees in the Chicagoland area to address obstacles the Iraqi community faced establishing their new lives in the United States. Located in the West Ridge neighborhood of Chicago, the primary clientele served includes refugees, immigrants, asylees, and Special Immigrant Visa holders. Since their founding, MIRA has served linguistically and culturally diverse

populations, most recently including arrivals from Syria, Afghanistan, and refugees and asylees from Southeast Asia and more. Case management, vocational empowerment programs, immigration and legal services, and English Language courses are some of the services they provide.

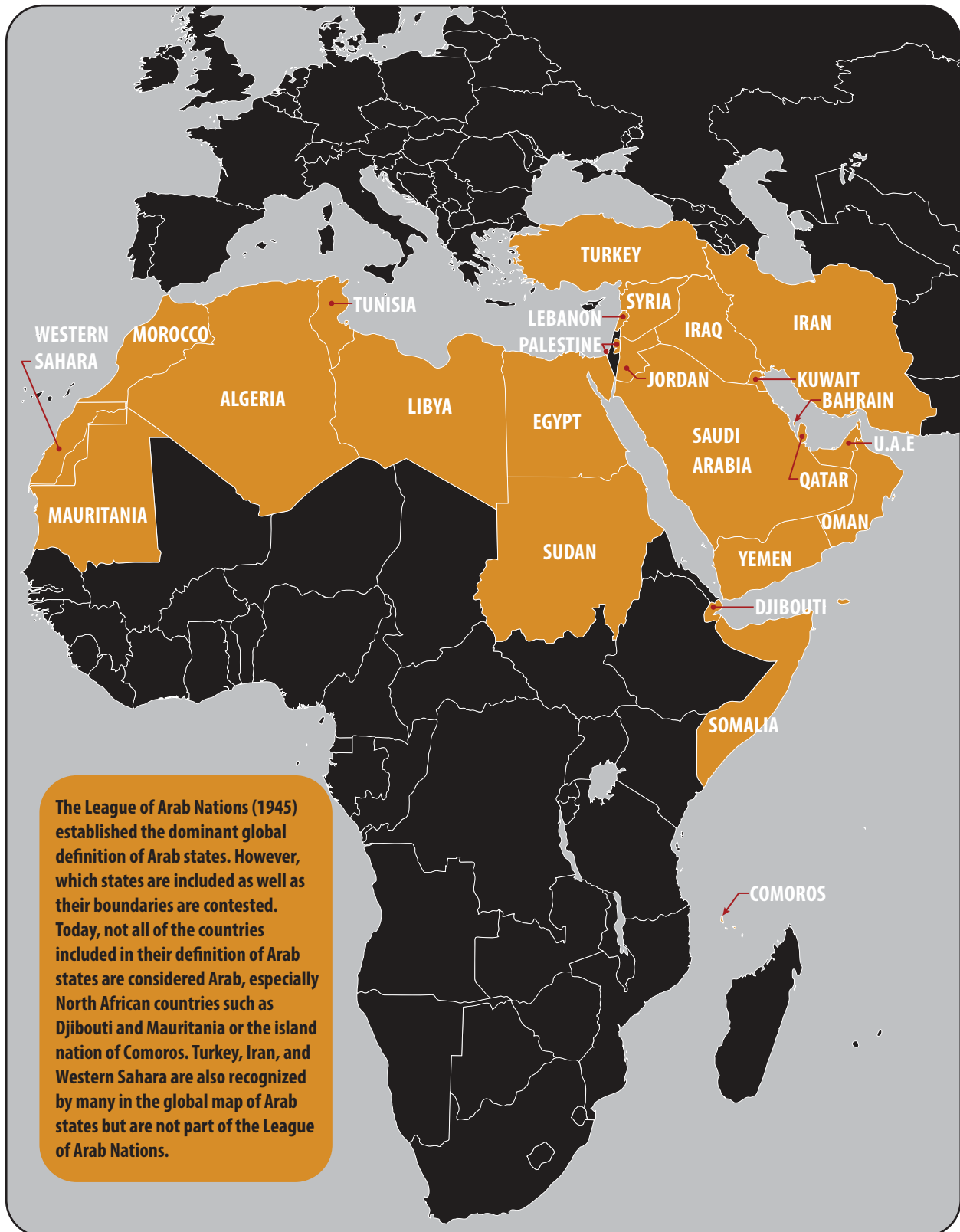
Sanad Social Services

Sanad Social Services is a social service agency that supports and addresses the issues and concerns of the Arab American community. The Sanad “Pay It Forward” Center is built around one very simple, yet very powerful idea: one by one, we can all change lives. SANAD provides a wide range of services for diverse, low-income individuals and families by offering assistance and empowerment through outreach programs, educational seminars, and training classes. SANAD social services is especially renowned for its food pantry.

Syrian Community Network (SCN)

The Syrian Community Network is a non-profit refugee and immigrant support organization established in response to one of the worst humanitarian refugee crises. SCN began their work in 2015 with the arrival of Syrian refugees to Chicago by providing newly arriving families with mentors to assist them in navigating their new community, language, and services. Since their start, SCN has expanded their services to include case management, free legal immigration services, adult and youth education, and advocacy work. Serving primarily Syrian refugees and immigrants, they are starting to expand services to all other refugees and immigrants in need.

MAP OF MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICAN COUNTRIES



The League of Arab Nations (1945) established the dominant global definition of Arab states. However, which states are included as well as their boundaries are contested. Today, not all of the countries included in their definition of Arab states are considered Arab, especially North African countries such as Djibouti and Mauritania or the island nation of Comoros. Turkey, Iran, and Western Sahara are also recognized by many in the global map of Arab states but are not part of the League of Arab Nations.

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INTRODUCTION

In this report, we examine the state of racial justice for Arab Americans who live in the Chicago Metropolitan Statistical Area, which we refer to colloquially as Chicagoland. Despite their myriad differences, some of which we will attend to in the report, there are important continuities in the conditions and experiences of Arab Americans in Chicago. Arab Americans come to the United States from the Arab countries of the Middle East and North Africa, countries that are themselves comprised of many racial and ethnic communities that have distinct histories and cultures. While not everyone in the Arab region identifies as “Arab,” we use the term Arab American as a shorthand to refer to the diverse immigrants, refugees, and their descendants who have come to the United States from Arab countries since the turn of the 20th century.

Understanding Arab American experiences and the status of racial justice for Arab Americans in Chicagoland requires that we confront the dual problems of invisibility and hypervisibility. The field of Arab American Studies uses the term “**Arab American invisibility**” to name our society’s limited knowledge of Arab American communities, of Middle East and North African history, and of the realities of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism and its implications more specifically.¹ The problem of invisibility for Arab Americans stems, in part, from the fact that the U.S. government and Census Bureau currently categorize Arab Americans as “white/Caucasian.” The inclusion of Arab Americans in the white racial category has caused them to be historically excluded from mainstream conversations about racism and also makes it very difficult to identify, much less measure quantitatively, the distinct patterns in experiences and outcomes for this group, rendering their lives and needs invisible. For instance, in the next section of the report we will analyze the current conditions of the approximately 108,000 Arab Americans who live in Chicagoland whom we can identify in the American Community Survey (see appendix for additional information). However, we recognize this number to likely be a significant undercount. The field of Arab American Studies has long necessarily drawn on census data as the best

“At my local gym, this guy who works for the Cook County supply chain management came by me and just cussed me out on the floor, and he says, “F-ing Arab.” I couldn’t believe what I’d heard. It’s a place where people work out. I confronted him after he left. He said the [F] word to me as he went on his way. I followed him, and he went on this tantrum about how Arabs are taking over the southwest suburbs and how mosques could be [places] where terrorists hide or spread their ideology. I reported it at the gym but they never did anything.”

– Samir, Jordanian immigrant man

“I was in one of the carnivals with the kids and [a white] woman was talking to me. She said, “You confuse me with your hijab the way you’re wearing it, one of you is wrapping it over your head, your neck showing. One of you covers their face. It’s not really for religious purposes,” she said. “I know you’re hiding bombs under there.”

– Abeer, Yemeni immigrant woman

“When I was younger, I didn’t know anything. It’s like, all right, you called me a terrorist? I’m still gonna go home, put on some cartoons, do homework, and go to sleep. Now I’m like, “damn, I could actually get jumped. If I go outside and wear a thobe [an ankle-length robe, usually with long sleeves], I could get jumped 'cause of that.” As I grew older, I kinda see how big it is now.”

– Hamza, Yemeni immigrant man

“I have racist neighbors who live on the third floor. They are older people. We’ve been harassed by them since I moved into the building three years ago. Now I have a restraining order against them. But they keep bothering me because I am a Muslim and I am Arab. On Tuesday, my daughter was alone in the house. They knocked on her door and they told her that she should move herself outside of this building and out of the USA.”

– Sumayya, Palestinian immigrant woman

way to track population trends while also recognizing that because of issues with sampling, categories and fear attached to the Census, the numbers are likely much lower than the actual population. Moreover, although there is substantial qualitative documentation of Arab American experiences with racism, the challenges related to regularly capturing racial inequities experienced by the Arab American population with quantitative data contributes to their being left out of conversations about racial equity in the United States.

In addition to the challenges in identifying Arab Americans in quantitative data, there is little in the way of educational curricula, national discourse, or social justice and diversity initiatives about Arab Americans. The result of Arab Americans being classified as white and the lack of education about Arab American communities is that, across nearly every sector of U.S. society, there is insufficient knowledge about, attention to, or resources and advocacy for policies that address the needs of the Arab American community. The lack of awareness about the depth and prevalence of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism and its significant impacts on the everyday lives of Arab Americans has myriad negative consequences.²

Although not all Arabs are Muslim and not all Muslims are Arabs, U.S. government and media discourses conflate the categories “Arab” and “Muslim.” We use the term anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism throughout the report to signal how the form of racism we address in this report often conflates Arab and Muslim communities. While we focus on how anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism impacts Arab Americans, it also impacts any individual or community who the U.S. state or media portrays as Arab and/or Muslim, or who is perceived as Arab and/or Muslim, albeit in different ways and to different degrees.

Another contributing factor to the lack of awareness about, and potential invisibility, of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism is the fact that many Arab Americans do not have a conceptual language of race or racism. Recent migrants are themselves coming to understand and recognize how race and racism work in the United States as they navigate how these categories and associated meaning systems are projected onto their bodies (along with those of others). The boundaries and rules of racial categorization as well as the logics of race and patterns of racism vary dramatically

across the world. Although this dynamic is shifting, historically race has not been a dominant framework of identity, social organization, or analysis in the Arab region. Instead, people have tended to identify primarily by religious sect, village, or family of origin, and later, by national identity and analysts studying social inequality or social problems have primarily focused on the intersections of these identities (e.g., nationality) and issues of social class, gender, solidarity, and power. Because race has not operated as a salient social category in the Arab region, Arab American immigrants do not come to the United States with a clear understanding of racial dynamics. For example, Aya, an Egyptian American Coptic woman, reflected a generalized sentiment that we heard in many of our interviews and focus groups when she told us, “[My family members] don’t have any kind of framework through which to understand themselves, particularly when it comes to race. The conversation on race within the Coptic Church is so limited in America.” Lacking a framework and language to discuss racialized dynamics, recent Arab American immigrants and refugees also have difficulty naming their own experiences with racial discrimination or recognizing parallels with other minoritized communities.

We witnessed the limited racial consciousness among recent Arab migrants ourselves while conducting research for this report. As part of our study, we worked with multiple Arab American community-based organizations to undertake a survey of Arab Americans in Chicagoland. When many of the 496 Arab American respondents who completed our survey answered questions about discrimination, their responses suggested limited instances of racial discrimination – this was particularly true for those not born in the United States. However, in every one of the twelve focus groups that we conducted with Arab Americans, participants in these in-depth discussions described repeated instances of racial profiling or racial discrimination and how these incidents occurred at all hours and everywhere, from grocery stores and classrooms to workplaces and airports.

These pervasive experiences of racial profiling point to the second major theme of this report, what the field of Arab American Studies calls **“Arab American hypervisibility.”**³ This refers to the fact that, while widespread knowledge about the histories and cultures of Arab Americans is limited, an entire industry has circulated

racist ideas about Arabs, Muslims, and Middle Easterners since the days of Western colonial expansion. Their erroneous ideas have become entrenched commonplace lenses through which members of American society tend to view Arab Americans.⁴

From journalism and academic texts to portrayals in popular culture and art galleries, dominant narratives about Arab Americans rely upon a narrow set of fictional categories and established stereotypes. The pervasive portrait of Arab Americans in U.S. society – whether in corporate media or in U.S. state discourses – tends to not only conflate Arab, Middle Eastern, and Muslim identities together but also to label Arab people as irredeemably foreign, “other,” or as an “enemy of the U.S.” The hypervisibility of Arab Americans includes not just a perception of them as *outsiders* but also includes the consequential perception of Arab Americans, Arabs, Muslims, and people from the Middle East and North Africa as likely to be *enemies* of the U.S. nation-state (e.g., “terrorists”).

Not all Arabs are Muslim, not all Middle Easterners are Arab or Muslim, and not all Muslims are Arab (in fact the majority are not); however, the long history of conflating these communities and of using the categories “Arab” and “Muslim” interchangeably or of using “Muslim” as a catch-all phrase to refer to anyone from the Middle East and North Africa means that we lose sight of what “Arab” means specifically and of the distinct and diverse experiences of Arab Americans.

There is a profound disconnect between these erroneous commonplace ideas which are rooted in misunderstandings and stereotypes about Arab Americans and the realities of who Arab Americans are. A central aim of this report is thus to map who Arab Americans in Chicagoland are, including their diverse histories and demographics, as well as to understand the conditions and experiences of this group, including how racial inequities and racial discrimination affect their lives.

While a contribution of the report is to increase knowledge about Arab Americans, we also seek to further the state of racial justice for Arab Americans by making the case for the adoption of a Middle Eastern/North African (MENA) category of identity and documentation in all institutions and sectors of society that collect demographic data in Chicagoland and Illinois. We contend that establishing a MENA category is an urgent remedy to the problems of invisibility and anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism that heavily obstruct the capacity of Arab Americans, especially working-class immigrants and refugees, to survive and thrive.

““

I grew up very strongly in a Coptic community that was very clear that we weren't Arab, and I happen to adhere to that. Not in an adversarial manner, but [...] in terms of how I identify myself, I very squarely consider myself African. I think it's a very important position to take because, just like I think Arab identity, in many ways, African identity has also been homogenized in various ways, but I think it shifts. I think there's a recognition there that an Africanness is also quite diverse. It's not singular in any manner. [...]. Almost every Egyptian I know, on some level, code-switches between being an Arab and being an African, depending on particular contexts, and I think that's fair.

””

– George, Egyptian American man

““

It's this multilayer thing that I'm Coptic, I'm Arab, I'm African. They're all dear to my heart in different degrees, but, of course, there is all those layers [...].

””

– Adam, Egyptian immigrant man

EGYPT

NOT EVERYONE FROM AN ARAB COUNTRY IDENTIFIES AS ARAB: CHICAGOLAND VOICES FROM THE COPTIC COMMUNITY

““

Growing up, [...] I was taught that I wasn't really Arab. I was Egyptian and Coptic [...]. As I got older, meeting more and more Arabs, I would say that I was Egyptian. They'd be like, "Oh, you're Arab." I'm like, "Oh, cool." Then I started taking on, or being more empowered to claim the word Arab.

””

– Aya, second generation Egyptian American woman

Summary of the Report

This report is organized into four parts. Part one presents an historical and statistical overview of Arab American communities. We begin with a summary of their varied histories and cultural, religious, and racial identities and experiences. We also present an overview of how the U.S. has racially classified Arab migrants. Finally, we draw on existing administrative data to illustrate the diversity of this group and how they are doing across a number of socioeconomic measures.

According to official U.S. Census data, over 100,000 Arab Americans reside in Chicagoland, constituting about 90% of all Arab Americans in Illinois. As explained previously, many scholars and community leaders believe that this number is a significant undercount.⁵ Since Arab Americans do not have a racial category of their own and instead are subsumed under the white racial category, Arabs can only be identified in the Census using the ancestry question, which was only asked of a sample of the U.S. population in past Decennial Censuses. Currently, the question is asked by the American Community Survey, which is based on a small sample of the U.S. population. The Arab American Institute and others have argued that these sampling and category issues have led to a sizable undercount of Arab Americans. The Arab American Institute, for example, estimates that the U.S. Census undercounts Arab Americans by 1.6 million and recommends multiplying Census population numbers by 1.5.

While Census data may undercount *how many* Arab Americans are in the U.S., they do provide reliable measures of demographic trends and socio-economic patterns and is important for what it tells us about differences between and across groups. For instance, census data reveal concerning socio-economic characteristics of Chicagoland Arab Americans including lower household median incomes, higher rates of unemployment, and higher rates of being housing-cost-burdened compared to Chicagoland residents overall. These data also remind us, however, of the diversity within Arab Americans. For instance, there is significant economic inequality *within* Arab American communities by ancestry group. Egyptians and Lebanese people, for example, have a much higher median household income relative to other Arab Americans, such as Yemenis.

Part two of the report provides an historical overview of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in the U.S. In this section, we explain how anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism has escalated

since the commencement of the long U.S.-led war on terror in the aftermath of the Cold War and how instances of racism that Arab Americans experience are part and parcel of this war on terror.

In part three of the report, we present findings from two different data collection efforts we conducted to better understand the social conditions and everyday experiences of Arab Americans in Chicagoland. While we used U.S. Census data in part one to offer a picture of some of the broad demographic and socio-economic patterns that characterize Arab Americans, due to the data limitations discussed earlier concerning how Arab Americans are counted and categorized, we collected new data on the Chicagoland Arab American community via two additional methodologies. We used survey research to access the perspectives, conditions, and experiences of community members across the metro area. For this, we partnered with community organizations to develop accessible strategies for reaching their constituents.

We also conducted twelve focus groups with diverse Arab American residents to qualitatively explore how they understand and make sense of their experiences.⁶ The focus group data collection effort helped us to address possible limitations in other sources of data. As we addressed earlier, in these conversations we were able to explore participants' experiences with a wide-range of microaggressions, profiling, discrimination, and other forms of interpersonal or institutional hostility that might not show up in a typical survey question about racial discrimination given participants' different familiarity with "race" as a category. These conversations were also especially useful as immigrants tend to be more comfortable with oral narrative practices than written practices because of a collective sense of fear related to filling out forms and surveys in the U.S. due to the high level of (unwarranted) government surveillance of these communities. During the focus groups, participants told story after story of being marked as racially other; discriminated against in daily life; and having to navigate forms of surveillance, violence, and hostility. Part three thus outlines how anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism hinders possibilities for civic participation among Arab Americans and limits their capacity to live with safety, dignity, and belonging in Chicagoland.

In part four, we conclude by advocating for the importance of the creation and implementation of a MENA category in order not only to obtain accurate data about

Arab American communities but also to be able to address community needs and to advance racial justice. Adding a MENA classification to all public and private sector forms and databases would provide crucial data for policy makers, advocates, and institutions to use in informing public policies and resource distribution for Arab American communities that can address the economic disparities and racial inequities that working-class immigrant and refugee Arab Americans and their communities face. Instituting a MENA category is the major policy recommendation that emerged out of our research and collaboration with community-based organizations and researchers working with Chicagoland's Arab Americans. This should be implemented in all public institutions (educational, economic, health, legal, judicial, law enforcement, social and human services, employment agencies, etc.) and also be a requirement for all entities that receive state support in any form.

Although we made every attempt to uncover and analyze as many data sources as possible, the information in this report presents only a partial picture of the lives of Arab Americans in Chicagoland. There are many areas of social and economic life we lack data on or were unable to investigate in our focus groups and surveys. In addition to policy recommendations, part four is therefore also a call to academics, journalists, and media makers for greater research and attention to the rich and diverse lived experiences of Arab Americans in the U.S.

Throughout the report, we also include nine expert commentaries written by academics and community-based organizers that provide a deeper examination of key issues affecting Arab American communities in Chicagoland or that offer further insights into the everyday experiences of particular groups. Some expert commentaries focus on communities whose experiences have remained invisible and unaddressed by scholars and activists, such as Coptic Egyptian Christians and Sudanese migrants. Others cover urgent current issues that required exceptional attention such as the effects of COVID-19; mental health; surveillance; and anti-Palestinian racism. The remaining expert commentaries focus on communities facing urgent crises: Iraqi refugees, Syrian refugees, and Yemeni migrants.

Who are Arab Americans?

We use the term Arab American as a shorthand to refer to the immigrants who have come to the U.S. and their descendants from the Arabic-speaking countries of the Middle East and North Africa. Arab American ethnic groups in Chicago originate from over 20 different countries, each with their own internal dynamics and important differences that have shaped the experiences of immigrants and their descendants in the U.S. Although we use Arab American as shorthand throughout the report, it is important to recognize that the term “Arab” is a nationalist term and, if taken at face value, can erase the diversity within Arab American communities.

Coptic Egyptians provide just one example of why it is so important to take the diversity of Arab Americans seriously. Coptic Egyptians do not always identify as Arabs and often insist upon being seen and understood in terms of their distinct histories as indigenous people of Egypt whose culture and identity emerged long before the rise and spread of Islam in Egypt in the 7th century, which shaped the conditions through which Egypt emerged as an Arab nation-state in the late 20th century. The stories Egyptian interviewees shared affirm that no identity, Arab American or otherwise, is fixed and that not everyone from the countries internationally recognized as “Arab” identifies themselves as Arab. Arabs have a wide range of religious faiths and there are significant cultural, racial, ethnic, economic, educational, and employment differences among people from the Arab region living in the U.S.

This report uses the term “Arab American” whether or not everyone included within that shorthand self-identifies as “Arab.” We use the term Arab American to capture patterns people from the Arab region face with the intention of simultaneously affirming, rather than erasing, the diversity of these communities.

The Egyptian Coptic Community

by Fr. Morcos Daoud Rizk and Matthew Shenoda



Fr. Morcos Daoud Rizk served as a Priest at St. George Coptic Orthodox Church, Sporting, in Alexandria, Egypt, for 15 years before serving in the same role for 9 years at St. Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church in Palatine, Illinois. During that time, he earned an MA in Theological Studies from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. One of the main emphases during his studies was on how cultural diversity (mainly Coptic/Egyptian/Arabic/American) can impact the pastoral ministry of several generations of Copts who emigrated to the U.S. Fr. Morcos moved back to serve at his former church in Alexandria, Egypt.



Matthew Shenoda is a writer, professor, and author and editor of several books. His debut collection of poems, *Somewhere Else* (Coffee House Press) was named one of 2005's debut books of the year by *Poets & Writers Magazine* and was winner of a 2006 American Book Award. He began his teaching career in the College of Ethnic Studies at San Francisco State University where he taught for nearly a decade and is currently Professor and Chair of the Department of Literary Arts at Brown University.

The Coptic community in Chicago emerged in the 1960s, with members viewing the church as a safe haven from the religious persecution they faced back home in Egypt. Many Copts migrated to Chicago and elsewhere to escape the religious discrimination they were subjected to in their homeland. In addition to Chicago, large Coptic communities have also emerged in coastal states such as Florida, California, New York, and New Jersey. While similar in their origins, most of Chicago's Coptic community has become more assimilated to mainstream American culture than their coastal counterparts. Several structural factors have contributed to this pattern, including slow rates of population growth and the lack of an established enclave with Copt-owned businesses in the city. Moreover, many first-generation Copts have worked in professional, white-collar settings where English is the only language used.

Of course, there are working-class Copts in Chicagoland whose experiences differ from their middle-and upper-class counterparts. Socio-economic differences, for example, influence whether and to what extent Coptic Egyptians identify with white middle-class culture. However, despite the immersion of many Copts in Chicago into mainstream U.S. culture, Copts in Chicago – like Copts all over the U.S. – struggle in understanding and identifying with the concept of race in the U.S.

The notion of race is virtually absent in Egypt. Egyptians encompass a variety of phenotypic characteristics, but overall are considered "Egyptians." Egyptians are not systemically categorized based on their skin color and other phenotypic characteristics. Instead, class and religion are the primary identity markers. Christianity and Islam are the country's most widely practiced religions.

In Chicago (and the U.S. generally), first generation Copts were shocked to learn that they are racially categorized as “white.” Contrary to this label, few Copts have truly experienced or developed a sense of whiteness. Copts tend to have darker skin and are often mistakenly confused for Muslims in non-Coptic settings. For example, in being mistakenly identified and treated as Muslims, many Copts have been subjected to intense surveillance, harassment, and detention in public settings, especially in airports.

This conflation between Islam and Egyptian identity is complicated for Copts, especially because of the ways contemporary political crises in Egypt have led to increased tensions between Copts and particular Muslim political movements that have, in some cases, led to anti-Coptic discrimination and violence. These tensions are also complicated, especially since they have been fueled by U.S. interventions in Egypt and the ways various Egyptian regimes have fueled Christian-Muslim divisions for their own purposes. For many Copts, the conflation between Islam and Egyptian identity demonstrates an ignorance in the U.S. about the presence of Christianity in Arab countries. This ignorance writ large, then, often puts Copts in a very defensive position when they are mistaken for Muslims or when people are surprised to know that Egyptian Christians exist. Copts tend to share a common understanding that their identity as Christians is unknown to and disregarded by others. Being Christian is a major component of their identity, yet it is virtually nonexistent in the minds of others. Later Coptic generations, however, tend to share a commitment to challenging Coptic-Muslim tensions and divisions and to being in solidarity with Muslims in relation to anti-Muslim racism in the U.S.

Similar to other immigrant groups in the U.S., there are significant differences in the experiences, attitudes, values, and beliefs of first and later Coptic generations. Second- and third-generation Copts in Chicago have been born and raised in American society. They have not been exposed to the realities of the persecution targeting Copts in Egypt. Younger generations have been educated and socialized to understand the experience of Muslims through a Eurocentric lens wherein Islam is the subordinate and persecuted religion. Because of this, Coptic youth tend to misinterpret their elders’ defensiveness as racism/Islamophobia, rather than a resistance to being conflated with a group that has, and continues to, contribute to their oppression. Such differences in the lived experiences of older and younger generations of Copts has also led to a tension in which older generations seek to retain their Coptic identity, values, and beliefs as newer generations become more assimilated into various strands of U.S. culture.

The traditional Coptic identity is completely and totally intertwined with their religious identity, as faith and spiritual beliefs are central to their way of life. Younger Coptic generations have been socialized into U.S. society and, as such, religion is not as influential in shaping their sense of self, life chances, and opportunities as it was for older generations. As Egyptian-American Copts, younger generations have begun decentering traditional Coptic spiritual practices and beliefs from their daily lives. This tension has sparked conversations in the community regarding how Copts in America can retain their identity without its religious markers.

Another internal conflict within the Coptic community is the complicated relationship between Arab identity and Arabic language use. Many older generation Copts that left Egypt do not identify as Arab. Despite Arabic being their native language, older Copts often view the label "Arab" as a monolithic identity that merges all Middle Eastern and North African ethnic groups together, minimizing both their religious identity and their diverse linguistic roots as they were forced to adopt the Arabic language through colonization centuries ago. It is for this reason that many Coptic churches maintain some use of the Coptic language as a link to their pre-Arabized identity. Some second- and third-generation Copts, however, have become open to embracing a pan-Arab identity as younger generations become more socially and politically conscious about how U.S. identity is framed. Young Copts are learning and incorporating the Arabic language into their everyday lives and developing more of a global consciousness about their Egyptian identity as they navigate U.S. institutions.

While younger generations have developed a global perspective, first-generation Copts have lived experiences navigating between the U.S. and Egypt. Egypt itself is a complicated context to navigate for Copts. Back home, they are subjected to direct and often violent religious persecution fueled by interventions in the region by the U.S. and some Gulf states. In the U.S., they are subjected to a different type of discrimination, which tends to be more covert and less life-threatening. Despite being more accustomed to mainstream American culture, Copts in Chicago continue to be deeply attached to and influenced by their homeland. Many internally struggle with wishing to return to Egypt to live but knowing that they cannot do so unless true changes come about. Compared to Egypt, the discrimination Copts are subjected to in the U.S. is not as direct nor severe. Copts know that they will experience discrimination no matter where they go, so they take the lesser of two evils and navigate the complexities of Coptic life in the U.S.

Arab Migration to the U.S.

The experiences of Arab immigrants coming to the United States have varied significantly before and after World War II. Shifting immigration policies and global engagements led to distinct demographics trends. Especially post-1965, changes in U.S. immigration policies and post-Cold War U.S. military, economic, and political intervention in the Arab region profoundly changed Arab migration patterns and demographics.

The first large influx of Arab immigrants included predominantly Christian groups from Mount Lebanon at the turn of the twentieth century. They came to the U.S. from what was considered Greater Syria (present-day Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine).⁷ These immigrants tended to leave their homelands out of economic necessity and for personal advancement. Their existing ties with European Christian missionaries and/or business networks enabled their emigration. Arab Muslim immigrants, while smaller in number, often took alternate routes since the U.S. restricted their immigration more than Arab Christians. Some for example, journeyed through Mexico and crossed over the U.S. southern border.⁸

Immediately after World War II, a majority of the Arabs who moved to the U.S. were Palestinian refugees displaced following the creation of the state of Israel in 1948.⁹ The 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act opened borders in new ways and made it possible for a wider array of migrants. From the late 1960s to the present, growing economic instability in the region alongside U.S.-led oil wars and military interventions resulted in the movement of broader sectors of Arab societies to the United States. New migrants came from nearly every Arabic-speaking country and included nearly equal numbers of Muslims and Christians.¹⁰

More recently, U.S.-led wars, internal armed conflicts, and popular uprisings during the first two decades of the 21st century brought large numbers of displaced people and refugees to the United States. Examples include the U.S.' war on Iraq (2003-2011); popular uprisings such as the second Palestinian *Intifada* (Uprising) (2000 to 2005); the Arab Spring revolutions that began in 2011; the protracted civil war and armed conflicts in Sudan and Somalia that have ensued since the 1980s; and Syria's ongoing civil war. These and other realities have all driven large numbers of displaced and refugee Arabs to the United States.¹¹

NUMBERS THAT COUNT

Composition of the Arab American Population in the U.S., 1990 to 2020

	1990		2000		2010		2020	
Egyptian	78,574	(8.46%)	142,832	(10.69%)	179,853	(10.31%)	278,498	(11.68%)
Iraqi	23,212	(2.50%)	37,714	(2.82%)	73,896	(4.23%)	153,964	(6.46%)
Jordanian	20,656	(2.22%)	39,734	(2.97%)	60,056	(3.44%)	88,528	(3.71%)
Lebanese	394,180	(42.45%)	440,279	(32.94%)	485,917	(27.85%)	507,900	(21.29%)
Moroccan	19,089	(2.06%)	38,923	(2.91%)	74,908	(4.29%)	120,402	(5.05%)
Palestinian	48,019	(5.17%)	72,112	(5.40%)	83,241	(4.77%)	136,869	(5.74%)
Syrian	129,606	(13.96%)	142,897	(10.69%)	147,426	(8.45%)	184,938	(7.75%)
Arab	127,364	(13.72%)	205,822	(15.40%)	259,644	(14.88%)	263,373	(11.04%)
Other Arab	30,038	(3.24%)	82,558	(6.18%)	181,522	(10.40%)	387,151	(16.23%)
Assyrian/Chaldean /Syriac	51,765	(5.58%)	82,355	(6.16%)	88,951	(5.10%)	100,649	(4.22%)
Somali	2,357	(0.25%)	36,313	(2.72%)	100,011	(5.73%)	159,595	(6.69%)
Sudanese	3,630	(0.39%)	14,936	(1.12%)	38,380	(2.20%)	68,308	(2.86%)
Total	928,490		1,336,475		1,745,006		2,385,146	

Source: Decennial Census 1990 & 2000, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2006-2010 & 2016-2020

Rising unemployment as a result of global economic forces over the past two decades has also caused people from the Arab region to seek employment and educational opportunities in the U.S.¹² Tunisian migration, for instance, increased by 8 percent between 2002 and 2012.¹³ Recent Tunisian migration has included more high-skilled workers and university graduates than before. Student migration also has increased because of the post-revolution crises in Tunisia and the 2008 global economic crisis. Saudi Arabia represents a unique context since the population of Saudis in the U.S. came primarily out of opportunities for Saudi students to study in the U.S. and obtain a university education.¹⁴ While the number of Saudi students studying in the U.S. ebbs and flows in relation to government policies, including conservative Saudi efforts to obstruct Saudi students from studying in non-Muslim nations,¹⁵ the post-2010 period saw a spike in Saudi student migration, making them the fastest growing group of international university students, even ahead of China.¹⁶

NUMBERS THAT COUNT

Arab American Population, U.S., Chicagoland, Cook County, and Chicago, 1990 to 2020

	U.S.	Chicagoland	Cook County	Chicago
1990	928,490	43,894	36,193	21,978
2000	1,336,475	63,240	49,700	22,431
2010	1,745,006	82,900	61,717	22,175
2020	2,385,146	108,340	80,838	30,462
Raw change	+1,456,656	+64,446	+44,645	+8,484
% Change	156.88%	146.82%	123.35%	38.60%

Source: Decennial Census 1990 & 2000, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2006-2010 & 2016-2020

The transnational nature of Arab immigrant communities is another factor that centrally shapes Arab immigrant experiences. Many individuals belong to families with members living across borders. Moroccan businesses in the U.S., for instance, tend to rely upon ties with Morocco, and many Moroccan American families include members in the U.S. and Morocco simultaneously.

Over the past 30 years, the Arab American population in the United States has grown both in number and diversity. Data from the U.S. Census suggest that there are approximately 2.4 million Arab Americans living in the U.S. with family roots from more than two dozen countries in the Middle East and North Africa. (See the Methodological Appendix for a detailed table of Arab Americans included in this report.) While Arab Americans make up only around 1% of the total U.S. population, the Arab American population has almost tripled since the 1990s, increasing by nearly 1.5 million residents. And, as noted in the introduction, population estimates from the U.S. Census are likely underestimates of Arab Americans living in the U.S. The Arab American Institute Foundation calculated the total 2017 Arab American population at 3.7 million, nearly 1.6 million more than the 2017 Census population estimate.

In the beginning of the 21st century, more and more immigrants have come to the U.S. from contexts further devastated by global economic neoliberalism and war. At

the same time, some have come to the U.S. from countries that have flourished. It is crucial to recognize that the Middle East region at large is the most “unequal region in the world [...]. The top 10 percent of its people account for 64 percent of its wealth” while two-thirds of the Arab population is classified as poor or vulnerable.¹⁷ Thus, the immigrant population post-1965 has been consistently socioeconomically “bimodal” – comprising larger numbers of immigrants at either end of the socioeconomic spectrum (e.g., large numbers of well-off professionals and entrepreneurs *and* many unskilled and semiskilled laborers and refugees fleeing wars backed by the U.S.). Recognizing the vast differences in both why immigrants are coming along with the conditions they are coming from is crucial for understanding the realities of Arab immigrants to the U.S. and to Chicago.

U.S. Government Racial Classification of Arab Americans

Over the long arc of Arab American immigration, their exact location within U.S. racial logics has been highly contested. While for the most part legally classified as white, they were, like other groups at different times, framed often as racially inferior whites or not-quite-white enough for full inclusion. For example, during the first period of Arab migration in the late 1800’s from what was then the Ottoman provinces of Syria, Mount Lebanon, and Palestine, immigration and naturalization policies used pseudo-scientific “racial” categories to sort immigrants hierarchically and determine their eligibility for citizenship.¹⁸ The U.S. classified Arabs as originating from “Turkey in Asia.” By the turn of the twentieth century, they were referred to as “Syrian.”¹⁹ In 1909, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization first cracked down on the eligibility of Syrians for citizenship, calling into question whether and to what extent their birthplace and racial appearance qualified them as white or whether they should be classified as Asian and therefore as ineligible for citizenship.²⁰ Racist anti-Arab/anti-Muslim immigrant rhetoric was commonplace in both the public and political spheres as exemplified by the words of a southern politician who labeled the Syrians “the spawn of the Phoenician curse.”²¹ Official policy referred to Syrians as members of a “questionable racial stock.”²²

A South Carolina court case exemplifies the ambiguous racial position of Arab Americans in the early 20th century. As author Helen Samhan documents, in this court case a judge ruled that “Syrians might be free white persons, [but] not that particular

free white person to whom the act of congress had donated 'privilege of citizenship' in 1790 – a privilege he ruled was intended for persons of European descent."²³ Thus, early racial classification of Arab immigrants under immigration law incited debates about whether Arabs were white, Turkish, Semites, and/or Asian and therefore subject to the Asiatic exclusion laws and whether their Christianity or their origins in the "near east" should privilege them over other Asians. While some Arab immigrants were granted the privileges accorded to white racial classification, it is not clear whether or not immigration officials deemed applicants as non-white if they were primarily Muslim and/or from the Arabic speaking regions of North Africa or the Persian Gulf.

Although some Arab immigrants were perceived as having a "proximity to whiteness," the U.S. tended to deem early Arab immigrants as white while simultaneously Othering them as "clannish and alien," "culturally unassimilable," as "a Mongolian plasma," or as "parasites" and a "drain on the American economy."²⁴ Legal classification as white in immigration law thus did not prevent the racialization of Arab immigrants as threats to U.S. society.

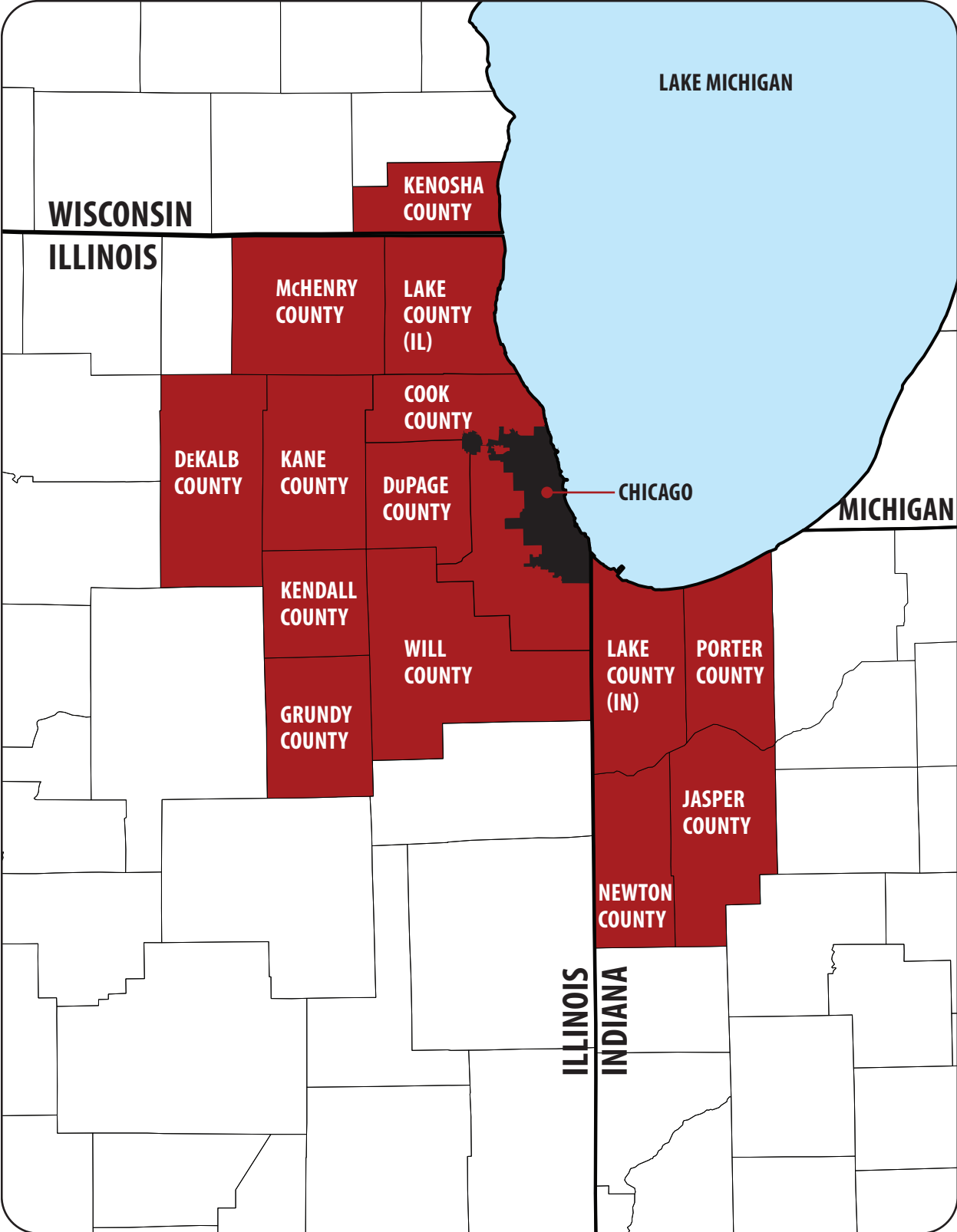
By World War II, the U.S. Census officially classified Arabs as white. However, as in the past, that classification was tenuous, did not translate into full inclusion within the American polity, and eventually served to erase or make invisible the many ways that Arab Americans were treated as a distinctly racial "Other." U.S. government policies surveilling and repressing Arab activists and corporate media discourses increasingly treated Arabs abroad and at home as non-white enemies of the nation.²⁵ This was especially pronounced in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, when the U.S. solidified its alliance with Israel and was expanding its interests in the Arab region.

Arab Migration to Chicago and Chicagoland ²⁶

U.S. Census data show that the Chicago Metropolitan Statistical Area – or Chicagoland – is a major population center for Arab Americans nationally and in the state of Illinois. The vast majority of Arab Americans in Illinois live in the Chicagoland area and Chicagoland has the 5th largest Arab American population in the U.S.²⁷

Arab migration to Chicago echoes the national Arab American migration story. The first substantial number of Arab migrants to Chicago came between 1899 and 1921. The early Arab migrant communities mainly arrived from present day Lebanon,

CHICAGO-NAPERVILLE, IL-IN-WI METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREA MAP



NUMBERS THAT COUNT

Composition of the Arab American Population in Chicagoland, 1990 to 2020

	1990		2000		2010		2020	
Egyptian	2,218	(5.05%)	3,338	(5.28%)	4,769	(5.75%)	8,209	(7.58%)
Iraqi	1,536	(3.50%)	1,848	(2.92%)	3,995	(4.82%)	6,312	(5.83%)
Jordanian	1,735	(3.95%)	3,931	(6.22%)	4,658	(5.62%)	10,164	(9.38%)
Lebanese	5,610	(12.78%)	7,331	(11.59%)	8,468	(10.21%)	8,977	(8.29%)
Moroccan	546	(1.24%)	1,341	(2.12%)	2,642	(3.19%)	3,611	(3.33%)
Palestinian	5,312	(12.10%)	7,052	(11.15%)	10,052	(12.13%)	17,081	(15.77%)
Syrian	2,490	(5.67%)	3,663	(5.79%)	4,117	(4.97%)	7,813	(7.21%)
Arab	9,945	(22.66%)	16,359	(25.87%)	19,014	(22.94%)	14,828	(13.69%)
Other Arab	507	(1.16%)	2,228	(3.52%)	8,043	(9.70%)	17,020	(15.71%)
Assyrian/Chaldean /Syriac	13,888	(31.64%)	15,683	(24.80%)	17,127	(20.66%)	14,917	(13.77%)
Somali	12	(0.03%)	310	(0.49%)	784	(0.95%)	1,177	(1.09%)
Sudanese	95	(0.22%)	156	(0.25%)	560	(0.68%)	1,825	(1.68%)
Total	43,894		63,240		82,900		108,340	

Source: Decennial Census 1990 & 2000, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2006-2010 & 2016-2020

Palestine, and Syria. Most were Syrian-Lebanese Christians, Palestinian Muslims, and a smaller number of Palestinian Christians. Syrian-Lebanese Christians frequently brought their families to the U.S. The first-generation born here often married and had children with persons from white ethnic groups. Unlike Syrian-Lebanese Christians, Palestinian Muslims were comprised almost entirely of men who tended to stay in the U.S. temporarily. Hailing predominantly from Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Ramallah, they often worked to send savings back home to their wives and family, hoping to return to their homelands. They stuck to their own language, cultural, and Islamic practices, and thus did not aspire to assimilate.

Syrian and Lebanese migrants successfully worked as traders and shopkeepers. Most Palestinian migrants also worked in these same occupations. Many worked as urban peddlers and opened grocery and dry good stores in predominantly newer Black communities throughout Chicago's Black Belt. Through their extensive trading and small business ownership, Palestinian Muslims held a "middleman minority"

status as shopkeepers in these neighborhoods, where they navigated between the dominant white suppliers and Black consumers, not being members of either group.

In the aftermath of World War II, Palestinian migration to the U.S. escalated with a significant portion being women joining their husbands. The establishment of Israel on Palestinian lands and Israeli forced removal and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians also contributed to the increase in new arrivals, including of Palestinian Christians. Assyrian, Iraqi, and Jordanian migrants also arrived during this time, settling on the north side of Chicago. Unlike many other Arab groups, Egyptian migration to the U.S. started in the 1950s. Egyptians tended to come from more affluent and educated families and arrived on high-skill visas. With the exception of Jordanians and most Palestinians, all of these groups settled on the north side of Chicago.

When the Immigration Act of 1965 removed specific immigration quotas, Chicago witnessed a surge in Arab immigration, especially of Palestinians and Jordanians (many of whom were Palestinian). Many arrived under family reunification visas. The steady influx of Palestinians into Chicago continued through the 1980s due to discriminatory Israeli policies, illegal land grabs, and the continuing occupation of Palestinian lands. Palestinians would eventually become the largest Arab group in metropolitan Chicago, and Chicagoland would become home to one of the most concentrated Palestinian communities in the U.S. During this era, activists in Chicago and other urban communities began creating pan-Arab community centers and academic and community-based organizations partnered to challenge widespread racist portrayals of Arabs and the Middle East.

Palestinian families eventually moved into neighborhoods west of Chicago's Black Belt that were being deserted by white flight from the city. By the 1970s, they reached the Gage Park and Chicago Lawn neighborhoods where they were joined by additional Palestinian families along with Black families and immigrants from Poland, Mexico, and Jordan. As for north side communities, Arabs and Assyrians lived in Albany Park and West Rogers Park neighborhoods. The Arab and Assyrian commercial business hub in Albany Park was, and still is, located on Kedzie Avenue between Montrose and north of Lawrence Avenue, along with Assyrian businesses in the near north suburbs.

Chicago's newly arriving Palestinian immigrant community relied upon previous immigrants and others within their social network to survive. Oftentimes, Palestinian immigrant shopkeepers employed new immigrants, including family members, to

NUMBERS THAT COUNT

Composition of the Arab American Population in Chicago, 1990 to 2020

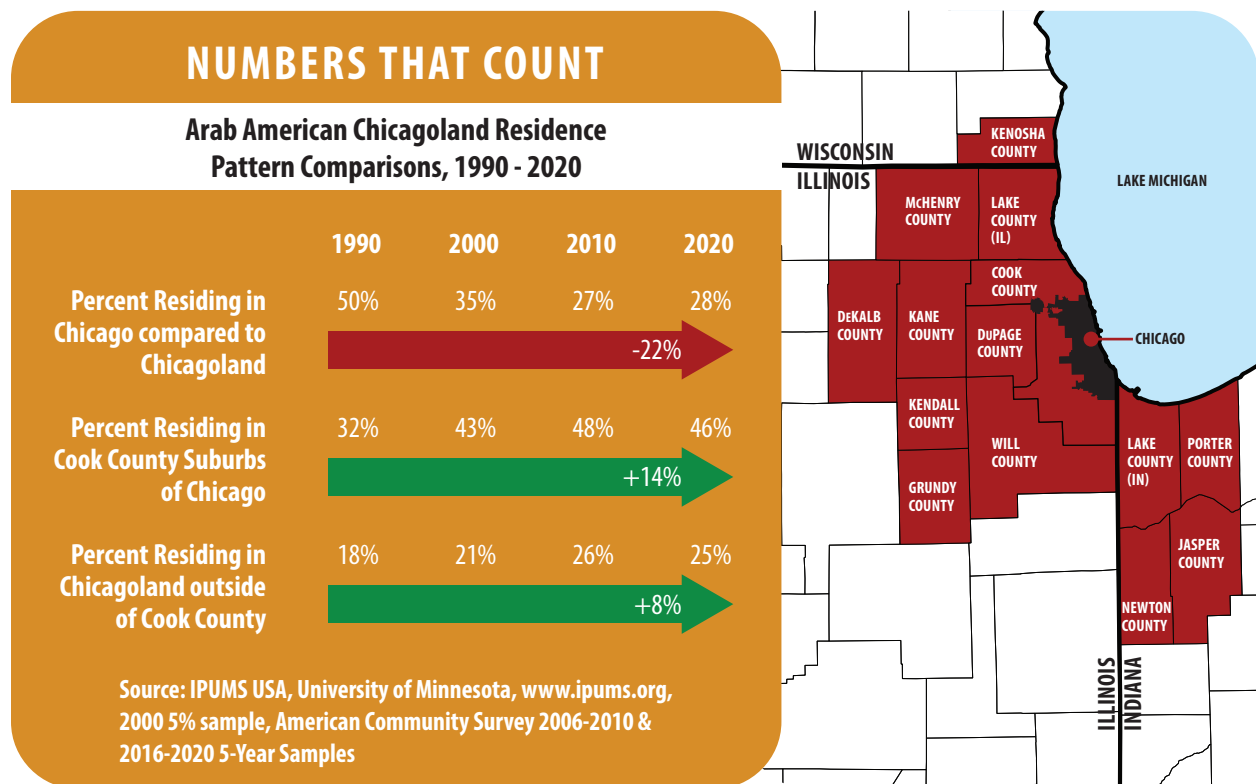
	1990		2000		2010		2020	
Egyptian	516	(2.35%)	556	(2.48%)	1,010	(4.55%)	1,817	(5.96%)
Iraqi	914	(4.16%)	931	(4.15%)	1,592	(7.18%)	2,207	(7.25%)
Jordanian	752	(3.42%)	1,078	(4.81%)	948	(4.28%)	2,417	(7.93%)
Lebanese	1,745	(7.94%)	2,027	(9.04%)	1,936	(8.73%)	3,417	(11.22%)
Moroccan	268	(1.22%)	733	(3.27%)	1,014	(4.57%)	1,760	(5.78%)
Palestinian	2,879	(13.10%)	2,052	(9.15%)	2,219	(10.01%)	1,905	(6.25%)
Syrian	591	(2.69%)	1,124	(5.01%)	1,029	(4.64%)	2,513	(8.25%)
Arab	5,449	(24.79%)	5,458	(24.33%)	4,311	(19.44%)	4,245	(13.94%)
Other Arab	163	(0.74%)	1,012	(4.51%)	2,874	(12.96%)	6,242	(20.49%)
Assyrian/Chaldean /Syriac	8,594	(39.10%)	7,121	(31.75%)	4,638	(20.92%)	3,528	(11.58%)
Somali	12	(0.05%)	222	(0.99%)	637	(2.87%)	839	(2.75%)
Sudanese	95	(0.43%)	117	(0.52%)	225	(1.01%)	424	(1.39%)
Total	21,978		22,431		22,175		30,462	

Source: Decennial Census 1990 & 2000, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2006-2010 & 2016-2020

work in their shops. These positions included long hours with minimal training, and individuals often learned English on the job. Many men, in turn, eventually became business owners or held higher positions as employees and employed newer arrivals, providing a cyclical and inexpensive labor force for shopkeepers. By the 1970s, although Arabs were only about 1 percent, or 30,000 of Chicago’s population, they owned nearly 20 percent of all small grocery and liquor stores in Chicago, mostly in Black neighborhoods. These Arab-owned establishments filled the gaps that were left by merchant divestment in Black communities and the unwillingness of professional lenders to provide business loans to Black investors in these neighborhoods. Arab business owners accessed personal loans through family or community members and had a cheap labor force willing to work long hours without benefits. A smaller number of Arab immigrants also worked in local factories, finding positions that did not require mastery of the English language or specific job skills but had low wages, no health care benefits, and often involved lengthy hours and dangerous working conditions.

The continual growth of community owned small businesses and an increase in migration led to the foundation of a greater Arab owned business area that extended from Kedzie to Pulaski Avenues on 63rd street and from 55th to 87th on South Pulaski road until the mid-1980s. This enclave of development, once the heart of the community, was home to Arab owned businesses, grocers, beauty salons, medical practices, realtors, lawyers, and many more professional businesses. Starting in the mid-1980s, many middle-class Palestinians whose wealth had increased followed the earlier trajectory of white flight and moved further into southwest suburbs such as Oak Lawn, Burbank, Bridgeview, and Orland Park. By the early 1990s, this suburban migration of wealthier families created a stark difference between those who had fled the city and the Arab communities remaining on the southwest side. The more affluent families in the southwestern suburbs shifted the social and economic strength of Arab American communities to areas outside of the city. However, only ten years later, few Palestinian families remained on Chicago’s southwest side and the movement to the southwest suburbs was nearly complete.

The vast majority (75%) of Arab Americans in Chicagoland reside in Cook County. However, since the 1990s, the Arab American population residing in the Cook



NUMBERS THAT COUNT

Composition of New Chicagoland Arab American Population Growth by Decade, 1990-2020

	1990 - 2000	2000 - 2010	2010 - 2020
Egyptian	5.8%	7.3%	13.5%
Iraqi	1.6%	10.9%	9.1%
Jordanian	11.4%	3.7%	21.6%
Lebanese	8.9%	5.8%	2.0%
Moroccan	4.1%	6.6%	3.8%
Palestinian	9.0%	15.3%	27.6%
Syrian	6.1%	2.3%	14.5%
Arab	33.2%	13.5%	-16.5%
Other Arab	8.9%	29.6%	35.3%
Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac	9.3%	7.3%	-8.7%
Somali	1.5%	2.4%	1.5%
Sudanese	0.3%	2.1%	5.0%
Change	+19,346	+19,660	+25,440

Source: Decennial Census 1990 & 2000, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2006-2010 & 2016-2020

County suburbs (west, southwest, and south) grew by over thirty-six thousand, a 3.5-fold increase versus a growth of about eight thousand in the City of Chicago, which housed just over half of the Arab American population before 1990.²⁸

Chicagoland is home to the second largest Palestinian population, Jordanian population, and Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac population (this is the label used by the Census Bureau though in Chicago this is mostly Assyrians) in the United States. Fifteen percent of

the U.S. Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac population, 12% of the U.S. Palestinian population, and 11% of the U.S. Jordanian population reside in Chicagoland (as compared to 5% of the total Arab American population). Mirroring what we see nationally, the Arab American population in Chicagoland has grown in both size and diversity over the past 30 years. In 1990, the three largest Arab American ancestry groups (Assyrians, Arab, and Lebanese) made up 67% of Chicagoland's Arab American population. It is important to note that an in-depth examination of Census data found that most of the persons answering "Arab" to the ancestry question were Palestinians and that a large proportion of Jordanians are actually Palestinians. In 2020, these groups made up about 36% of Chicagoland's Arab American population.²⁹ Other Arab Americans, which includes people with ancestral roots in the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa, saw the largest growth, followed by Palestinians and Jordanians.³⁰

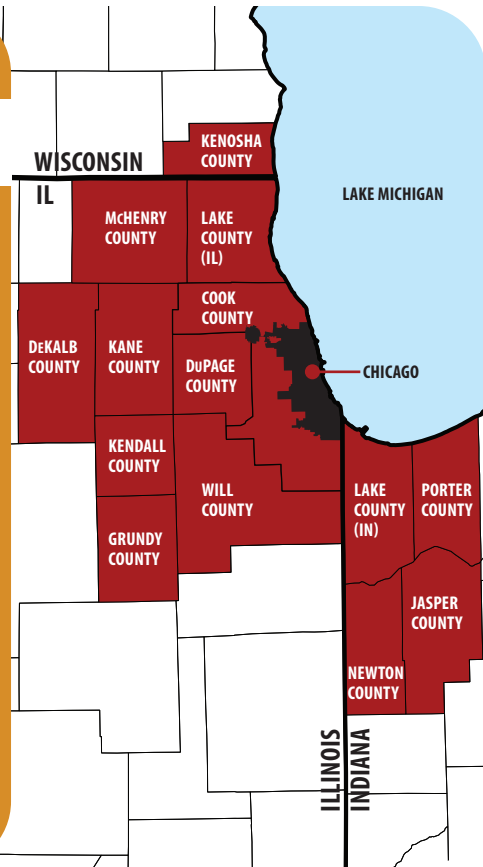
The 2000s was a decade of transition for Arab American demographics in Chicagoland with the Arab American population becoming more diverse. Since the 2000s, the growth of foreign-born Arab Americans in Chicagoland far outpaced the growth of foreign-born residents overall. Between 2000 and 2020, the Arab American immigrant population grew by 60% versus a 13% growth in the overall Chicagoland immigrant population. Today, 51% of Chicagoland Arab Americans are foreign-born versus 19% of non-Arab Americans.³¹

NUMBERS THAT COUNT

Foreign-Born Status in Chicagoland, Cook County, and Chicago, 2000 - 2020

	2000	2010	2020
Chicagoland			
Arab Americans	52%	52%	51%
Non-Arab Americans	17%	19%	19%
Cook County			
Arab Americans	55%	55%	52%
Non-Arab Americans	20%	21%	21%
Chicago			
Arab Americans	58%	59%	55%
Non-Arab Americans	22%	21%	20%

Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, 2000 5% sample, American Community Survey 2006-2010 & 2016-2020 5-Year Samples



NUMBERS THAT COUNT

Median Age in Chicagoland, 2000 - 2020

Born Outside of U.S.	2000	2010	2020	Born in the U.S.	2000	2010	2020
	Arab Americans	36	40		43	Arab Americans	12
Non-Arab Americans	36	41	45	Non-Arab Americans	32	33	34

Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, 2000 5% sample, American Community Survey 2006-2010 & 2016-2020 5-Year Samples

Chicago's Iraqi Refugees: A Conversation with Othman Al Ani, Director of Operations, Middle Eastern Immigrant and Refugee Alliance (MIRA)

by Nina Shoman-Dajani



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Preface

The Iraqi community is not new to Chicago. Communities who trace their heritage back to the geographic area known as modern day Iraq, such as the robust Assyrian community, settled in Chicago's north side more than a century ago and have long contributed to the diverse tapestry of Chicago's MENA population. The influx of Iraqis to Chicago in the last two decades was mainly prompted by the U.S. wars waged on their country. The Iraqi community in Chicago is by no means monolithic and reflects some of the same traits as other MENA sub-populations in the region: varied faith-based groups, multi-generational, and representing a range of socio-economic, professional, and educational backgrounds.

Chicago's Iraqi Refugees

The journey of Iraqi refugees may be similar to each other, but each has a district story. During a recent conversation with Othman Al Ani, former Case Manager and Employment Specialist and now Director of Operations at the Middle Eastern Immigrant and Refugee Alliance (MIRA), he told a firsthand account of his lived experience as an Iraqi refugee and the work he has dedicated his life to: assisting new arrivals to Chicago. Othman's passion for helping the displaced was cultivated while he was living in Iraq and working with the Norwegian Refugee Council as a social worker and advocate for the internally displaced. Now, after almost a decade working with MIRA, he has a unique, personal understanding of the ever-changing policies towards refugees, asylum seekers, and displaced people arriving to Chicago.

MIRA was established under the name Iraqi Mutual Aid Society, and as programs and services expanded and the clients they serve diversified, the organization changed its name. Part of their mission states the following:

[MIRA] fosters the well-being and self-sufficiency of Middle Eastern refugees, immigrants, and asylees in Chicago. MIRA serves as a first point of contact for a diverse client population from around the world, offering culturally competent services for those from the Middle East and Islamic cultures.³²

Othman works with clients and builds a support system for them regardless of age, religion, or background. As a supervisor, he also continues to develop programming with his colleagues to meet the range of needs of new arrivals. The organization provides a variety of services, including case management, vocational empowerment programs, immigration legal services, and community empowerment programs.

The conversation focused heavily on the need to revamp U.S. policy towards refugees. Based on his firsthand experience with the Iraqi refugee community, as well as refugees from other countries, he has found that many refugees do not feel protected within the current system. With little or no knowledge about how to adapt to U.S. financial systems, the housing system, or navigate the job market, refugees experience vulnerability and are prime targets for scams. For example, as refugees are unaware of how the bureaucratic financial systems of the U.S. work and mainly come from nations heavily dependent on cash systems, a misunderstanding of credit cards and banking can cause much confusion.

We discussed the challenges of well-educated Iraqi refugees and their struggle to use their degrees and professional experience once they arrived. Othman shared a story about an Iraqi judge who came to the U.S. and soon found himself working at McDonalds: "He has very young kids, and he was like, I, I just want to feed my kids, the financial system also [...] it's pushing the people to do stuff they don't love." Othman elaborated that while the U.S. is a "dreamland" for some, for Iraqi refugees who left their homeland and loved ones behind, who may have watched their family members die and faced immense trauma, it takes time to adjust.

Most of the Iraqi refugees were unable to use their higher education and professional degrees and found themselves working as dishwashers, a common job for new arrivals, according to Othman. As an administrator who oversees the Adult Education program at Moraine Valley Community College, and as a board member for the Syrian Community Network, I understood and connected with the

stories Othman shared with me – an unfortunate and very common series of stories. Although there are organizations that focus on assisting highly educated refugees who attempt to transfer their degrees, many professionals with specialties, whether it be in the medical field, in law, or other specializations, will never have the opportunity to actually put that training to use in the U.S. To imagine the loss of what Americans refer to as “intellectual capital” is truly tragic. Among other issues that need to be tackled, an introduction of structures to allow refugees to utilize their prior training and education deserves more attention and examination.

Like other immigrant communities, Iraqi refugees are struggling with a new identity in the U.S. They left their country to settle in the U.S.; a country that waged not one, but two wars on their land, which resulted in incredible damage and will take generations to rebuild. Some embrace their new home and attempt to leave the past behind, including their memories of Iraq, and others continue to struggle with the suppressed trauma they will live with forever.

Despite the challenges he has witnessed, Othman’s commitment to refugee services stays the same. He would like to see more Arab Americans in elected positions that can advocate for communities like those of Iraqi refugees. He stressed how important it was to have representation within decision making entities that make policy. Othman will continue to cultivate support and engagement as the refugee community continues to grow on Chicago’s north side.

PART ONE: A SNAPSHOT OF ARAB AMERICANS IN CHICAGOLAND

NUMBERS THAT COUNT

Chicagoland Home Ownership and Rental Comparison by Arab Ancestry, 2015

	Home Owners	Renters
Assyrian/Chaldean /Syriac	69%	31%
Lebanese	67%	33%
Egyptian	58%	42%
Palestinian	58%	42%
Syrian	57%	43%
Jordanian	54%	46%
Arab/Arabic	52%	48%
Yemeni	48%	52%
Middle Eastern	46%	54%
Moroccan	43%	57%
Algerian	36%	64%
Iraqi	26%	74%
Sudanese	6%	94%
Saudi Arabian	3%	97%
Chicagoland Average	45%	55%

Source: US Census, American Community Survey 5-Year 2011-2015; and IPUMS American Community Survey 5-Year sample 2011-2015

Housing in Chicagoland

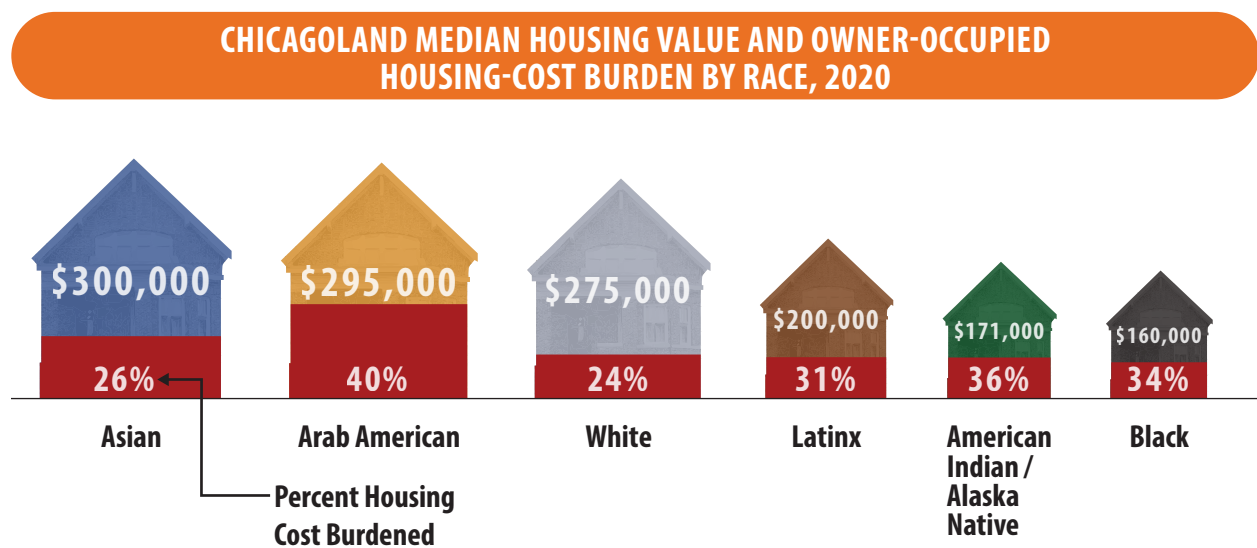
Housing Tenure

Arab American households are more likely to be renters and less likely to be homeowners compared to the Chicagoland population overall and to white households in particular. One in every two Arab American households (50%) rent as compared to about one third of all Chicagoland households and about one quarter of white households (36% and 26%, respectively). Conversely, one in every two Arab American households own their homes versus about three in every four white households. These statistics vary by foreign-born status and class. Arab American households headed by immigrants rent at higher rates

than those headed by Arab Americans born in the U.S. Arab American households in the top 20% of the income distribution, unsurprisingly, have much higher rates of homeownership (3 in every 4 households) than Arab American households in the bottom 20% (about 2 in every 10 households). Interestingly though, Arab American households in the top 20% of the income distribution rent at more than twice the rate of white households (24% versus 11% respectively).

Home values and Housing-Cost Burdens

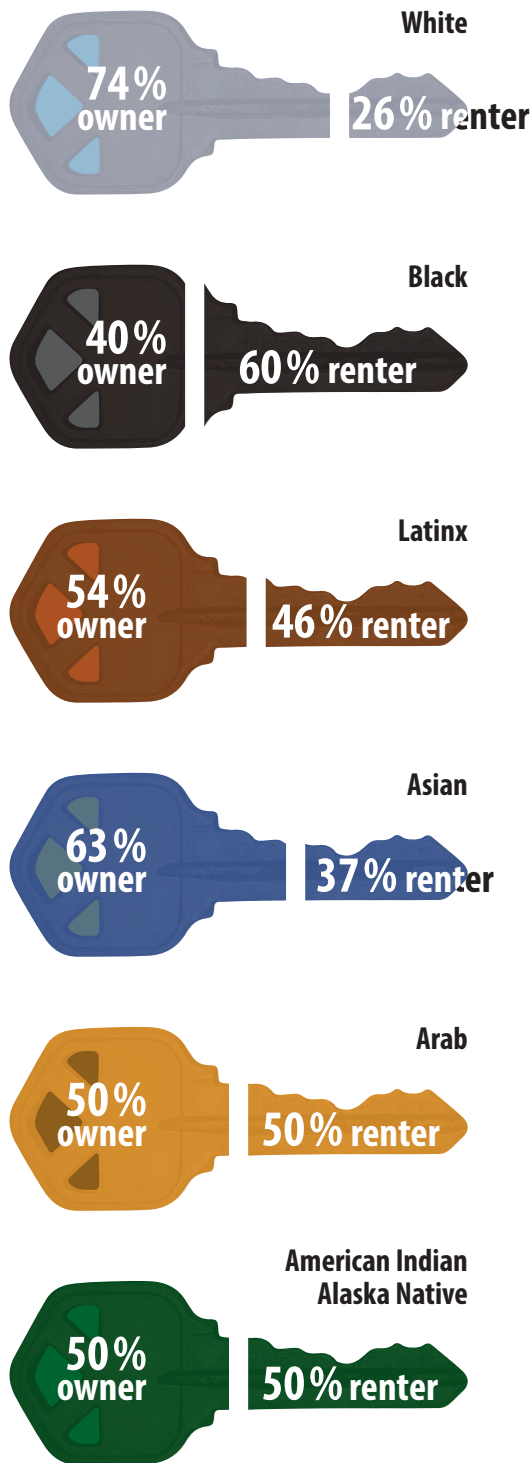
The median home value of Arab American homeowners is \$295,000. Arab Americans have the second highest amount of property wealth in Chicagoland. This is slightly more than white homeowners and almost twice that of Black homeowners. This remains true across the income distribution and between U.S.-born versus foreign-born Arab Americans. However, while median property values are high among Arab American homeowners, those homeowners are also more housing-cost-burdened than owners from other racial groups.



Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Samples

Forty percent of Arab American homeowners are housing-cost-burdened versus 24% of white homeowners. Being housing-cost-burdened means that a household pays 30% or more of its income on housing costs such as rental or mortgage payments and utility payments. This eats away at other avenues to accumulate assets, such as savings. Housing-cost burden is a standard used at all levels of government and by non-profit lenders and is considered an important benchmark as households that are housing-cost-burdened tend to have increased levels of food insecurity; avoid seeking healthcare and therefore have worse health outcomes; and have difficulties paying utilities and other bills.³³ Data shows that Arab American homeowners are more housing-cost-burdened than any other racial/ethnic group in Chicagoland.

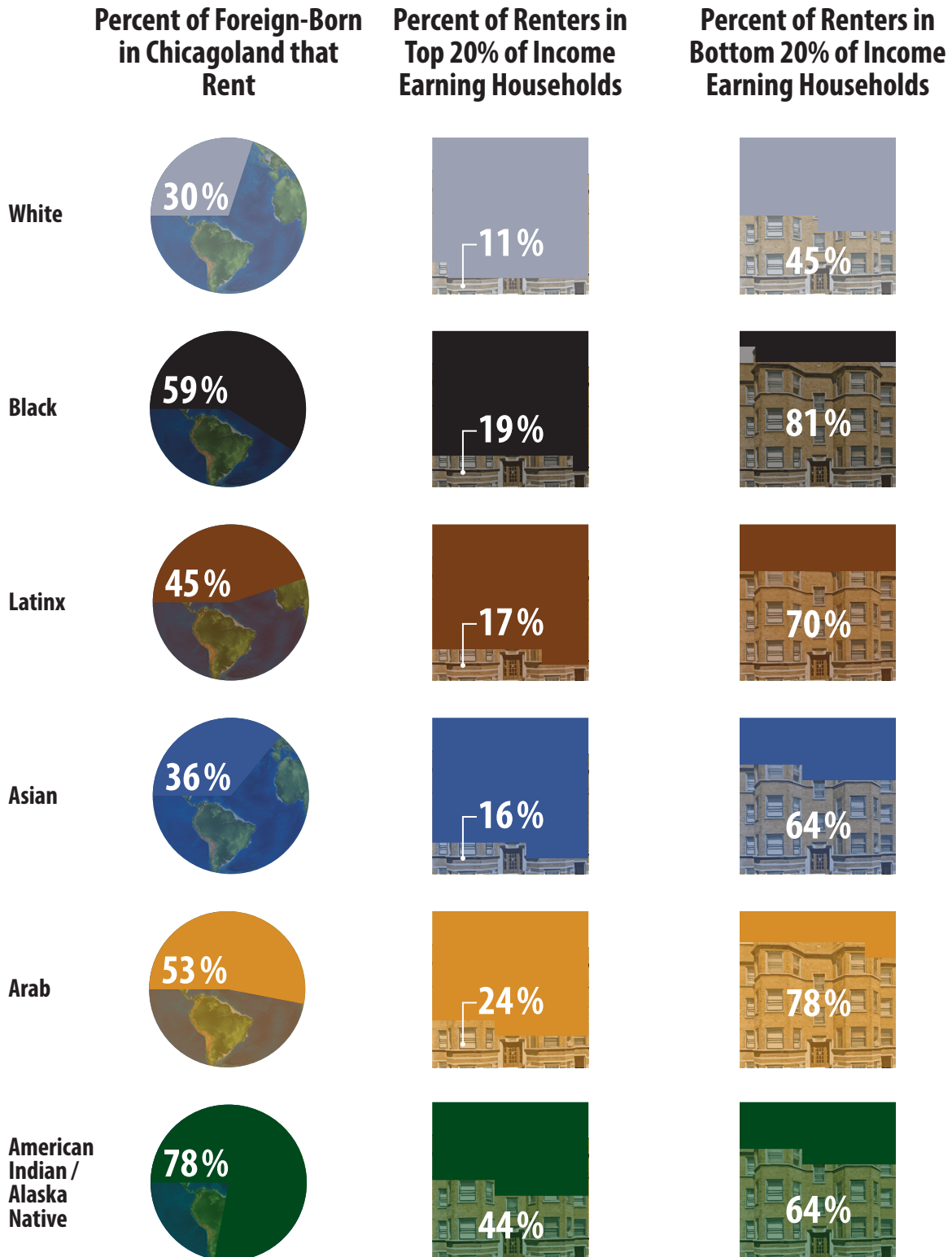
CHICAGOLAND HOME OWNERSHIP AND RENTAL COMPARISON BY RACE, 2020



Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Samples

The graphic on the next page provides a breakdown of housing by race and other factors. Unsurprisingly, housing statistics vary by social and economic characteristics. Households that rent, households that are headed by foreign-born persons, and low-income households are all relatively more housing-cost-burdened than their counterparts (i.e., owners, U.S.-born persons, and affluent households). This is true across all racial and ethnic groups. However, it is notable that Arab American households headed by immigrants are more housing-cost-burdened than households headed by immigrants from all other all racial/ethnic groups. The same is true of low-income Arab American households. Ninety-two percent of Arab American households in the bottom 20% of the income distribution are housing-cost-burdened, the highest housing-cost burden of any racial/ethnic group. While Arab American households across the income spectrum are the most housing-cost-burdened of any group, there are important disparities among Arab Americans. While nine of every ten Arab American low-income households are housing-cost-burdened, only one in every twenty Arab American households in the top 20% are housing-cost-burdened.

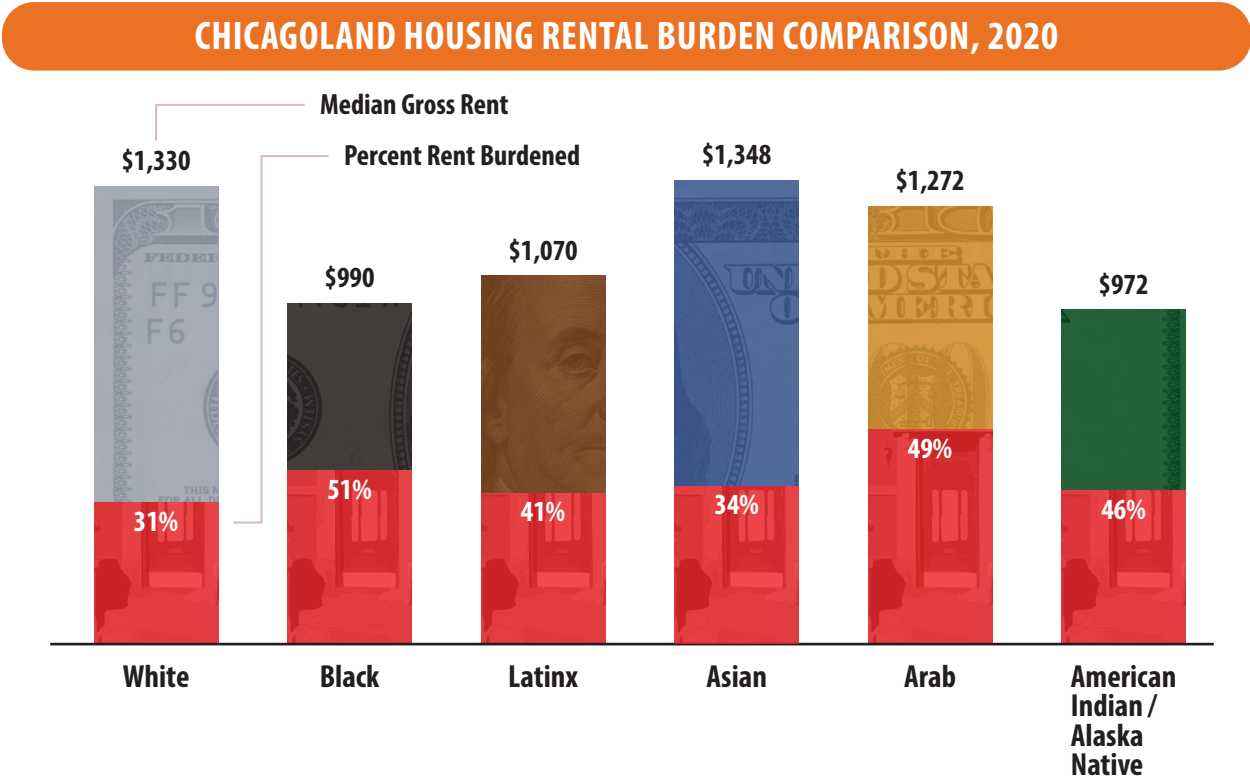
CHICAGOLAND RENTAL COMPARISON BY RACE, 2020



Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Samples

In addition, Arab American households (both those that rent and own) have the highest rate of severe housing-cost burden among all other racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. Severe housing-cost burden means that a household spends 50% or more of its income on housing costs. About one in every three Arab American renters and nearly one in every five Arab American homeowners spend half or more of their income on rent and utilities.

These numbers become alarmingly high when we look at the lower-end of Arab American working-class households. For Arab American households in the bottom 20% of the income distribution, 92% that own and 94% that rent are severely housing-cost-burdened.



Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Samples

To put this another way, for *nine of every ten low-income Arab American* households, half or more of their monthly *earned* income (income earned through working) is going towards the *passive* income (income acquired through ownership of an asset) of landlords, banks, and utility companies. This stymies the possibility of these households to accumulate their own assets or to create savings and increases their likelihood of suffering from material hardships.

Chicago's Syrian Americans and the arrival of Syrian Refugees

by Nina Shoman-Dajani and Maya Atassi



Dr. Nina Shoman-Dajani is Assistant Dean of Learning Enrichment and College Readiness at Moraine Valley Community College where she oversees the Adult Education program serving students from forty-five countries. She completed her Doctor of Education degree at Benedictine University in Higher Education and Organizational Change. Her doctoral research focused on the racial identity construction of Arab American college students. She is a member of the National Advisory Council for the National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education, a board member for the Arab American Studies Association, and a board member for the Syrian Community Network, a refugee resettlement agency in Chicago.



Maya Atassi has been with the Syrian Community Network (SCN) since its earliest days and has growing into her current role as Director of Operations. As a first generation Syrian American, she was inspired to join SCN after feeling helpless by the turmoil in her parents' home country and wanted a way to give back to her community. As part of her role, Maya oversees daily operations at SCN and is also responsible for managing SCN's programmatic offerings – reporting to grant program managers, providing technical assistance to staff, and ensuring community members and staff alike feel supported.

The Syrian American Community is not a Monolith

When discussing the Syrian American community in the U.S., and specifically in the Midwest, we can trace the documented immigration patterns of Syrians from the late 1800s to present day. However, we must consider the diversity of this community in terms of their immigration journeys as well as their lived realities before and after leaving Syria. The immigration journey of Syrians to U.S. ports in the late 1800s and early 1900s, who were mainly Christian and left during Ottoman rule, was much different than the immigration journeys of their well-educated counterparts who left in the 1960s and 1970s. One thing they both had in common: they left by choice. If we analyze the immigration of Syrians who arrived in the U.S. in the last decade, we find a refugee population that left by force and that is part of the Syrian refugee crisis occasioned by the Syrian revolution that began in 2011. Like the first two groups who left for better economic opportunities, recent Syrian refugees left their homeland with the hope of returning in mind; however, the ongoing political crisis and uncertainty of creating a livelihood in their beloved homeland, combined with various other factors, have prevented most from doing so. Despite their distinct immigration trajectories, Syrians in the U.S. have found themselves in a new land with new possibilities – but also facing their fair share of challenges. As renowned Arab American scholar Michael Suleiman once wrote: "Among the most important issues with which Arabs in America have had to wrestle is the definition

of who they are, their sense of identity as a people, especially as they encountered and continue to encounter bias and discrimination in their new homeland.”³⁴

Syrians in Chicagoland

Historically, the Syrian American community in Chicagoland is known as a highly educated community that helped build important faith-based, educational and community-based institutions in the Arab and Muslim community in the southwest and western suburbs. They are represented in all professional fields but are well-known for a large contingency in the medical field. Many of the Syrians who came to Chicago in the 1970s and 1980s arrived with the intention of continuing their education – many of them focused on completing their medical training – and today serve as some of the most acclaimed doctors (with various specializations) in Chicagoland.

In 1978, for example, Ameid Atassi came to the U.S. to pursue and complete additional medical training. He had studied general medicine in Syria, completed his obligatory military service and then decided to pursue surgical training. His plan was to complete his surgical residency and return to Syria to live and work. In a conversation with us, Atassi reminisced on the fact that, “post the turmoil in the late 1970s and the massacre in Hama in 1982, his father told him not to plan on coming back” but to start considering the possibility of building a life in the U.S. This was a turning point not just for Atassi but for many Syrians, whether because they had family members who identified with groups who opposed the Syrian regime or because families decided that the future in Syria seemed slightly less certain than before; if opportunity presented itself elsewhere, it was time to take advantage of that opportunity. Atassi arrived single to the U.S. but eventually married and his three children were U.S. born.

This was also the case with other members of the Atassi family and many others who came to the U.S. from Syria in the 1970s and 1980s, established roots in Chicagoland and built families while pursuing their careers. This generation of the Syrian community demonstrates a classic example of chain migration. Many individuals, many from Homs, pursued the same path. Their journey, in contrast to that of the Syrian refugees who have arrived in the last decade, was voluntary and not based on traumatic forced displacement. The difference between the chain migration that followed individuals pursuing higher degrees and the displacement of entire families of refugees by the 2011 Syrian revolution is pronounced and has been a jarring contrast for the well-established Syrian American community that has thrived in Chicagoland for decades.

Syrian Refugees, the Diaspora and the Challenges

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency, (UNHCR), the Syrian refugee crisis is the largest in the world and combines a population of both internally and externally displaced Syrians totaling more than 13.4 million people. Since 2011, the UNHCR notes that over 6.8 million Syrians have fled their homeland to seek refuge outside of Syria as the result of “a March 2011 violent government crackdown on public demonstrations in support of a group of teenagers who were arrested for anti-government graffiti in the southern town of Daraa. The arrests sparked public demonstrations throughout Syria which were violently suppressed by government security forces. Conflict quickly escalated and the country descended into a civil war that forced millions of Syrian families out of their homes.”³⁵ While the UNHCR describes the conflict in the context of a “civil war,” it should be noted that others would describe the war as a revolution that began peacefully and transformed into a violent conflict due to the brutal government response. In comparison to other countries that have allowed Syrian refugees to resettle, the Trump administration strictly limited the number allowed to seek refuge here and eventually banned their migration altogether.

When assessing the changes and challenges the Syrian community in the Chicago region has faced over the last decade, there may be an assumption that the arrival of refugees transformed the community at large. The Syrian Community Network (SCN), the first refugee serving community-based organization to be founded by a Syrian American, Suzanne Akhras, has worked closely with both the Syrian refugee community and the Syrian diaspora community since day one. Garnering support from both faith-based organizations and diverse Chicagoans who wanted to support the newly displaced community, SCN has established a broad coalition of support. There have been challenges and moments of triumph. Many Syrian Americans who had the privilege and means to assist the new arrivals did so with pride and responded to the need to prepare to receive and welcome Syrian refugee families. There was initially a high level of excitement from the local diaspora community – they wanted to feel connected to what the people of Syria were going through, and now it was manifesting with a local presence. They wanted to offer support, both financial and otherwise. As the level of new arrivals has waned and as the Syrian crisis has dragged on, creating greater frustration, the diaspora has become less engaged.

The challenges Syrian refugee families face are many. The language barrier tends to be amongst the biggest issues, as many institutions do not provide translated documents, especially in Arabic. Interpretation is even harder to come by – and if it is offered, there are often several steps to take before one can connect with an interpreter. The built-in bureaucracy that manifests itself in many

governmental and human services institutions is extremely difficult for refugees and immigrants to navigate.

The SCN assists with the cumbersome task of navigating the various systems refugees are faced with and offers support in three main service areas: case management (public benefits, medical and administrative case management), immigration services (adjustment of status, naturalization, and asylum) and education services (in person and virtual youth programming, education case management, and English as a Second Language (ESL), citizenship/civics preparation). Most of the SCN staff speak Arabic and provide direct service in the language that is familiar to the families being served. Many Syrian refugees have been displaced multiple times before being resettled in Chicago. Yet, they can contact SCN to simply ask a question and access services for a need that they have, all in a language they know. That accessibility helps families feel less guarded and more comfortable. The organization strives to provide services to the whole family, providing a safe and welcoming space.

Like staff at other non-profits that serve a community with such a broad range of needs and who carry immense trauma, SCN staff also experience compassion fatigue and feel overwhelmed with the requests they encounter. Organizations like SCN depend highly on grant funding and the capacity and capability of the services provided are shaped by that funding. There are many generous private donors but maintaining the funding long-term is challenging. The services provided by SCN continue to grow as they establish new programs to meet the needs of the growing and expanded needs of the clients they serve. As other refugee communities are welcomed and resettled in Chicago and the resettlement of Syrian refugees resumes anew under a new administration, SCN strives to assist as much as possible.

U.S. Policy and its Impact on Refugee Settlement

Consistent with historic immigration policy, in the last decade, we have witnessed a dysfunctional response towards migrant communities, refugees and asylum seekers who hope to enter the U.S. Former President Trump's 2017 executive order which his administration coined as *Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry to the United States* halted immigration from Iran, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen and Libya, and became widely known as the "Muslim Ban." This sweeping policy made a false argument that foreign nationals from these countries had a history of committing terrorist acts in the U.S. and suspended any opportunity Syrians seeking refuge had to find that in the U.S. until this executive order was eliminated in 2021 by President Biden's administration.

Immigration policy has long been a divisive topic in the U.S. If we take the response towards Ukrainians and compare it to Syrian refugees, we see a clear difference in public opinion and policy stances. It is well documented that support for Ukrainians seeking entry to the U.S. following Russia's invasion far exceeded the support for Syrian refugees. A recent Gallup poll noted that "Seventy-eight percent of Americans say they would approve of 'allowing up to 100,000' Ukrainian refugees into the United States [...]. This is the highest level of U.S. public support for admitting refugees that Gallup has found in its polling on various refugee situations since 1939."³⁶ In comparison, a 2015 Gallup poll found that only 37% of Americans approved of "at least 10,000" Syrian refugees being admitted.

Attitudes towards, and perceptions of, Ukrainians escaping their homes in contrast to immigrants and refugees from the Middle East and Africa not only impacts the immigration policies and immigration trajectories of migrants and refugees from these communities, but it also impacts the way these communities view themselves. According to Lamis Abdelatty, professor of political science at Syracuse University, "This discrimination toward vulnerable people fleeing a dangerous conflict at home can have a long-lasting and damaging impact on refugees, from how they view their self-worth to the services they receive and their ability to cope with and move on from the trauma in their lives."³⁷ Unlike Syrians, Ukrainian and Afghan nationals (who qualified) were given a direct pipeline to come to the U.S. and while they may not have the refugee designation and a formal path to direct residency and citizenship, they are able to use the benefits that refugees have in terms of accessing public benefits and all the services provided upon resettlement.

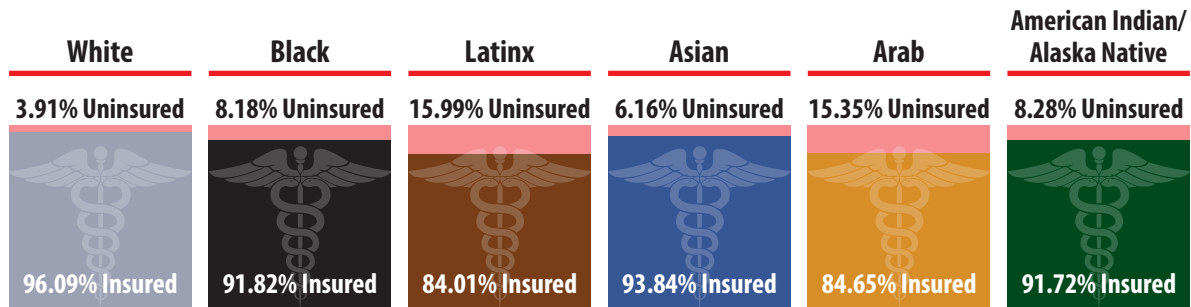
However, there have also been contradictions in the way Afghan and Ukrainian refugees have been treated by the Biden administration. As NPR has reported, "In the weeks after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the Biden administration announced plans to accept 100,000 refugees from the war. But the move has raised questions about a possible double standard. When the Taliban took over Afghanistan last August, the United States evacuated about 79,000 Afghans. But most who made it to the U.S. still have no clear way to stay. And back in Afghanistan, thousands who were promised U.S. visas are still stuck."³⁸ Refugee settlement agencies like SCN continue to grapple with everchanging and inconsistent U.S. policies towards refugee resettlement. Navigating the varied policies and procedures that have been assigned to different populations by the federal government is one of the challenges for agencies that service migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. The shift in policy from the Trump administration to the Biden administration prompted agencies to increase their capacity in time to meet the needs of refugees whose cases had been put on hold and were now going to be resettled – while additionally attempting to meet the demand of prioritizing specific populations in such large numbers. This impacts all refugees – not just Syrians.

Health insurance in Chicagoland

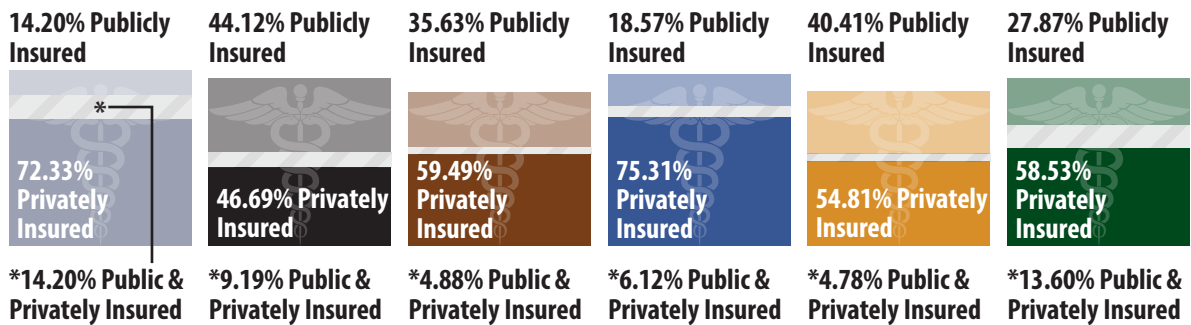
About 40% of Arab Americans in Chicagoland rely on publicly provided healthcare, 55% rely on private healthcare, and the remainder rely on a mix of both. Arab Americans stand second to Black people in terms of their reliance on publicly provided health insurance. Of those who are reliant on private insurance, Arab Americans have the lowest rates of employer or union provided healthcare, which is the most common form of health insurance in the U.S. Arab Americans who purchase healthcare outside of their employer or union are more reliant than any other racial/ethnic group on purchasing healthcare directly through the private healthcare marketplace.

Arab Americans have the second highest uninsured rates in Chicagoland, roughly the same uninsured rate as Latinx residents. Consistent with other trends, these numbers are pronounced when looking at foreign-born residents and low-income residents. About 20% of Arab American immigrants and roughly the same proportion of low-income Arab Americans are uninsured, which is well above the overall Chicagoland uninsured rate. And, similar to housing-cost burdens, racial disparities in uninsured rates are greatly reduced among the top 20% of the income distribution.

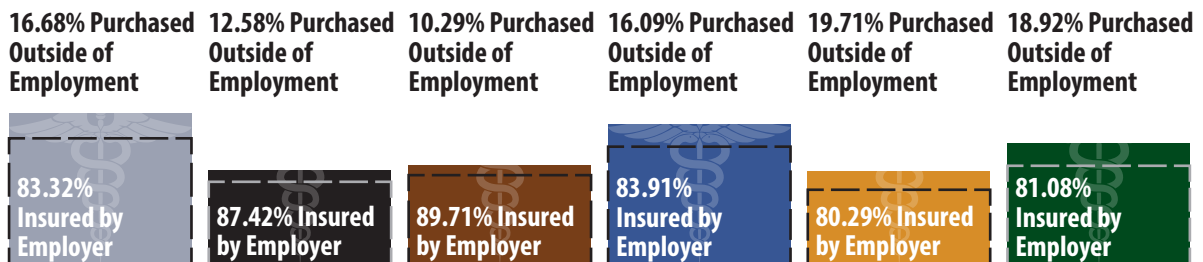
CHICAGOLAND HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE BY RACE, 2020



Of those Insured



Of those with Private Insurance



Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Samples

The Impact of COVID-19 on Arab American Communities in Chicago

by Sarah Abboud and Itedal Shalabi



Sarah Abboud, PhD, RN, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Human Development Nursing Science at the University of Illinois Chicago and a Visiting Faculty Fellow at the Center for Research on AIDS at Yale University's School of Public Health. Her program of research is grounded in social justice and health and equity frameworks and its goal is to reduce health disparities by developing programs that improve health outcomes among Arab immigrants and sexual and gender minority individuals.



Ms. Itedal Shalabi earned her Bachelor's and Master's Degrees from the Jane Adams College of Social Work at the University of Illinois Chicago. In 2001, she co-founded Arab American Family Services (AAFS). AAFS is among the first leading social service organizations in the southwest suburbs established to serve and advocate for Arab Americans within the Chicagoland area. Located strategically in Worth, Illinois, AAFS's mission to change and impact the quality of life by serving and building stronger and healthier generations of Arab Americans in our communities has created a profound impact on the lives of thousands of individuals and families.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately affected racial and ethnic minority groups, with high rates of death in African American, Native American, and Latinx communities. The sources/causes of these disparities can be largely attributed to different social determinants of health (safe housing and transportation; racism, discrimination and violence; education, job opportunities, and income; nutritious food and physical activity; clean air and water; and language and literacy skills). Minority groups are disproportionately affected by chronic medical conditions, have lower access to healthcare, and are more likely to experience living and working conditions that can worsen COVID-19 outcomes.³⁹ The foundations of these disparities are long-standing structural and societal factors that the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed.

Within Arab communities in the U.S., we don't have official data on the impact of the pandemic on this minority group because the U.S. Census classifies Arabs as racially white, which contributes to making their health disparities invisible. According to health experts, Arab Americans in Chicago and across the U.S. are likely at increased risk of COVID-19 infection and complications that will not be captured in any healthcare databases. Anecdotally, community-based organizations in Chicago have reported that high rates of COVID-19-related infections and deaths devastated the community at the height of the pandemic. Public data documenting COVID-19 deaths and their locations from the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office indicates that Bridgeview, Palos Heights, and Summit, three Chicago suburbs with majority Arab American communities, were among the top 10% of all locations in Illinois in terms of COVID-19 cases. However, because local and federal governments

do not track data on Arab American health outcomes separately, we don't have any official system to accurately identify how many Arab Americans contracted or died from the virus in Chicago specifically, or Illinois generally.

In this commentary, we address the impact of COVID-19 on Arab communities in Chicagoland in the context of structural challenges facing these communities, including access to protective equipment, vaccines, education, and language. To better understand the impact of COVID-19 on Arab communities, we interviewed the COVID-19 response team at Arab American Family Services (AAFS), a community-based organization serving Arabs and other minoritized groups in the southwest areas of metropolitan Chicago.

The COVID-19 response team at AAFS included seven staff members, some of whom were recruited specifically after the start of the pandemic to address community needs. The team initially assessed the needs of the community by calling community members and asking them what specific services they needed, a challenging task given the number of people they had to call. Through AAFS, the team organized and provided food drives, personal protective equipment (PPEs; e.g., masks, hand sanitizers), educational resources including fliers and information sessions in English, Spanish, and Arabic, assistance in accessing testing and vaccination, and assistance filing for unemployment.

When asked about the impact of COVID-19 on Arab communities, AAFS team member Aysheh described that, generally speaking: "at first, we were super careful, super prepared, and then as time progressed, we kind of lost that. At first people washed their groceries, even the bags and everything, and then at the end of it [summer 2021], there was very little wearing masks or not wearing it properly." Over time, people grew tired of the lockdown and social distancing. Khaled, another AAFS team member, said: "over the past year and a half, people got fatigued, you know, quarantine fatigued, they got fatigued from all the protocols and people were just tired."

The most significant impact was seen at the economic level. AAFS witnessed an increase in the number of individuals filing for unemployment. For many, the economic impact of COVID-19 was on top of their already existing financial struggles. This impacted their ability to pay for rent, secure food, and access transportation and healthcare services.

Despite having bilingual staff, educational materials, and testing and vaccine resources and being well-prepared to address the community's needs, the AAFS team faced several challenges. Some challenges were related to fear and the spread of misinformation about COVID-19, testing, and vaccine hesitancy. AAFS team member Zahira said that "most people were very scared of even

COVID testing because they saw on the media how the test was going to be, and how it was going to be in their nose, and they knew that it was going to be scary so most of them were scared to even go and do the test.” Jana, another AAFS team member, mentioned that people were more scared of the results of COVID-19 testing rather than the test itself. Other misinformation was being spread on social media regarding vaccination safety. Jana described that “we have a very social culture that relies on social interaction, and social media was an easy way to stay connected and feel connected to the community; so if one person shared that this person died from it [vaccine], then they’re going to say ‘okay, why would I take a vaccine if it’s going to kill me and COVID might not.’ [...] Even with the Delta variant, there’s still people that are hesitating to take the vaccine.” The team described that the unclear messages that the CDC provided exacerbated the effects of misinformation and mistrust. Aysheh explained, “they [CDC] said that if you take one vaccine of Pfizer and one of Moderna, that could better protect you against the new variants, and then later on, the WHO [World Health Organization] said that we should not do that under any circumstances. In medicine that happens; it’s continuing, it’s evolving, we know this; but it definitely exacerbates the issues [of trust in vaccines] in the Arab communities.” Other challenges were related to finding resources, especially at the start of the pandemic, such as unemployment and rental assistance, affordable PPEs, and accurate information in Arabic. The government response was very slow in meeting the needs of Arab American communities.

When asked about the number of COVID-19 cases or deaths within Arab American communities, the team agreed that it was, and still is, a challenge to get accurate data. AAFS team member Bahaa described that, because Arabs are counted as white in hospital and clinic registries, “the numbers are probably skewed, so we don’t know how affected the Arab community was. I don’t think we can get an actual confirmation of how the Arab Community was affected, other than from what we’ve seen. Early on, someone said we had to call people every day saying ‘go get tested to see if you have COVID,’ so unless we do something like that – it’ll be hard to see how affected the Arab community exactly was.”

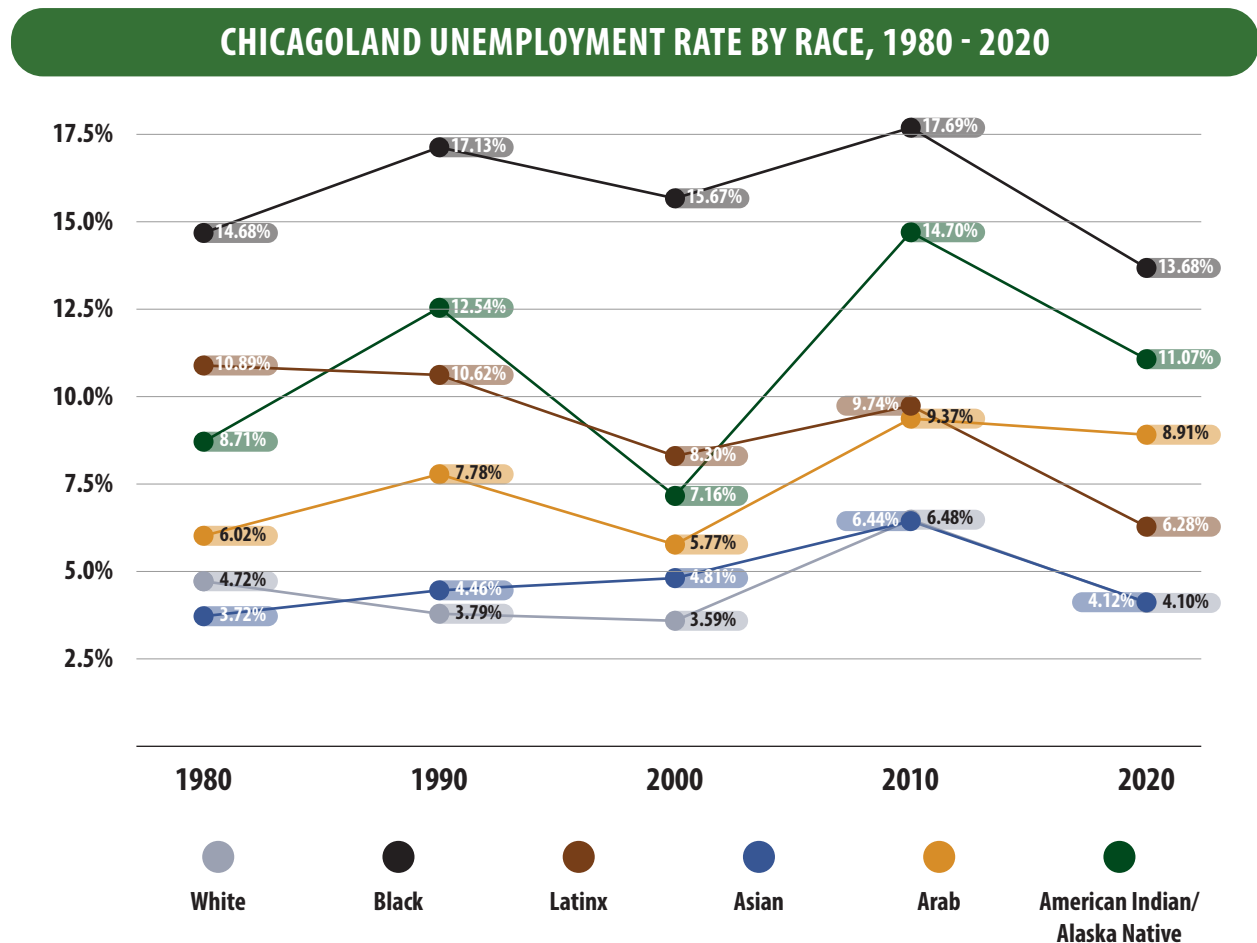
The team described that they were still witnessing a significant economic impact, as well as a need for funding and additional unemployment, educational, and pandemic benefits. They discussed the continued need for tailored information about COVID-19 from credible sources within Arab communities. The work of community-based organizations such as AAFS, shows the magnitude of the impact of COVID-19 on Arab communities and the importance of supporting such organizations as they are best positioned to understand and address community needs.

The information gathered from the COVID-19 team also supports the need to collect data on Arab Americans through a distinct racial/ethnic category on the U.S. Census. Without dedicated data, health disparities for Arab Americans related to COVID-19 and beyond (e.g., physical, mental, and social health and wellbeing) will remain invisible and ignored. Our previous research and community-based work, and what community-based organizations such as AAFS describe in relation to COVID-19, have shown that Arab Americans' health outcomes are significantly different from the health outcomes of white non-Hispanics, and more comparable to other racial/ethnic minorities.⁴⁰ The inclusion of Arab Americans within the "white" category has been a major obstacle to conducting research on health outcomes, to securing research funding, and to securing support for community services. It is impossible to gather data from national datasets to argue for the health disparities that we witness in our community-based work on daily basis. An optimal solution would be for the Census Bureau to adopt a separate Arab/Middle Eastern category. In the meantime, local institutions such as local hospitals and health registries (e.g., Cook County Medical Examiner's Office) in Illinois, or national institutions such as the National Institute of Health should expand their categorization of racial/ethnic minorities to include Arab Americans.

Economic Conditions in Chicagoland

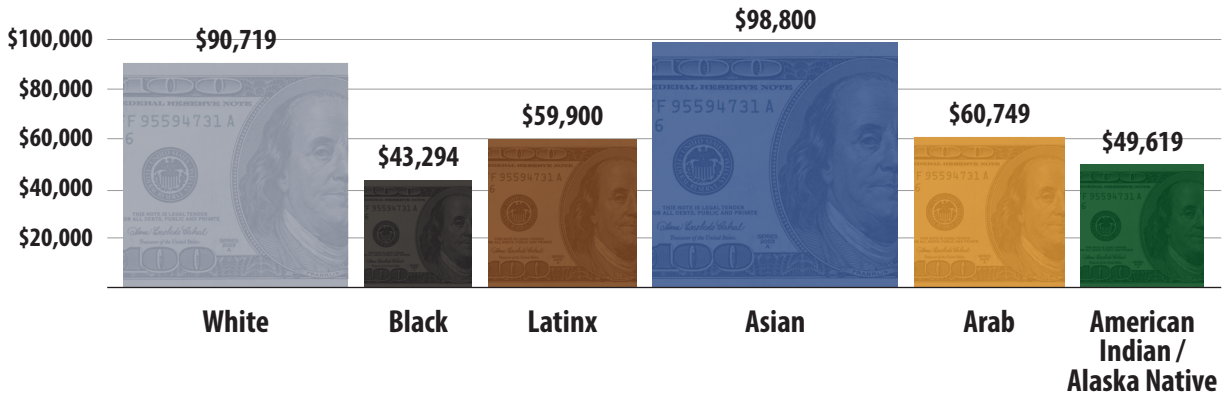
Economic conditions for Arab Americans in Chicagoland are worsening at a faster pace than that of other racial and ethnic groups experiencing economic declines. This can be seen in income and unemployment rates. For example, since the 2000s, income appears to be declining at a faster pace for Arab Americans than for other racial/ethnic groups.

According to our estimates, Arab American median household income is about \$14,000 dollars below Chicagoland’s median household income and nearly \$30,000 dollars below the white median household income. Moreover, while income growth slowed for most racial/ethnic groups in the 2000s and 2010s (relative to the 1980s and 1990s), Arab Americans and American Indians in Chicagoland were the only two racial/ethnic groups to see a decline in their median household income. Overall, this



Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, 1980 5% state sample, 1990 5% state sample, 2000 5% sample, American Community Survey 2006-2010 & 2016-2020 5-Year Samples

CHICAGOLAND MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME BY RACE, 2020



Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, 1980 5% state sample, 1990 5% state sample, 2000 5% sample, American Community Survey 2006-2010 & 2016-2020 5-Year Samples

NUMBERS THAT COUNT

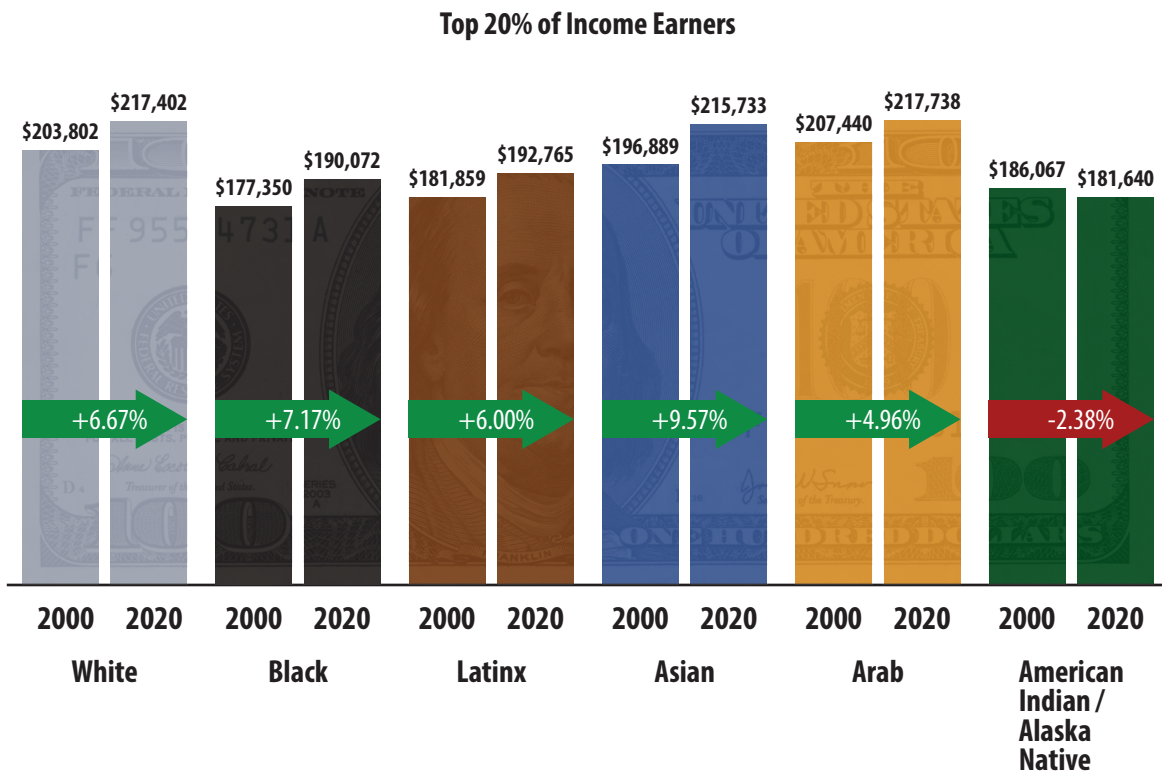
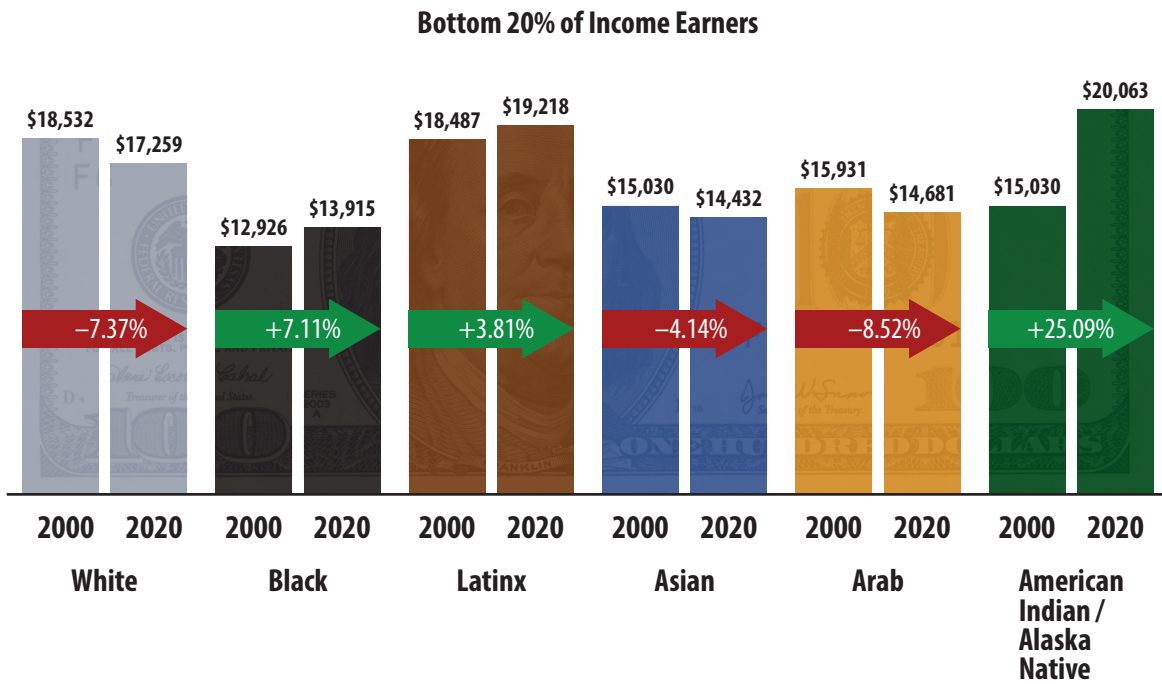
Chicagoland Median Household Income, 1980 - 2020 (in 2020 Dollars)

	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020	% Change
White	\$71,786	\$79,208	\$87,217	\$84,446	\$90,719	+26%
Black	\$39,277	\$42,630	\$48,396	\$42,728	\$43,294	+10%
Latinx	\$50,333	\$54,679	\$59,968	\$55,191	\$59,900	+19%
Asian	\$75,099	\$79,208	\$85,895	\$86,128	\$98,800	+32%
Arab	\$62,590	\$68,897	\$73,195	\$65,665	\$60,749	-3%
American Indian / Alaska Native	\$51,542	\$59,406	\$64,327	\$59,112	\$49,619	-4%

Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, 1980 5% state sample, 1990 5% state sample, 2000 5% sample, American Community Survey 2006-2010 & 2016-2020 5-Year Samples

pattern is likely not about decreasing income within individual households but growth in low-income Arab American households. Likewise, unemployment appears to be hitting Arab Americans particularly hard. In 2020, Arab American unemployment rates stood at 9% (3 percentage points above the Chicagoland unemployment rate). This is the third highest unemployment rate in Chicagoland and Arab Americans are the only group whose unemployment rates did not drop substantially in the last decade.

CHICAGOLAND CHANGE IN MEDIAN INCOME BY RACE AND INCOME GROUP, 2000 - 2020



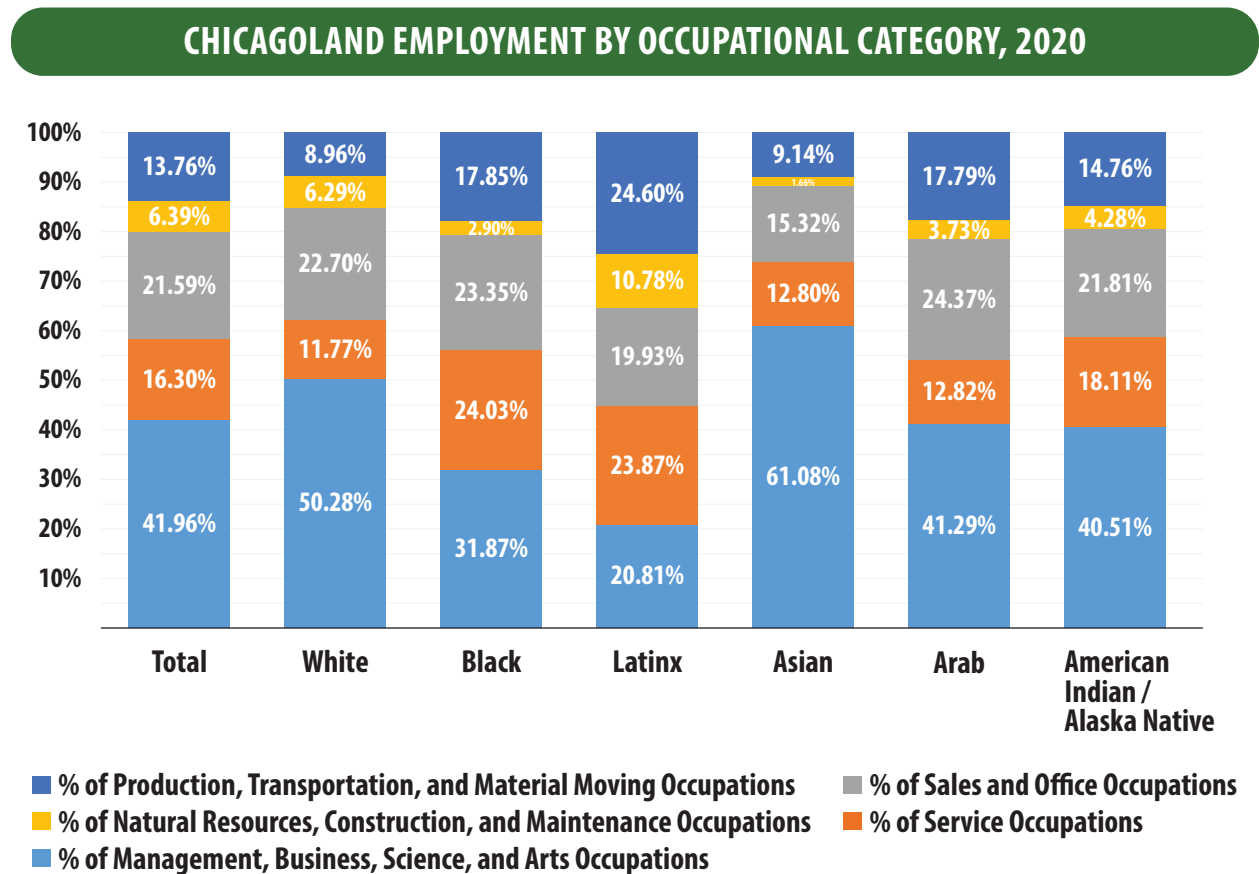
Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, 1980 5% state sample and American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Samples

Income inequality

As we have noted, Arab Americans are a diverse group ethnically. They are also a diverse group economically. One way to understand this is by looking at the income distribution within the ethnic groups that comprise Arab Americans. Arab American households in the top 20% of the income distribution take in about half of all income among Arab Americans, whereas those in the bottom 20% take in only 4% of the share of all Arab American income. This is in part because income growth since 2000 has occurred in the top 20% while growth has slowed and income has declined among the bottom 20%.⁴¹

Occupation

The growing economic divide among Arab Americans can be understood, in part, by looking at the share of occupations among racial/ethnic groups. Arab Americans are concentrated in both high- and low-paying occupations.

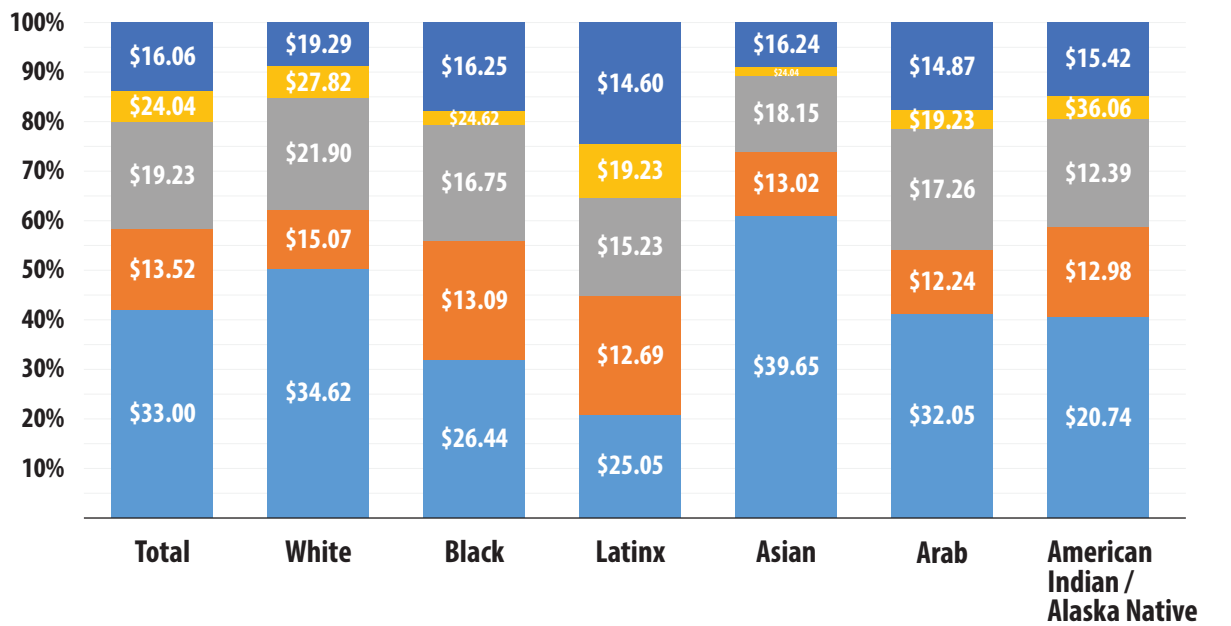


Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Samples

The largest plurality of Arab Americans (41%) work in professional-class occupations. Arab Americans in these occupations earn about \$11 above the median hourly wage of Arab Americans in Chicagoland overall. However, Arab Americans in these occupations earn slightly below the prevailing median hourly wage of other racial groups in these occupations. In other words, they are relatively advantaged compared to Arab Americans working in service or logistical occupations (e.g., warehouse workers at Amazon or restaurant workers) and in sales and office occupations, but they are disadvantaged relative to their professional peers.

Thirty-one percent of Arab Americans work in service occupations and in production and logistics. Hourly wages for Arab Americans in these occupations are well below the median hourly wages in those work categories overall and are low for Arab Americans as a whole. An important trend since the 2000s is that the share of these high and low earning occupations among Arab Americans has increased while the share of middle earning occupations such as sales and office occupations has decreased.

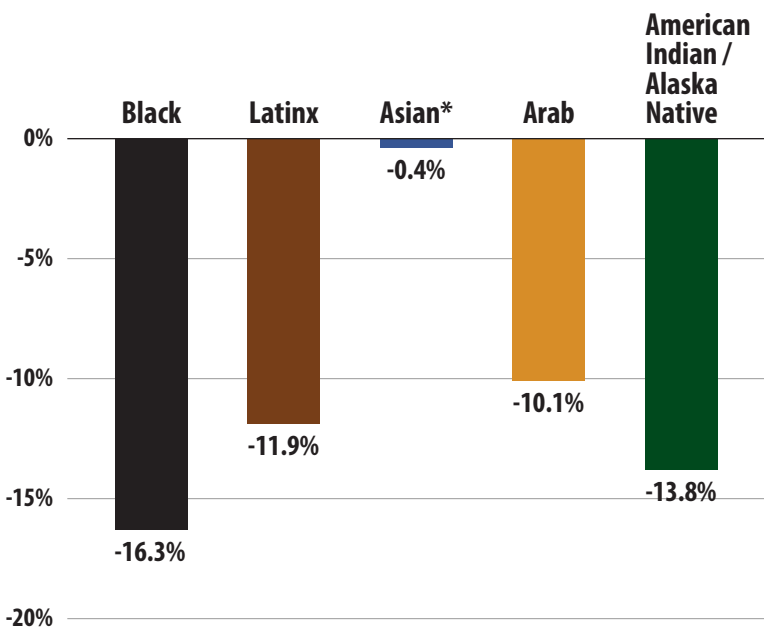
CHICAGOLAND MEDIAN HOURLY WAGES BY OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY, 2020



■ % of Production, Transportation, and Material Moving Occupations
 ■ % of Sales and Office Occupations
■ % of Natural Resources, Construction, and Maintenance Occupations
 ■ % of Service Occupations
■ % of Management, Business, Science, and Arts Occupations

Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Samples

CHICAGOLAND RACIAL WAGE GAPS WHEN COMPARED TO WHITE WORKERS, 2020



*** Note: The Asian American - White wage gap was not statistically significant.**
Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, American Community Survey 2011-2015 & 2016-2020 5-Year Samples

Wage gaps

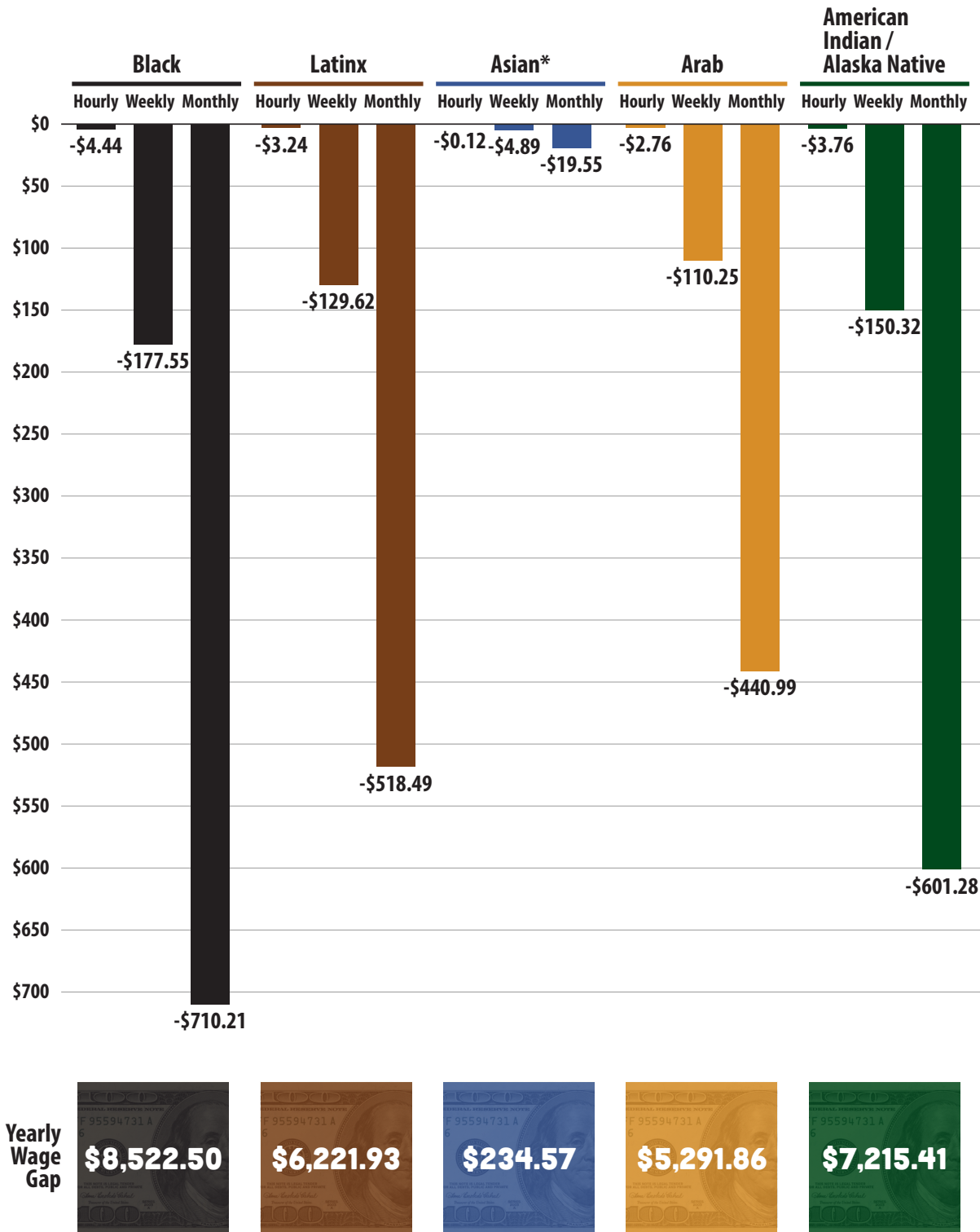
Wage gaps help to explain the economic disadvantages of Arab Americans relative to their peers in other racial groups (especially whites) as well as the advantages some Arab Americans have relative to other Arab Americans. Using statistical methods, we can measure the difference in wages among similarly situated workers to understand the role that race and other factors play in wage differentials. In other words, these

methods allow us to understand the importance of race and factors we are interested in analyzing (such as foreign-born status) while taking into account factors that contribute to differences in hourly wages (such as education, work experience, and so on). Put simply, we can compare two similarly situated workers.

According to our estimates, Arab Americans earn 10% less than similarly situated white workers. In other words, after accounting for immigration status, gender, education, age, family, and work characteristics, Arab Americans earn \$2.75 less an hour than white workers with similar characteristics. Over the course of a week – at the average hours worked per week in Chicagoland (41) – that amounts to a wage penalty of about \$110 dollars. Over the course of a year – at the average of 49 weeks of work per year in Chicagoland – the wage penalty for Arab American workers relative to white workers amounts to about \$5,273.

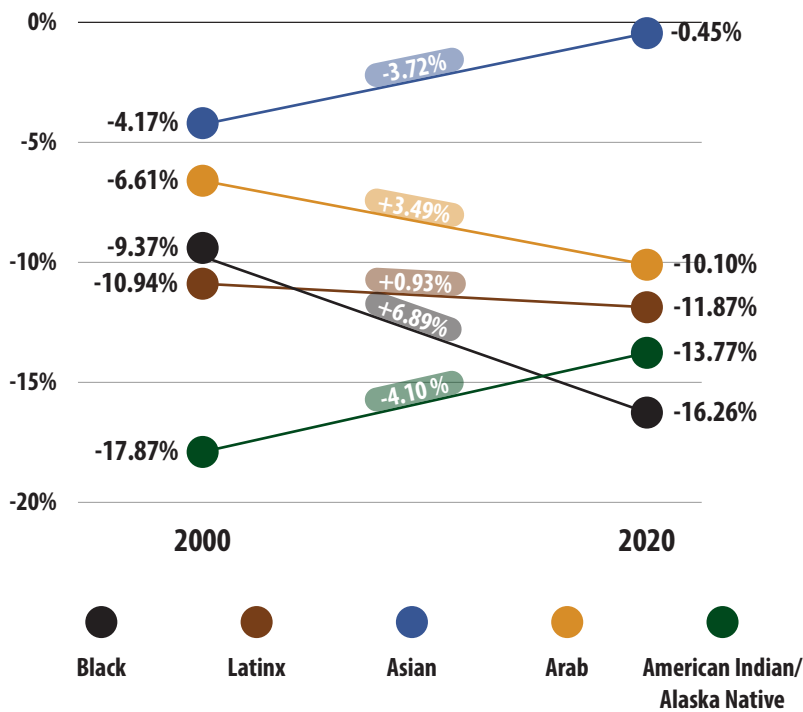
Moreover, our analysis shows that the Arab American-white wage gap has grown since 2000. According to our estimates, the wage gap declined in the 2000s and

CHICAGOLAND RACIAL WAGE GAP COMPARISON TO WHITE WORKERS OVER TIME, 2020



* Note: The Asian American - White wage gap was not statistically significant.
 Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, American Community Survey 2011-2015 & 2016-2020 5-Year Samples

CHICAGOLAND RACIAL WAGE GAPS WHEN COMPARED TO WHITE WORKERS, 2020



* Note: The Asian American - White wage gap was not statistically significant.
 Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, 2000 5% sample, American Community Survey 2011-2015 & 2016-2020 5-Year Samples

increased markedly in the 2010s, increasing from 7.7% to 10.1%. Additionally, the Arab American-white wage gap increases when we take into account foreign-born status. Relative to equally situated white foreign-born workers, foreign-born Arab American workers earn 20% less in hourly wages, the largest wage gap for foreign-born workers in Chicagoland.

In other words, for Arab Americans, being foreign-born carries a larger relative wage

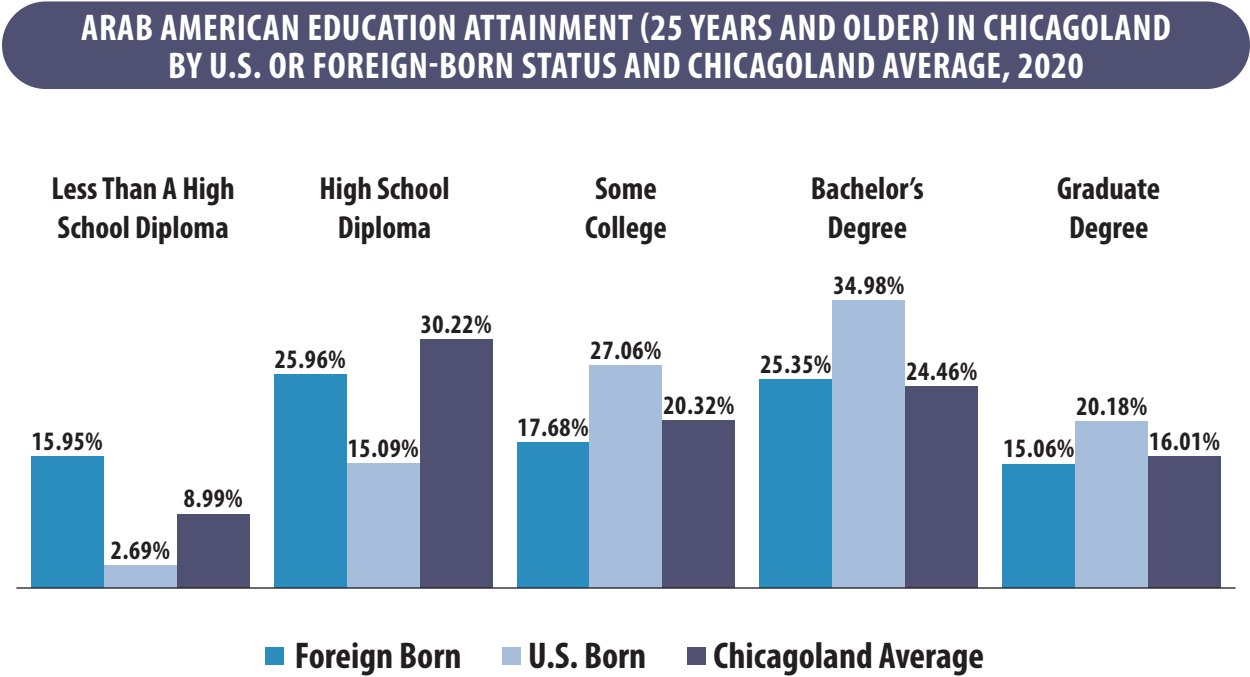
penalty than it does for other groups. In contrast to this, for all other racial groups, a lack of English proficiency has a larger, negative effect on wages than being foreign-born. For example, a white worker who is not proficient in English earns 23% less than a white worker who is proficient in English, whereas, a foreign-born white worker earns 4% less than a U.S.-born white worker. The wage gap for Arab American workers who are proficient in English versus those who are not is 17% whereas a foreign-born Arab American earns 23% less than a U.S.-born Arab American worker. When we standardize these estimates, which is a statistical method that allows us to compare various characteristics with one another, such as English proficiency and foreign-born status, what we find is that foreign-born Arab American workers pay the largest wage penalty relative to other racial groups. This wage penalty is about 2 times larger than that of Latinx workers and 4 times larger than that of Asian workers.

Educational Attainment

If you take 2020 as a starting point, Arab Americans seem to fare well with regard to educational attainment relative to other Chicagoland residents. About 45% of Arab Americans (25 years and older) have a bachelor’s degree or higher, which is slightly below the rate for white residents and slightly above the Chicagoland median. About one in three Arab Americans have a high school diploma or less.

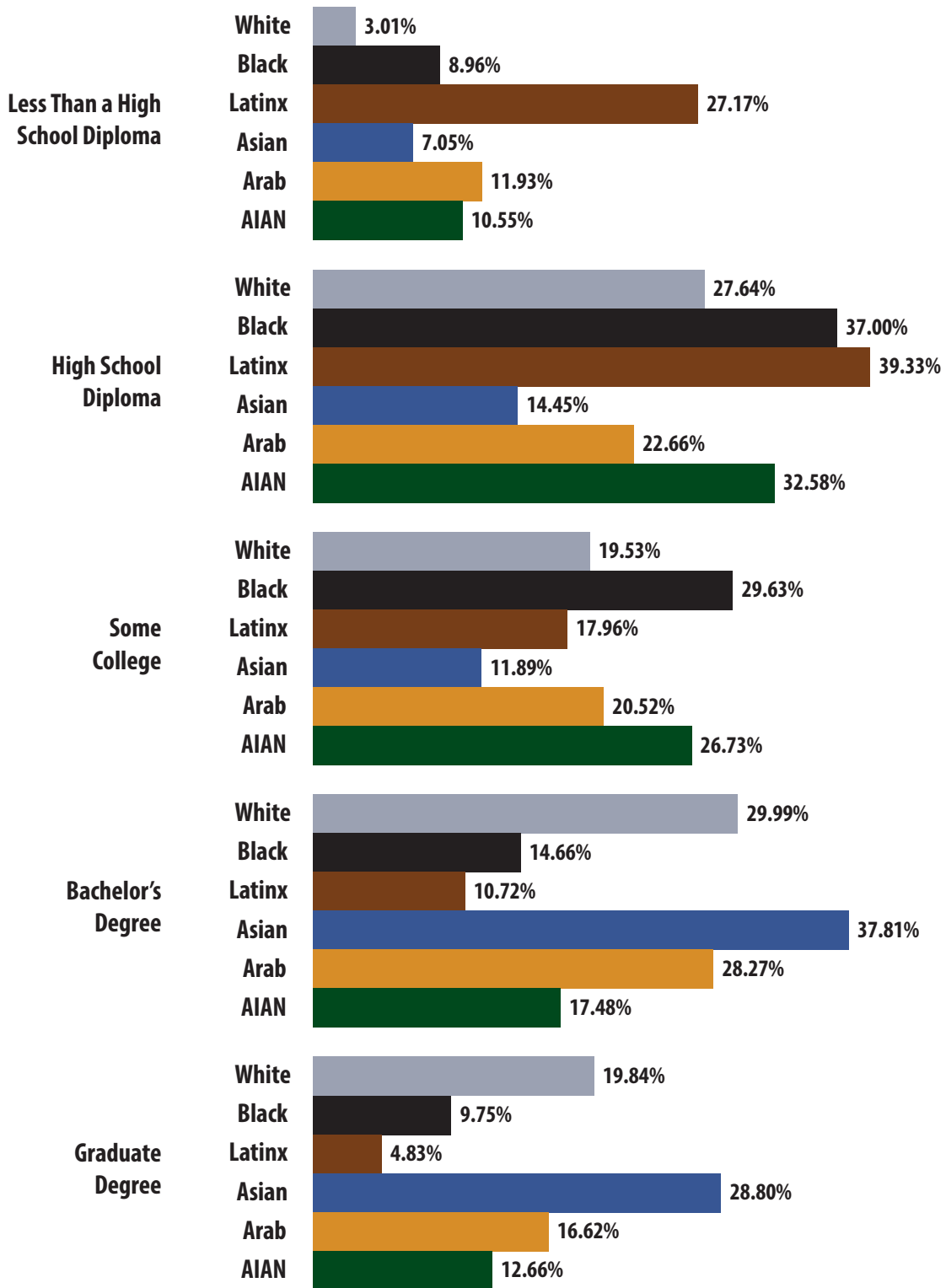
Educational attainment, similar to other topics we’ve discussed, varies among Arab Americans. Foreign-born Arab Americans have lower levels of educational attainment relative to U.S.-born Arab Americans.

Since the 1980s, educational attainment for Arab Americans has increased. However, while this is the case, the educational attainment gap between white residents and Arab American residents in Chicagoland has increased at least since the 2000s. Likely because of immigration patterns, the overall percentage of Arab Americans with a high school diploma (or equivalent) and a college degree has not kept pace with that of white residents.



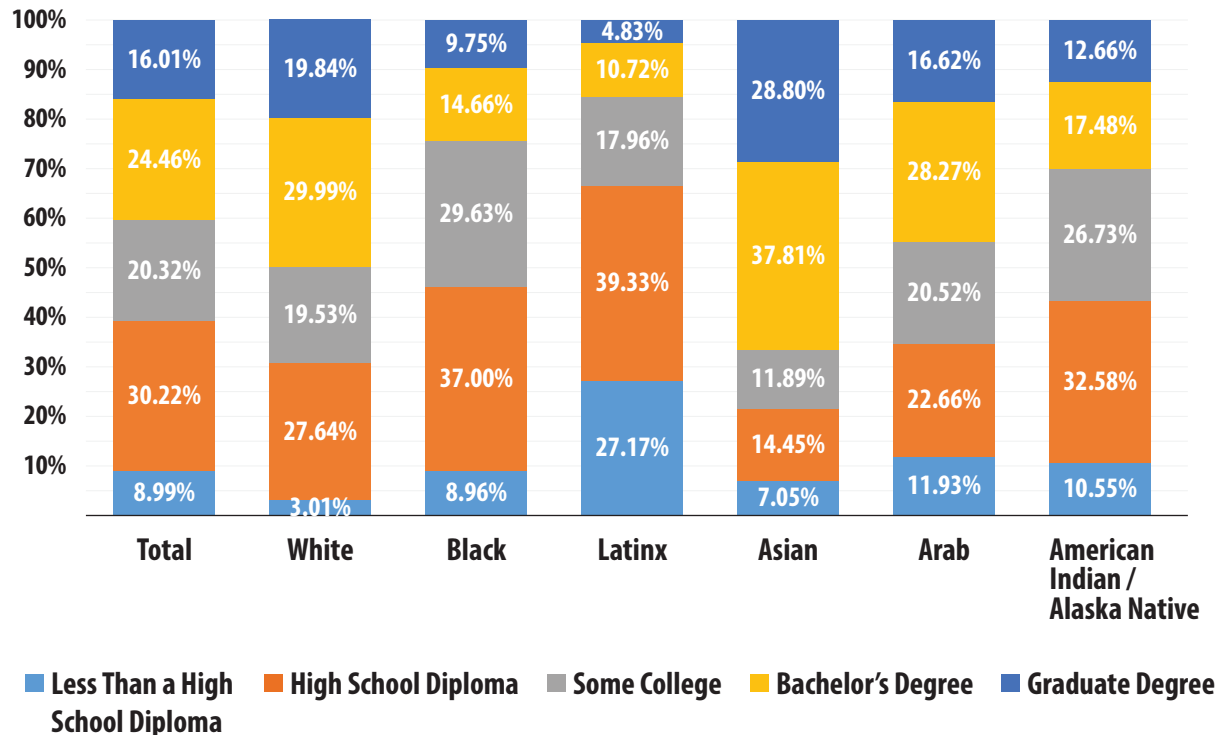
Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Sample

CHICAGOLAND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT (25 YEARS AND OLDER) BY RACE, 2020



Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Sample

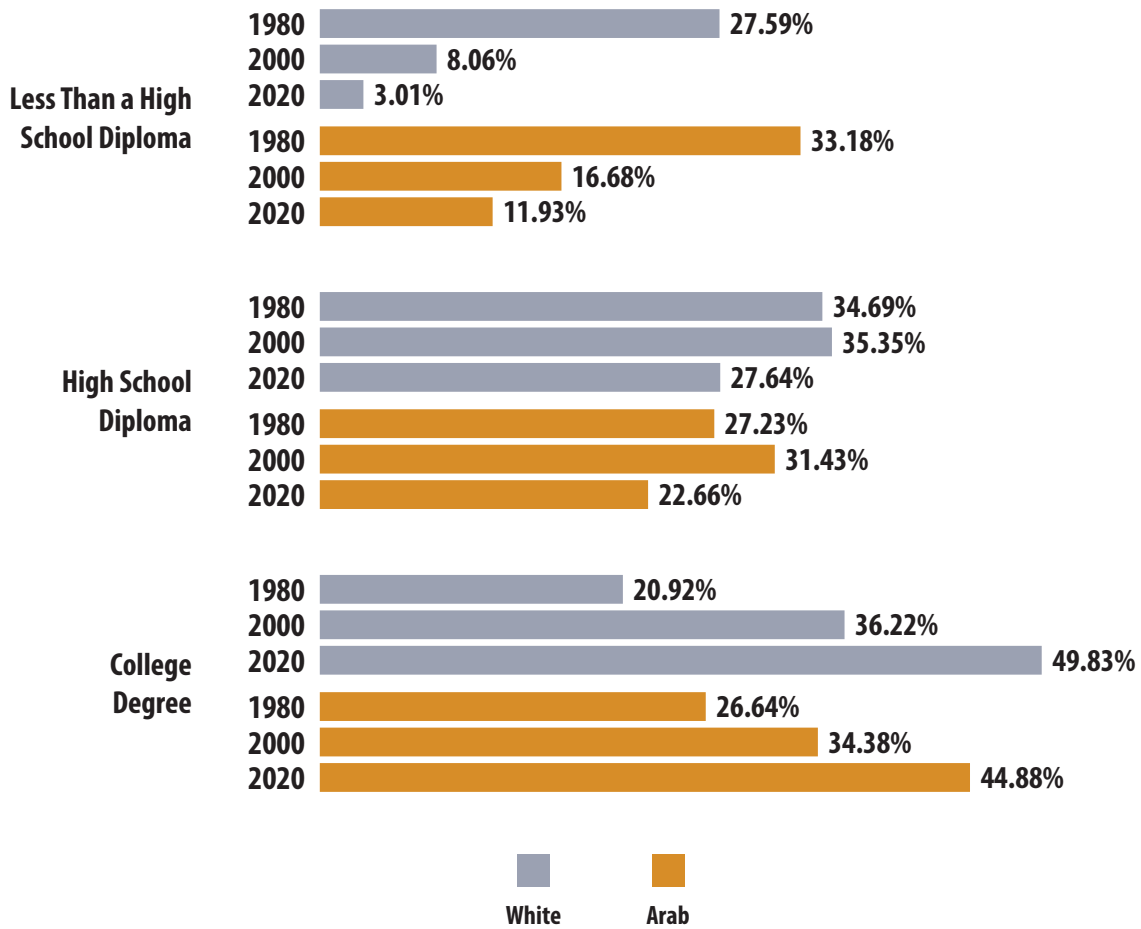
CHICAGOLAND EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT (25 YEARS AND OLDER) BY RACE, 2020



Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Samples

Statistics on the percent of the population with college degrees demonstrate the shifting disparities more explicitly. In 1980, more Arab Americans (27%) in Chicagoland held a bachelor's degree or higher than did whites (21%). However, over the course of the following two decades, the total percentage of white college degree holders increased by 29 percentage points whereas the total percentage of Arab American college degree holders increased by only 18 percentage points (again this is likely because of immigration patterns).

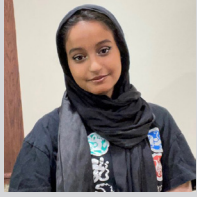
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT (25 YEARS AND OLDER), ARAB AMERICAN RESIDENTS, WHITE RESIDENTS, AND CHICAGOLAND RESIDENTS, 1980, 2000, 2020



Source: IPUMS USA, University of Minnesota, www.ipums.org, 1980 5% state sample, 2000 5% sample, American Community Survey 2016-2020 5-Year Sample

Being Yemeni in Chicagoland

by Nadiah Alyafai



Nadiah Alyafai is a Yemeni American born and raised in the southwest suburbs of Illinois. She is a full-time student at the University of Illinois Chicago and is employed at the Arab American Cultural Center, one of the first and only Arab American Cultural Centers in the nation. In 2018, after the election of Donald Trump, she joined the Arab American Action Network's youth organizing program to be more involved with her community. Her role at the Arab American Action Network is to politically educate youth 14-18 and help develop leadership skills and organizing skills within Arab and Muslim communities.

Nadiah Alyafai was invited to write about the Chicagoland Yemeni community through the lens of her and her family's life experiences and their Yemeni community network.

My Family

My mother was born in 1980 in Brooklyn, New York. My grandma, Mama Noor, immigrated to the United States to achieve the American Dream with her husband. After the tragic death of my grandfather, my mother and Mama Noor migrated back to Yemen where my mother met my father, a Yemeni citizen. After my parents married, they moved from Yemen to Burbank, Illinois where my father worked as a gas station attendant at 63rd and Kedzie in Chicago, Illinois.

I was born in 2002, during the era of heightened national security and counterterrorism policies in the United States. Although we lived in Palos Hills away from our Yemeni community, my mother made sure I grew up with her side of the family made up of over 20 families. When we congregated, women would come together to gain support and share stories while their husbands were at work and the children played.

Although many Yemeni immigrants settle/d in New York and California, community elders shared with me that the first Yemeni migrants came to Chicago in the 1960s. Most of them were from South Yemen, specifically from Yafa, where I am from. Many of those early migrants were Yemeni men who were said to only be in "transit," meaning they planned to stay in the U.S. for a short period, gain wealth, and then return home. Their jobs tended to be low-paying service jobs – from liquor stores to factories – many of which were located around Kedzie, Pulaski, Lawrence, and Ridgeway. They resided in apartment complexes in areas where necessities like transportation, grocery stores, and other Arab populations were easily accessible. Then, along with many Palestinians, the Yemeni community gradually moved to the suburbs of Chicago, such as Bridgeview, Burbank, and Hickory Hills.

One of the first *Jamiyat* (places where people come together) of the Yemeni community was on Lawrence and Kostner. A small building there served as a multipurpose facility. It was a weekend school for children to learn basic Arabic, to learn the Quran, and to build a sense of community and connection to the homeland. It also served as a place for boys and men of all ages to gather and chew *khat* while playing pool.

Another place Yemeni people gather is the Aden Center, a nonprofit center, founded around 2015 in Bridgeview, Illinois. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the center – run by women from a number of Arab communities – offered much-needed services, classes, and events to the Yemeni community. Some services provided are a Saturday School where children learn Arabic, Quran, and some Islamic studies. They hold classes on healthy relationships and family ties as well as stress management. Aden Center also partnered with Moraine Valley Community College and Dr. Nina Shoman-Dajani to provide Yemeni women with ESL classes and, hopefully in the future, will bring beginners level Arabic classes to the many young and adult women who are not literate in Arabic. Additionally, Aden Center plans to introduce computer classes for women, citizenship classes, civics classes, and GED classes to supplement their current programs on financial aid, career nights, and college fairs to increase access to education. The Center also partners with MUHSEN, an Islamic organization that brings awareness about people with disabilities to break down stigmas and create a place of inclusion and acceptance for people with disabilities and their family members.

Chicagoland's Yemeni Community Challenges

Despite community centers as gathering and learning places, Chicagoland's Yemeni community, similar to other Arab American communities, faces many challenges including different forms of racism, educational disadvantages, impact of war, and social isolation.

Racism

There are three main types of racism that Yemenis face: Yemeni-Yemeni Racism, Arab-Yemeni Racism, and Institutional Racism. Although each type of racism is distinct, the Yemeni community as a whole faces racism on micro (i.e., from how others perceive the food that we consume, how we tend to dress, or how we live our daily lives) and macro (institutionalized racial profiling) levels.

Yemeni-Yemeni Racism – Due to Yemen being separated into different cities and tribes as well as the division of North Yemen from South Yemen, these differences can get amplified in the U.S. when we are living in closer proximity to each other.

Colorism plays a role, especially when lighter skin Yemenis are treated better in the U.S. whereas darker complexions are not given the same opportunities or treatment. Classism and sexism play into the racism between one another.

Arab-Yemeni Racism – What separates Yemenis from other Arab Countries most of the time revolves around the history of colonization. Where many of the Arab countries were fully colonized by European and later U.S. forces, Yemen was never fully colonized. Aden, which is located on the southern tip of Yemen near the Gulf of Arabia and the Red Sea, has been the major target point for Western colonizers such as Great Britain and the former USSR. While these nations have been able to conquer Aden, they never expanded into the other territories (tribal areas would not allow it; the mountainous regions made it difficult; and the ports were the Western colonizers' main target). As a result, Yemeni cultures and traditions were less impacted by Western cultures and are closely tied to those our ancestors practiced. Yemeni's experience a distinctive "othering" from other Arab communities leading to difficulty in integration between other Arabs and Yemenis.

Yemenis tend to be less formally educated and Yemen is known for being one of the poorer countries. These realities tend to lead other Arabs to perceive Yemenis in a negative light and look down upon us.

Institutional Racism – Because of the difference in customs and traditions that distinguish Yemenis, U.S. society has a hard time classifying us as a racial or ethnic group. U.S. society often perceives Yemeni as uncivilized and classifies us as "tribal" and therefore backward or savage.

The institutional racism stems from how many of our community members have darker complexion with African hair texture. Many other Arabs can pass as white but that is not an option for us. Many Yemenis agree that the U.S. treats us in ways similar to the Black community.

Fear

Although in Yemen politics are a topic of conversation at nearly every meal, many in the community in the United States avoid politics. This stigma is slowly diminishing since Yemeni migrants are aware that the United States plays a significant role in politics back home. The Yemeni community overall remains hesitant to participate in civil society because we are afraid of deportation, of getting attacked through hate crimes, of facing harassment, and of being placed under surveillance. We understand that having an opinion is not free in America and we want to be completely under the radar because of the constant fear of deportation and immigration problems.

Lack of Formal Education

The Yemeni Community, compared to other Arab nations, has a low formally educated population. Women oftentimes do not receive an education. Those that do have an education often live in cities. There are few teachers who are willing to travel or live in remote areas. To be sure, many women are educated and have masters, bachelor's, and PhDs. However, there is a great need to increase the number of women with education.

Men also often do not receive education. Once they reach a certain age, they are expected to work and assist in any financial obligations not only within the house but within the community.

Many women do not have their own means of transportation nor do they have a license to drive. This feeds into the education barriers as they are unable to seek out classes that might assist in their language proficiency. Oftentimes, patriarchy obstructs women's language access and proficiency.

War & Trauma

Yemen has been facing conflict and war for many years. This impacts Yemenis in Chicagoland because many have family members in Yemen. Overwhelmingly, migrant Yemenis hold very close ties to Yemen due to ancestral ties to their land and their love for their country. Yemeni people have a sense of duty and responsibility to their extended family. Tribal thinking dictates that it is not every person for themselves but a communal duty to make sure tribe members and village members are able to receive basic necessities. Widows and orphans are taken care of by the entire village, where everyone who is financially or agriculturally capable steps in. Immigration to a country that values individualism creates distress for Yemeni migrant families, especially those with little to no community around them.

Intergenerational trauma from war, racism, and attacks on our community (such as hate crimes or government surveillance) go undiscussed in the U.S. or within the Yemeni migrant community. There is a stigma among Yemeni and Arab migrant communities to avoid acknowledging mental health challenges such as the trauma produced by war and racism. Especially within the Muslim community, Yemeni families tend to overshadow mental health with religion. The stigma of having depression and anxiety and going to a therapist is that you are seen as "weak" and "unstable." The community tends to label women with mental health disabilities as "unfit" to be married. Men who have mental health issues or who publicly express emotions are seen to be "weak" or "unmanly." Yet many community members need healing from trauma and, with the stigma and lack of knowledge around mental health, they are reproducing a harmful cycle.

Social isolation

The Yemeni community is a very private community. Many factors play into this. Yemen is a country located in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula. Its history is ancient and rich, consisting of over thousands of years of tribes whose differences resulted in conflicts with each other. When the time of the Imams (people that ruled the northern part of Yemen) came, they were very xenophobic and used their power and control to make sure Yemen and its people stayed cut off from the entire world (the mountainous regions helped). The establishment of the closed-off region allowed the preservation of ancient Yemeni cultures and traditions as well as the unique dialects in comparison with other Arab countries.

Culture Clash

One of the main cultural clashes that occurs within the Yemeni immigrant community is attire. In Yemen, it is common for women to wear the black *abaya* and *Khuna* or *burqu* (face veil). For men, it is common to wear the *Futah* (skirt) with a *jambiya* as well as a *mashada* (male head scarf). The attire back home emphasizes modesty. When Yemeni migrants come to the U.S., they typically wear the attire they wear back home. The clash that comes from differences related to dress and the individualistic culture of the U.S. can be challenging.

Youth Struggles Within Education

There are many factors that play into the struggles that Yemeni youth face, especially in schools. The first is racism. Yemeni students have a difficult time assimilating because of the significant differences between them, other Arabs, and white middle-class cultures. This creates isolation among the Yemeni students.

Students also struggle due to the barriers and challenges related to parents lacking formal education and the capacity to provide educational assistance to their children. Also, within many homes, education is not heavily valued.

Students within the school system face challenges due to their distinct dialect. Many schools do not have proper ESL classes for Yemeni students. The Yemeni dialect is very different than other Arabic dialects. Many schools do not have the resources to assist the Yemeni student body which impacts their access to education.

Stigmas within the Yemeni community such as the lack of acknowledgment for when a student has any type of developmental delay or learning disabilities also impacts education. Not only is there a cultural stigma that comes along with disabilities within our community, but there is also a lack of understanding and knowledge about disabilities that prevents parents from accessing resources their children need.

Teachers and administrators in schools rarely understand Yemeni cultural practices and are unable to support or include Yemeni children or their families in ways necessary for educational success.

PART TWO: HISTORY & DIMENSIONS OF ANTI-ARAB/ANTI-MUSLIM RACISM (A LANGUAGE AND FRAMEWORK)

Like racism directed at any community, anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism emerges out of specific historical and material conditions and entails institutionalized and everyday forms of racism that reinforce each other. In the 1970s, for example, it may have made sense to refer to anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism in and of itself. Increasingly, though, U.S. cultural and political spheres have conflated “Arab” and “Muslim” categories in their portrayal of the U.S.’ enemy in the war on terror. The figure of a “Muslim enemy,” moreover, has dominated the portrayal of many Arab communities, as well as those who are neither Arab nor Muslim. South Asian Sikhs, for example, are not Arab or Muslim but have faced hate crimes and murders based on the assumption that they are Arab/Muslim. The idea of an Arab-Middle Eastern-Muslim enemy conflating different groups and creating a racialized surveillance regime has been fueled post 9/11 by rhetoric echoing then president George W. Bush’s warning that the “Muslim enemy is anywhere and everywhere.”

As we have noted, however, Muslim communities are incredibly diverse, including individuals from every racial/ethnic community in the world. This is why we insist that while Arab Americans are impacted by anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism, a more general racist discourse also defines all Muslims, whether Arab or not, as “potential terrorist enemies of the U.S.” In other words, anti-Muslim racism impacts diverse racial/ethnic communities differently. It is important, for example, to understand how Black Muslims experience anti-Muslim racism in distinct ways compared to non-Black Arab Muslims. At the same time, this report’s findings are also relevant in different ways and to different degrees for anyone impacted by anti-Muslim racism.

The war on terror “abroad” and “racial profiling” of Arab Americans “at home” are interconnected. Given the centrality of the war on terror in U.S. culture and institutions, solutions calling for civil rights or inclusion and tolerance under the law are limited when it comes to challenging anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism. For Arab Americans, the U.S.-led war on terror and racism are not separate. In fact, while civil rights efforts

such as calls for religious tolerance of Muslims or the inclusion of Arab Americans in government positions are useful, they can also have the effect of covering up the ongoing impacts of the war on terror, as we will outline below.

Racism directed at Arabs and Muslims is not merely a recent problem resulting from the contemporary context of post-Cold War U.S. global engagements. Scholar Junaid Rana explains that the demonization of Muslims specifically emerged out of the 15th century context during a time when Europeans classified religious difference through ideas about biological difference, when Catholics forcibly removed and converted Muslims and Jews in Spain, and when the concept of race was born. Rana argues that these violent histories found their way into how European explorers viewed the indigenous people of the New World, claiming they were like “the Moors of the Old World” – in addition to the many ways they dehumanized indigenous people.⁴²

We can trace the roots of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism to the formation of what scholar Edward Said explains as the creation of a discourse of Orientalism born out of European colonial histories in the Arab region. Said argued that centuries of European writing consolidated a repertory of images that reinforced the idea of the “East” as inferior, uncivilized, and savage compared to the developed, civilized, and modern “West.” This repertory included images of exotic Arab Muslim women and the idea of the “East” as a mysterious place; Orientalist understandings had virtually nothing to do with the actual people and places living there. Rather, European Orientalism both rationalized European domination of the Arab region and North Africa while consolidating the racist myth that all “Orientals” (whether from India, Syria, Egypt or other Eastern countries) are the same. As Said argued, Orientalism creates the sense that there is a fixed and unchanging “Arab culture” that is savage, misogynist, uncivilized, and backwards.⁴³

Early U.S. histories of Islamophobia and Orientalism, borrowed from European colonial histories, gave rise to anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in the U.S, affirming that anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism has always been global and imperial in scope. Orientalism underlined the treatment of the first significant group of Arab migrants who came to the United States in the late 1800’s. While debates about their access to white privilege and citizenship ensued, Orientalist ideas, coupled with racist ideas fostered by Christian missionaries and white American Christianity about the “Holy Land,” fueled instances whereby the U.S. assumed Arabs were different than and inferior to whites.⁴⁴

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the U.S. government and popular media increasingly treated Arabs as non-white enemies of the United States, even as the U.S. Census and other government documents classified Arab Americans as “white.”⁴⁵ At multiple moments, understandings about Arab Americans and their place in the United States evolved alongside shifting relationships between the U.S. government and U.S. companies in Arab countries, particularly related to U.S. efforts to exert control over Arab oil supplies.

The 1967 Arab-Israeli war specifically marked a turning point in the ways U.S.-led imperialism in the Arab region had a ripple effect in the lives of Arab Americans. During this period, the U.S. government confirmed its unconditional alliance with the Israeli colonization of Palestinian land and relied on anti-Arab/anti-Muslim corporate media representations, anti-Arab/anti-Muslim state policies, and anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racist discrimination and harassment to mark Arabs, especially Palestinians, as potentially violent terrorist enemies. These anti-Arab/anti-Muslim policies and practices explain why Arab American scholars and activists refer to 1967 as the moment that galvanized anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in the United States across domains (e.g., employment, housing, politics), including the generalized dehumanization of Arabs in the printed media, cartoons, the workplace, neighborhoods, and more.⁴⁶ The 1967 Arab-Israeli war was a watershed moment for the racialization of Arab Americans, consolidating longstanding Orientalist assumptions, discriminatory legislation, deleterious policies, and racist media representations of Arabs as a menace to U.S. society.

Federal policies since the 1970s have been marked by the intimidation, surveillance, and harassment of Arabs with U.S. citizenship, of resident aliens, and of individuals of Arab descent, and Arab students and activists in particular.⁴⁷ For example, President Richard Nixon’s 1972 Operation Boulder cited the threat of domestic terrorism to grant the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) the power to harass individuals for “special investigations,” including phone calls and visits without evidence of criminal activity with the specific purpose of intimidation, harassment, and to discourage their activism on issues relating to the Middle East.⁴⁸

The United States has a longstanding pattern of criminalizing, arresting, and deporting Arab Americans as a way to intimidate Arab American activists and perceived supporters of Arab liberation movements. For example, in 1987, the U.S. government

arrested eight Palestinian and one Kenyan student activist in Los Angeles County on the grounds that they allegedly had raised money for a leftist Palestinian political party (the PFLP) which the U.S. considered a terrorist organization. The federal government admitted that none of the “L.A. 8” had committed a criminal or terrorist act. The L.A. 8 court proceedings revealed a Justice Department contingency plan that provided a blueprint for the mass arrest of 10,000 alien terrorists and undesirable Arabs within the U.S.; the contingency plan also detailed provisions for detention camps in Louisiana where Arabs and Iranians would be held.

This case consolidated a key component of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism whereby the U.S., in partnership with pro-Israeli advocacy movements, equated criticism of Israel and anti-Semitism with terrorism and thereby rationalized and justified the surveillance and criminalization of Arab American communities and the deportation (or threat of deportation) of Arab immigrants. Provisions for the mass roundup and possible deportation of Arab residents went hand in hand with the practice of collecting information about legal Arab American political activities and the production of a culture of fear and repression among Arab Americans, especially those most vulnerable to police harassment, such as working-class Arab immigrants. The effect of U.S. government policies was to isolate Arab Americans and obstruct possibilities for non-Arab groups to build solidarity with Arab Americans around racial justice.

These realities help explain why Arab American scholars and activists have insisted that anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism is a global and not simply a domestic problem. There is a direct correlation between anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in U.S. policy, media, and everyday life and the U.S.’ mission to grow its empire in the Arab region and North Africa – including its support of Israeli colonization and its post-Cold War military and economic domination of the region.⁴⁹

The Gulf War in the 1990’s brought an increase in profiling by airport employees of individuals who fit a “terrorist profile” (including individuals with Arab or Muslim names and/or individuals traveling to certain Arab and/or Muslim countries). In 1995, Arabs and Arab Americans were scapegoated as perpetrators of the Oklahoma City Bombing, inspiring more and more cases of violence and harassment.⁵⁰ The Clinton administration leveraged this to advance a legislative effort allowing the government

“to use evidence from secret sources in deportation proceedings for aliens suspected of terrorist involvement.”⁵¹ Out of the more than two dozen immigrants around the country who were facing deportation or exclusion on the basis of secret evidence, all were of Arab descent or were Muslims.⁵²

The post-Cold war context set the stage for the “terrorism framework” that was institutionalized especially after 9/11 through interconnected domestic and global policies and corporate media rhetoric.⁵³ This framework defines all Arabs as Muslims and all Muslims as potential terrorists. The immediate aftermath of 9/11 brought a heavy U.S. state focus on Arabs and Muslims in the U.S., rationalizing an expansion of policing and surveillance activities against them. The U.S. expanded its framing of the “Arab-Middle Eastern-Muslim terrorist enemy” to anyone and everyone who could be perceived to be Muslim, including South Asians.

Directly after September 11th, 2001, a number of Department of Justice regulations authorized the secret and indefinite detention of non-citizens, which resulted in the immediate detention and potential deportation of 1,200 persons, most of whom were Arab, South Asian, Iranian, and/or Muslim.⁵⁴ The National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), also known as “special registration,” put in place by the Department of Justice in 2002, targeted Arabs and Muslims as well as those from the Middle East and South Asia.⁵⁵ Overly broad interpretations of “material support” laws denied people their freedom – generally Arabs and Muslims – and even threatened some forms of humanitarian aid.⁵⁶ Thousands of Arab American lives were impacted not only by forced engagement with raids, detentions, and entrapment in the immigration system, but also by the culture of fear and repression that emerged and the drain on economic and social resources that comes with constantly paying lawyers and needing to organize community-based interventions.

The USA PATRIOT Act added new justifications for surveilling Arab immigrants, especially Muslims, denying entry and deporting citizens, and expanding the power of the attorney general in certifying an immigrant as a “terrorist” and holding him/her in indefinite detention. It also gave the FBI authority to investigate citizens without probable cause and expanded the ability of law enforcement officers to conduct secret searches and surveillance. Government policies such as the Deputy General’s Memo (or Alien Absconder Initiative)⁵⁷ and The Domestic Security

Enhancement Act⁵⁸ targeting Arab Americans included detention and deportation without due legal process, closed immigration hearings, the use of secret evidence, special registration, and government interviews of thousands of immigrants without evidence of criminal activity.⁵⁹

Many other policies have supported the racial profiling of Arab Americans, including laws that permitted the arrest and brief detention of “material witnesses” who have “important information” about a crime, which allowed the Justice Department to hold 70 men – all but one of whom were Muslim. Nearly half of them were never brought before a grand jury or court to testify. Many were not informed of the reason for their arrest and denied immediate access to a lawyer and knowledge of the evidence used against them. Their court proceedings were conducted behind closed doors, and all of the court documents were sealed. Witnesses were typically arrested at gunpoint, held around the clock in solitary confinement, and subjected to the harsh and degrading high-security conditions usually reserved for prisoners accused or convicted of the most dangerous crimes. Corrections staff verbally harassed the detainees and, in some cases, physically abused them.⁶⁰

The post 9/11 moment has only expanded the surveillance, containment, and criminalization of Arab Americans. As scholar Deepa Kumar explains, “A nation at war typically turns against those it sees as domestic representations of the ‘foreign enemy.’ [...] Today, the events of 9/11 have been used to ratchet up attacks on Muslim citizens and residents.”⁶¹ In her study of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism after 9/11, scholar Louise Cainkar argues that at least 100,000 Arabs and Muslims living in the United States have personally experienced one of these racial profiling measures.⁶² Moreover, Cainkar documents that, of thirty-seven known U.S. government security measures implemented since the September 11th attacks, twenty-five either explicitly or implicitly target Arabs and Muslims in the United States.⁶³

Prominent examples of targeting include the New York Police Department’s surveillance of Muslim organizations in 2006 that mapped and infiltrated mosques, community spaces, and sports venues in the name of national security and the 2009 FBI Operation Rhino which rationalized surveillance in the Twin Cities as a national security initiative to disrupt al-Shabaab recruitment. Arab and Muslim migrants continue to be profiled and harassed at airports through the Controlled-Application-

Review Resolution Program (CARRP), which has given extra scrutiny to immigrants and non-citizens arriving in the United States from Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian countries. The National Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) initiative that racially profiles Arab American communities is a collaborative effort between the Department of Homeland Security, FBI, and local law enforcement agencies. The post-2015 Countering Violent Extremism programs racially profile Arab Americans through community-based policing.

The racial profiling of people perceived to be Arab, Muslim, and/or South Asian culminated in the Trump Administration's Executive Order 13769 (known as the Muslim Ban), which "banned all travelers from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen for at least 90 days, including U.S. permanent residents. It also suspended the United States Refugee Admissions Program and related refugee settlement for 120 days." Tens of thousands of would be migrants were denied entry to the United States due to the Muslim Ban, and the migration of Syrian refugees was stopped. It also helped intensify racist fear, suspicion, surveillance, and the criminalization of Arab and Muslim immigrants. These post-9/11 policies are part and parcel of the global war on terror in the Middle East, South Asia, and North Africa.

Many anti-racist advocates have celebrated the Biden administration for its plan to partner with Arab Americans. However, the handful of Arab American consultants in his administration are heavily outnumbered by the many passionate anti-Arab advocates of Israel in the top ranks of his administration, Congress, and the Democratic Party machine. Moreover, the anti-Arab/anti-Muslim war on terror continues to be central to administration policies.⁶⁴ Nicole Nguyen, an expert analyst of domestic counter-terrorism policies explains that, "Despite Biden's promise to end the Trump administration's Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Program (TVTP), given its targeting of Arab and Muslim communities, he announced plans to expand funding for TVTP. TVTP relies on the concept of 'radicalization,' which tends to conflate particular strands of Islam with the turn to violence and terrorism."⁶⁵ Surveillance and policing strategies from Operation Boulder in the 1970s to TVTP, the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR) Initiative, and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs of today all help sustain the racial profiling of Arab Americans.

Just as it has at the federal level, institutionalized anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism has shown up in Chicagoland in many ways. FBI surveillance of Arab American Muslim homes, schools, and mosques have a long history in Chicagoland dating at least to the 1980's.⁶⁶ We also see institutionalized racism in the Chicago Police Department, especially as revealed in the 2017 Department of Justice report that made public social media posts by police officers that are heavily anti-Muslim. One Chicago Police Department officer posted a photo of a dead Muslim soldier in a pool of his own blood with the caption: "The only good Muslim is a (expletive) dead one."⁶⁷ Writing about Muslims in a Facebook post, the Chicago police union chief asserted, "Savages, they all deserve a bullet."⁶⁸

The effect of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim policies and racism extends beyond the specific individuals who they target. Advocates agree that the U.S.' politically motivated deportation of 70-year-old community leader Ramea Odeh in 2017 was meant to repress Arab American activists.⁶⁹ Next, we turn to the everyday effects of this racism for Arab Americans in the region as they contend with racism in airports, at school, in healthcare, in the workplace, and in their encounters with police.

Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs)

The Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative facilitates the gathering, documenting, processing, analyzing, and sharing of Suspicious Activity Reports between local, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, the nationwide “If you see something, say something” Department of Homeland Security initiative encourages local residents to generate Suspicious Activity Reports. These reports are stored in high-tech “Fusion Centers” where law enforcement agencies can collaboratively sift through the reports and identify “suspicious activity with a potential nexus to terrorism.”⁷⁰ The Arab American Action Network and Policing in Chicago Research Group at the University of Illinois Chicago reviewed 235 Suspicious Activity Reports from two Illinois Fusion Centers, the Chicago Police Department’s Crime Prevention and Information Center (CPIC) and the Illinois State Police’s Statewide Terrorism Intelligence Center (STIC). This analysis found that SARs are:

- A tool of racialized surveillance. Over half of all SARs that include markers of racial identity listed the suspects as Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, or “olive skinned” (53.6% at CPIC and 49.4% at STIC), and even more are identified as people of color (76.8% at CPIC and 63.9% at STIC).
- Used to criminalize dissent and suppress political critique.
- Used to reinforce racial stereotypes that treat Arabs and Muslims as “terrorists.”
- Used to criminalize a wide range of behaviors when carried out by people of color, including photography, work activities, mental health crises, and protected speech.
- Used to target Black people, especially in association with Islam.
- Used in ways that reinforce white supremacy.⁷¹

Given the history of marking Arab communities as national security threats through public policy and popular media, the deputization of local residents as terrorist watchdogs has facilitated the expansion of racialized surveillance of Arab, Muslim, and “olive skinned” people; criminalized Arab-led political organizing; and reinforced white supremacy. In this way, the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reports Initiative empowers and encourages the vigilante policing, surveillance, and harassment of Arab Americans as terrorist threats.

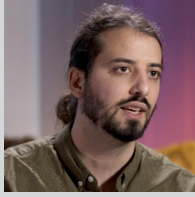
Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Programs

Countering violent extremism is a federal anti-terrorism program that encourages community members, social service providers, and religious leaders to participate in the national security apparatus. In effect, CVE programs deputize community members and social service providers as terrorist watchdogs who identify and report individuals vulnerable to or who they perceive are in the process of terrorist radicalization.⁷² In Chicagoland, CVE emerged through the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority's (ICJIA) Targeted Violence Prevention Program (TVPP), which received a 2016 Department of Homeland Security grant to train 150 community leaders and members to "help off-ramp individuals who exhibit warning signs of radicalization to violence as well as those who exhibit behaviors signifying they may be in the early stages of planning an act of ideologically inspired targeted violence."⁷³ ICJIA also developed training curriculum to "provide community members tools to prevent violence and community health and resiliency" so they can serve as "engaged bystanders" equipped to "intervene before, during, or after a situation when they see behaviors that promote violence."

Although ICJIA insisted that its anti-terrorism approach offered an alternative to law enforcement-led interdictions, investigative journalists Alex Ruppenthal and Asraa Mustufa revealed consistent collaboration with law enforcement, including the Chicago Police Department and Federal Bureau of Investigation.⁷⁴ Ruppenthal also found that ICJIA struggled to secure, and sometimes misrepresented the status of, community partners, and that many community members opposed the program given its explicit targeting of Arab and Muslim communities as uniquely susceptible to terrorist radicalization.⁷⁵ These findings align with reports from the American Civil Liberties Union and Brennan Center for Justice that CVE programs hinge on faulty social science, repress political dissent, and treat Arab and Muslim communities as terrorist incubators.⁷⁶ The narratives organizing ICJIA's Targeted Violence Prevention Program – that community members must vigilantly report potential terrorists and that Arabs and Muslims pose an enduring security threat – justify and even encourage everyday forms of harassment, discrimination, and bullying. It is to these everyday experiences that we next turn.

Surveillance in Arab Communities in Chicagoland

by Muhammad Sankari



Muhammad Sankari is the Lead Organizer for the Arab American Action Network (AAAN). The son of Arab immigrants, he grew up in Wisconsin and joined the AAAN in 2010. Since then, he has worked primarily with young people helping to develop the youth-led Campaign to End Racial Profiling. He was part of a research team composed of other AAAN members and UIC's Policing in Chicago Research Group that wrote the May 2022 report *The Suppression of Dissent and the Criminalization of Arabs and Muslims in Illinois*.

When asked about the surveillance, criminalization, or repression of Arabs in the U.S., many people often mark September 11th and its immediate aftermath as the beginning point, but that is a common misconception. The surveillance of Arabs on a national level, and in Chicagoland (Chicago proper and all its adjoining suburbs) specifically, is a decades-long issue that extends as far back as the early 1970s and exists at the intersection of U.S. foreign policy goals, changing domestic politics, and the growing national security apparatus. This commentary addresses the impact of surveillance on Arab Americans in Chicagoland, with a focus on the contemporary policies of racial profiling and the targeting of Arabs and an exploration of the communities' political and historical roots.

The initial surveillance of Arabs in Chicagoland coincided with the arrival of large numbers of Palestinians who immigrated in the late 1960s and early 1970s after Israel illegally occupied the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem in historical Palestine, plus other Arab territories. A number of these Palestinians were activists in Palestine and members of the Palestine Liberation Organization. This made them targets of U.S. law enforcement, which was already engaged in domestic counter-intelligence operations against the Black liberation, Chicano liberation, Puerto Rican independence, and other social movements. Arabs were subjected to the same FBI spying and infiltration tactics that were employed against other groups, and Arab activists were threatened with deportation. This period laid the foundation for the continued and expanded surveillance and targeting of Arabs in following decades.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as U.S. foreign policy shifted in the Middle East, so too did the surveillance and targeting of Arab communities in the U.S. In 1995, President Bill Clinton signed Executive Order 12947, "Prohibiting Transactions with Terrorists Who Threaten to Disrupt the Middle East Peace Process," criminalizing support for almost every political party in Palestine. In Chicagoland, while the influence and strength of Arab organizations continued to grow in

the community, they also came under heavier scrutiny, including religious institutions whose membership was primarily Palestinian.

Following the attacks of September 11th, the federal government enacted a new era of mass surveillance and repression against Arabs and Muslims across the U.S. With the passage of laws and policies ranging from the USA PATRIOT Act and the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS) to mass arrests and FBI interviews, as well as the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the national security state was born into existence. NSEERS ushered in this new era by forcing non-permanent resident immigrant males ages 16 and up who were nationals of 25 countries (24 of which have majority Arab or Muslim populations) to register with the then-Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS).

The Arab American Action Network (AAAN) led the organizing against NSEERS in Chicagoland, working with legal and community allies to provide education and identify attorneys for the men targeted by the program and to alert their families in case they were detained. According to the DHS, over 83,000 foreign nationals participated in the domestic portion of the program, with over 13,000 being placed in deportation proceedings, most for minor, technical violations of their visa statuses. Not one of the 13,000 placed in deportation proceedings was ever convicted of any crime related to terrorism. NSEERS continued into the Obama administration, when it was finally rescinded, as the increase of technological capabilities by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services and U.S. Customs and Border Protection made the program obsolete.

Here in Chicagoland, also following September 11th, the government launched a vicious attack against community leaders Abdelhaleem Ashqar and Muhammad Salah. Salah was a resident of the Chicagoland area and both were well known community members who were targeted by the Department of Justice for their Palestine activism. The trial of Ashqar and Salah became a public test case of the new post-9/11 counter-terrorism laws and included testimony by a government informant who had infiltrated the largest Arab mosque in Illinois, the Mosque Foundation of Bridgeview, a suburb of Chicago.

While Ashqar and Salah were both acquitted of all serious terrorism charges, their case marked a shift in the strategies employed by the U.S. government in the targeting of Arab communities – from this point on, confidential informants would become the cornerstone of the surveillance, entrapment, and harassment of Arab communities in the U.S. In fact, in a 2008 FBI budget authorization request, the FBI mentions having 15,000 informants on its payroll.⁷⁷

In recent years, surveillance programs have continued to expand their targeting of Arabs and Muslims across the U.S. In 2015, the Obama administration launched a program known as Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), which was purportedly established to provide funding to organizations to help stop the rise of extremism by identifying and intervening in the lives of people deemed to be “at risk” of becoming violent. This program pumped millions of dollars into partnerships between DHS and local organizations.

The Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority’s (ICJIA’s) Targeted Violence Prevention Program (TVPP) received \$187,877 through the DHS’ 2016 inaugural grant program. For years, TVPP failed to make inroads into Arab and Muslim communities due to successful organizing led by AAAN, American Friends Service Committee, and other allies, which prevented CVE from taking root. After a sustained two-year organizing campaign by the Stop CVE Coalition, the director of TVPP resigned and ICJIA announced it would not re-staff his position – securing an important victory for Arab communities.

Law enforcement also surveils Arab and Muslim communities through massive data collection and processing as part of “preventative” counter-terrorism measures, mainly using Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) and fusion centers.

Fusion centers are physical data warehouses created post-September 11th to provide a space for local, state, and federal law enforcement to coordinate and share data. On a practical level, this means that data gathered (potentially based on the biases of local police) from everyday activities can have deep consequences for people. For example, a SAR could be filed on a person and then forwarded to a fusion center, which is then mandated to share the information with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the FBI, and a myriad of other law enforcement agencies. *All of this is done without an individual ever being charged with a crime.* This is the cutting edge of the national security state, the ability for a single officer – with a mere suspicion – to set in motion a series of events involving local, state, and federal law enforcement.

The Arab communities of Chicagoland, like Arab communities nationally, have been racialized, criminalized, and surveilled by law enforcement for decades as the domestic face of the “enemy abroad.” With the post-9/11 expansion of surveillance, these communities are now even more in the crosshairs. This reality has been met with community resistance, as Arabs in Chicagoland continue to organize and mobilize for their rights to live full lives without being marked as enemies.

PART TWO: SURVEY OF ARAB AMERICAN EXPERIENCES IN CHICAGOLAND

To better understand Arab American experiences in Chicagoland, we partnered with several community organizations to conduct a survey of community members focusing in particular on hard-to-reach parts of the population (e.g., Arabic-speaking, recent migrants, low-income and working-class residents, etc.). The invisibility of Arab Americans places this subset of Arab Americans in a particularly precarious position as they depend on support from public and non-profit private service providers with specific cultural knowledge and understanding of their experiences but the community organizations that are working to meet their needs often struggle to access necessary funds because the population they serve is not easily visible in existing data (e.g., rates of poverty, domestic violence, food insecurity, COVID-19 rates, etc.).

This is the first survey of its kind in Chicagoland. With the help of our Arab American serving community partners who administered the survey, we were able to complete 496 surveys between December 2020 and September 2021.

Two-hundred-twenty-seven persons, or 46% of respondents,⁷⁸ chose to take the survey in Arabic; the rest took the survey in English. Three-hundred-and-forty-seven, or 73% of respondents, were women. Fifty respondents, or just over 10%, were between the ages of 18-24, and 58% of respondents were between 25-44 years old. The majority of respondents (58%) had children. One-hundred-eight, or 23% of respondents, identified as white-only and two-hundred-and-eighty-one, or 60%, identified their race as Arab-only. More than two-thirds of our respondents were foreign born (68%). Over half (52%) were in households earning less than \$25,000; 41% had bachelor's degrees or higher; and 44% of were not working (either unemployed or not in the labor force).

Our survey questions were divided into 5 broad categories: organizational assessments (e.g., "How effective different organizations are in meeting the needs of Arab Americans"), stereotyping and prejudice (e.g., "How often are you asked uncomfortable questions about Arab Americans, Islam, and/or the Middle East

by the following people or groups?”), discrimination (e.g., “How often have you experienced verbal insults, threats, or physical attacks due to your race, ethnicity, and/or religion?”), discomfort engaging in certain activities (e.g., “How often do you feel uncomfortable engaging in the following activities in front of people who do not share your race, ethnicity, and/or religion?”) and worry over participating in certain activities (e.g., “How often do you feel uncomfortable engaging in the following activities in front of people who do not share your race, ethnicity, and/or religion?”).

Each category contained a series of questions inquiring into the respondent’s experiences in various settings such as at school, work, and seeking healthcare; with various social actors such as bosses, colleagues, neighbors, and police; and engaging in various activities such as political actions, discussing religious views, or filling out forms at the doctor’s office. Most responses were measured on a four-point Likert scale (for example “very effective / somewhat effective / a little effective / not at all effective” or “often / sometimes / rarely / never”) and the remainder on a three-point Likert scale (“very worried / somewhat worried / not worried at all”). In addition, we included an optional write-in section to allow respondents to elaborate on their choices.

Overall, the survey provides additional local insight on the broad patterns we see generally in scholarship on Arab Americans. On the one hand, respondents report experiencing that their families’ and communities’ needs are not being addressed – a kind of invisibility that often results from organizations and institutional actors not recognizing or understanding the community or its needs. On the other hand, respondents also document how their everyday life is framed by fear and threat due to hypervisibility – where they are treated with suspicion and hostility due to being seen through the lens of stereotypes.

Organizational Assessment

About one in four respondents noted that organizations such as religious organizations, businesses, service organizations, government offices, and schools are “not at all effective” in meeting the needs of Arab Americans while one in three reported these organizations as “very effective.” The differences in views towards organizations in conjunction with participant’s written responses help draw out some important insights.

First, it is notable that mosques and non-profit service agencies were viewed most favorably among respondents. Mosques had the highest “very effective” rating (41% of respondents reported that mosques were very effective in meeting the needs of Arab Americans) and the lowest “not at all effective” rating (15% of respondents). Although non-profit service agencies were not viewed as favorably as mosques, they had the second lowest “not at all effective” rating (18% of respondents), and almost one-third of respondents reported that non-profit service agencies were “very effective” in meeting the needs of Arab Americans.

Written responses suggest that this favorable view may have to do with the fact that these are organizations that understand and attend specifically to the needs of Arab Americans. As one respondent explained, “I just don’t think Arab folks are often thought about in any of these spaces unless it’s specifically an Arab/Muslim only space, like mosques and Arab churches.” Or, as another respondent put it, the mosque was the only institution in their community with services catering specifically to Arab Americans. Similarly, other respondents highlighted the importance of organizations that are led or staffed by Arab Americans. As one respondent succinctly stated, “If an organization is staffed with Arab Americans, they will be effective in serving the needs of Arabs.”

The paucity of knowledge about Arab Americans and lack of Arab American staff in organizations leads to negative experiences with organizations. As another survey respondent stated: “The lack of representation in a lot of these spaces leads to inadvertent alienation and a lack of understanding [of] the needs of Arab Americans.”

This may be the reason that local businesses were also viewed favorably by respondents. Sixty percent of respondents reported local business as being “somewhat” or “very effective” in meeting the needs of Arab Americans, while 30% of respondents viewed them as “not at all effective.” A written response pointed to the importance of dense networks of culturally competent businesses and organizations as critical to these being able to support Arab Americans and address the diverse needs of Arab American communities: “I live in an area with a plethora of local Arab owned businesses. These range from grocery stores to restaurants, to healthcare providers and therapists. Additionally, non-profit agencies such as Arab American Family Services are effective in helping immigrants in the community. U.S.-born Arabs have different needs than immigrant Arabs.”

These responses help us to understand how the lack or presence of Arab American staff in organizations directly impacts Arab Americans' experiences as they navigate everyday life – attending school or at work, navigating service organizations or attending a mosque. Organizations led and staffed by Arab Americans were highlighted by survey respondents as those that have the cultural insights, experience, and knowledge necessary to navigate the various needs of Arab American communities. Unsurprisingly, written-responses to the survey expressed that organizations that made an explicit effort to attend to the needs of Arab Americans were most effective. For example, a parent in our survey spoke highly of their child's school for helping students who speak Arabic. Another respondent captured the importance of organizations recognizing the specific needs of Arab Americans and having a degree of cultural competency, writing:

Most [organizations] don't recognize our individual needs so it's hard for them to meet the specific needs of our community. For example, we have unique healthcare needs but we do not have a box in healthcare spaces to identify our race. My university is an effective space because there is an Arab American Cultural Center which provides us with culturally relevant resources we need to thrive such as community events which provide us with connection to other Arabs.

Spaces in which Arab Americans are represented and their cultural needs are recognized were generally viewed more favorably among respondents.

Organizations more removed from the community including the workplace and government (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the police, and local government offices) were viewed far less favorably. Around 30% of respondents indicated that USCIS, local government, and the workplace were "not at all effective" in meeting the needs of Arab Americans and over one in three respondents viewed police this way.

Those who viewed workplace and government organizations as "not at all effective" in meeting the needs of Arab Americans mentioned that they felt this way due to being constantly surveilled, criminalized, or stereotyped as forever foreign. There was a sense, in other words, of being singled out for being Arab American. The following survey respondent summed up this, stating,

I cannot think of a time that an organization or agency has met my or my family's needs [...]. Quite the contrary, [I've] often experienced being met with suspicion and it feels uncomfortable to reach out to organizations that are tailored to Arab Americans because of fears of surveillance. [...]. Mosques in the community cooperate with law enforcement and do not meet the needs of non-religious people. Mental health, social, and educational services are limited. At the university when [...] experiencing discrimination from students or professors [...] I was criminalized for [reporting] it.

In fact, contrary to the parent who held their child's school in high regard for having English as a second language (ESL) classes, another respondent noted that "Public schools, for example, will put Arab children in ESL when they clearly don't need it. I have friends that were put in those classes that barely knew Arabic. I don't know if this is just to get more funding for these programs or just blatant racism, but I do know people that were wrongly placed in these programs faced long term effects in their academic careers."

Views towards the police provide a pointed understanding of what it's like to live at the extreme ends of being invisible to organizations or hypervisible but criminalized. Roughly equal numbers of respondents (about a third in each case) viewed police as "very effective" and "not at all effective" in meeting the needs of Arab Americans. Written responses that viewed the police as effective were virtually all succinct, most often writing something like "police were helpful." There were equally succinct unfavorable written responses, such as, the "police are racist" or "they are late when called," but, perhaps understandably, those with negative experiences were also those who elaborated on their disapproval in detail. They emphasized that police "harassed" Arab Americans "seeing them as terrorists" and that "police and immigration services [were] hostile towards members of [...the Arab American] community and treat them with suspicion."

A mother of 5 and educator stated, "Palos Park Police have been horrendous on multiple occasions. Horrible. Discriminatory and outright violent." She recalled a story of being pulled over in her minivan for an expired license sticker and was told

that her license would be suspended for prior tickets (“all minor infractions and fully paid for”). The routine traffic stop escalated to an arrest. She was yelled at, told to get out of the car, and forced to remove her hijab. When she asked for a female officer due to fear, the officer “became irate [...] extremely violent” and arrested her, cuffing her wrists “so tightly” that she had welts. She said “I can honestly say it has been traumatizing for me. I am a mother of 5, a law-abiding citizen who drives a minivan and I have been treated like a hardened criminal.”

Stereotyping, Prejudice, and Discrimination

Survey respondents documented experiencing significantly high levels of stereotyping and prejudice among colleagues, strangers, neighbors, and close friends and family. About half of respondents reported “often” or “sometimes” experiencing being asked uncomfortable questions by close friends and significant others, colleagues, and strangers. Survey respondents documented *relatively* lower rates of stereotyping by their bosses and police, yet these were still significant with one in four respondents experiencing stereotyping and prejudice from their boss “often” or “sometimes” and one in five respondents experiencing stereotyping and prejudice from the police.

The importance of these findings is that they underscore the pervasiveness of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism as it permeates the everyday experiences of Arab Americans and is perpetuated not only by those with power but also by strangers on the street, co-workers and fellow students, and even close friends. Collectively, the written responses shed some light on what this looked like for our respondents: a series of micro-aggressions – sometimes the result of ignorant but well-intentioned comments and questions and sometimes with malicious intent – that accumulate over time to produce exhaustion and frustration in everyday social interactions.

Written responses indicated that there is a considerable level of ignorance about Arabs and Arab Americans in the United States. As one respondent stated, “Almost every time I meet someone that is not an Arab or of Middle Eastern descent, they always ask questions that seem like they’ve never met an Arab before. I believe it’s

really important to educate non-Arabs.” Another respondent echoed this sentiment, “I hate how I have to explain to people that it is possible to be Arab and not Muslim.”

The lack of everyday knowledge about Arabs, Muslims, and the Middle East, alongside the hypervisibility of pervasive negative stereotyped depictions of Arabs and Arab Americans in popular media, make for fraught encounters and experiences for Arab Americans. Survey respondents expressed annoyance and exhaustion about continually being treated as cultural oddities or ambassadors for all Arab Americans and the Arab world. As one respondent expressed, “I get asked where I am from every time I go out into the community [...]. I question whether or not to be honest so as to avoid the barrage of comments and questions.” Another respondent explicitly stated that they are treated as the spokesperson for Arabs:

Whenever there seems to be a big news event happening whether it be in the U.S. or outside of it, a lot of times I get asked questions that are uncomfortable. People expect me to be the spokesperson for these events or take the time to express my patriotisms to the U.S. and condemn the bad things that are happening in the world. It’s extremely degrading, mentally exhausting, and makes me feel so invalidated.

Respondents also described continually being addressed in a pejorative and culturally insensitive manner, or even with aggressive and racist tones. One respondent wrote that, when a patient learned that they were Muslim during their clinical rotations in nursing school, that patient expressed to them that being Muslim “was okay” but added that they “didn’t need a white man’s permission or approval” to do something. The same respondent also recalled explicitly racist comments from a nurse practitioner in the break room.

Discrimination

Following the 2003 Detroit Arab American Survey,⁷⁹ our Chicagoland survey asked respondents about their experiences with a range of specific types of discrimination: verbal assault, threats, vandalism, physical attack, and loss of employment due to being Arab American. Survey respondents reported experiencing discrimination due to their race/ethnicity as follows: 39% reported experiencing threatening words or gestures, 38% reported experiencing verbal insults or abuse, 20% reported

experiencing vandalism, 14% reported experiencing a physical attack, and 14% reported experiencing loss of employment. Respondents in our survey reported much higher rates of discrimination across the board compared with the Detroit Arab American Survey (DAAS). For example, rates of verbal insults or abuse were 14 percentage points greater than those reported in DAAS. Rates of being threatened were 3 times greater, rates of vandalism and loss of employment were 4 times greater and reported rates physical attack were 8 times greater. These comparisons should be interpreted with scrutiny. We cannot say that Chicagoland Arab Americans experience more discrimination than Arab Americans in the Detroit Metro Area, since our survey was conducted in 2022 (about 20 years after DAAS) and, as stated above, because our is not a representative sample. However, it is noteworthy that Arab Americans in the Detroit Metropolitan area reported lower rates of discrimination a few years after September 11th than Arab Americans in Chicagoland did almost two decades later.

Verbal assaults and threats were the most common types of discrimination for our respondents. Around one in five respondents stated that this happened “often” or “sometimes.” Although physical attacks, vandalism, and loss of employment were not everyday occurrences for our survey respondents, the rate of occurrences for these types of discrimination were nonetheless high.

Respondents wrote that they have been called racial slurs, been harassed by Transportation Security Administration (TSA) workers, been attacked by fireworks, had their car windows broken, been denied promotion, and been forced to quit their job all due to being Arab. In the case of the broken car window, the respondent believed it had to do with their bumper sticker; in other cases these acts were due to the perceived race and ethnicity of the respondent. One respondent who worked in retail said they were called slurs and received complaints because of their ethnicity. Another respondent stated that they took off their hijab post 9/11 “due to the public reaction [...]. This included people yelling ‘Go back to Afghanistan,’ giving the middle finger, and stares in public that were too much for me to handle at 15.”

The written responses also illustrate how closely intertwined anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism and politics are for Arab Americans. One respondent was screamed at for wearing their *keffiyah* (a symbol of Palestinian resistance associated with the Second Intifada). Survey participants also recounted that the political context shaped how

they navigated social interactions. In their written responses, for example, ten respondents referred to the difficulty of discussing the Palestinian struggle under Israeli occupation and two respondents specifically noted that they were fearful they would lose their jobs if they discussed the Palestinian struggle for liberation.

In sum, verbal assault, threats, stereotyping, and prejudice are very much a part of everyday life for Arab Americans in Chicagoland. Our survey respondents described many examples of strangers, bosses, police, patients, and government and elected officials participating in this behavior, producing a general atmosphere of discomfort, exhaustion, annoyance, fear, and physical harm among many.

Worry and Discomfort in Participating in Activities

A significant proportion of survey respondents felt worried about engaging in a number of activities ranging from 16% to 37% depending upon the activity. These activities included filling out forms at the DMV or doctor's office, traveling abroad and within the U.S., and openly expressing political or religious views.

According to the written responses, concerns over engaging with police or participating in political activities were due both to a general atmosphere of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism and because of personal experiences with prejudice and discrimination. Some respondents gave voice to the pervasive and ever-present character of this worry: "I'm Palestinian so I feel like there might be random Americans that might harass me because of my identity or stop me from doing something because of it." Other respondents noted similar worries about being "visibly Muslim" and "visibly Arab" regarding the police and attending protests.

As indicated by numerous written responses, prior experiences shaped survey respondents worry to participate. For example, negative experiences with TSA and homeland security officers stood out and were the most commonly cited reason for worrying about traveling. One respondent was "concerned about traveling after [their] passport was removed without reason." For another respondent, "Racist airport experiences with TSA agents have been endless both within and outside of the U.S. and I am traumatized by airports now." Another respondent recalled being searched by homeland security upon returning from Washington D.C. after receiving

an award. Homeland security wanted to confiscate the award stating that it may be used as a weapon and escalated the encounter to the point of threatening arrest. They coerced the respondent into staying in their seat for the entire duration of the flight in exchange for keeping the award.

As with other questions, politics and racial animus went hand in hand and were a persistent theme in survey participant's explanations for their worry and concern about participating in various activities, especially in response to experiences with surveillance and doxing, where someone has their personal and sensitive information revealed online without their consent. As one survey respondent wrote,

Because there is so much political repression [due to] participating in a protest, BDS [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions], or speaking up politically especially on Palestine [...] I do worry about how my expressions, writings, SM posts, and grassroots organizing will be used against me or my family. Do we risk getting fired, denied other positions? how is activity being monitored?

Another respondent explained that they no longer use their full name on documents or job applications after being doxed on Canary Mission (a pro-Zionist website designed to discredit, harass, and intimidate Arab organizers). As they wrote, "I know that [Canary Mission] is losing credibility, but it still scares me and I sometimes feel alone in this even though I know several other people on canary mission that have tried to give me some relief. I google myself everyday to see if it's still there."

Differences Among Arab American Respondents

In our survey, there were important differences in how foreign-born and economically precarious respondents navigated everyday life and related to anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism compared to U.S.-born respondents with higher socio-economic standing. In our sample, socio-economic characteristics (income, education levels, and employment) were meaningfully associated with foreign-born status such that foreign-born respondents were more likely to live in households earning below the Chicagoland median household income and were more likely to be unemployed and hold less than a bachelor's degree.⁸⁰

Views on organizations' ability to meet the needs of Arab Americans

Foreign-born and economically precarious respondents tended to be concentrated at both the positive and negative end of our responses when assessing an organizations' ability to meet the needs of Arab Americans. They were more likely to report organizations as either "very effective" or as "not at all effective," depending upon the organization; whereas U.S.-born respondents with a higher socio-economic status were more likely to fall somewhere in the middle of these two ends.

This pattern was particularly pronounced with regards to health care providers and non-profit service organizations. Foreign-born and economically precarious respondents are more likely to rely on and to use non-profit services than those with a higher socio-economic status. This likely accounts for why they held more acute and articulated views on the effectiveness of these services. Likewise, whereas those with more money and full-time employment have more flexibility in shopping around for better healthcare in the private market or are provided health care through their employer, the majority of our sample were very likely to be reliant on public insurance or private health insurance of a lower quality, if they were insured at all.

Views on the police, local government offices, and USCIS provide an interesting variation on this trend in which less precarious Arab Americans had markedly lower rates of approval.

Reporting on being asked uncomfortable questions, discrimination, and worry about participating in activities

Economically precarious, foreign-born respondents tended to report lower rates of stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and worry about participating in activities relative to U.S.-born respondents with a higher socio-economic standing. The differences were stark in some cases. Nearly 9 out of 10 respondents with household incomes above the Chicagoland median reported being asked uncomfortable questions by their colleagues compared with 4 out of 10 of respondents with household incomes below the median. This is understandable and echoes data on other groups, such as middle-class African Americans, who tend to live and work in more mixed-race settings and thus report more experience with microaggressions or discrimination. Here, for example, recent refugees who are not in the labor force

are likely having fewer daily interactions outside of the community. Regardless, on its face, both rates appear quite high.

The 18- to 24-year-old cohort, who were more likely to be U.S.-born and hold a bachelor's degree or higher, reported higher levels of stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and worry about participating in activities compared to respondents who were 25 or older. This is important because age was generally not meaningfully associated with views on an organizations' ability to meet the needs of Arab Americans with the important exception of police and local government offices. The 18- to 24-year-old cohort was more likely to hold strong negative views and less likely to hold strong positive views of these organizations. Age was also meaningfully associated with more explicit experiences of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism. Young people, for example, were 2 times more likely to be asked uncomfortable questions by the police and 2.5 times more likely to worry about calling the police compared to those 25 and older. And they were almost 2 times more likely to express worry about engaging in political acts.

Race and perceived race

Our survey asked respondents how they self-identified ethnoracially and how others perceived them. A majority of respondents (67%) identified themselves as non-white. The vast majority (77%) of the self-identified non-white respondents reported their race as Arab. Similarly, almost two thirds of respondents reported their perceived race as non-white. Unsurprisingly, self-identified non-white respondents were over 10 times more likely to also report their perceived race as non-white.

What Does the Survey Tell Us?

Mirroring what we heard in our focus groups, Arab American survey respondents often experienced being invisible or misunderstood by organizations without Arab American staff or any awareness of the history, culture, and needs of Arab American communities. Arab American survey respondents also experienced discrimination, stereotyping, and criminalization due to the hypervisibility of Arab American communities associated with anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism though in different ways across class and social status. While our findings show that working-class, foreign-

born respondents documented experiencing lower rates of explicit racism (e.g., being asked uncomfortable questions) and worry to participate in activities due to their race, this should not be interpreted to mean that they are unaffected by anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism. Rather they experience it differently than those of a higher social status (possibly because of their different levels of daily contact and interaction with non-Arabs) and in less overt but nonetheless meaningful ways.

Written responses in the survey, for instance, revealed a lack of services able to accommodate the needs of Arab Americans, especially immigrants, who tend to occupy lower socio-economic positions in Chicagoland and thus be more reliant on non-profit and public services. The lack of ample resources to meet the needs of foreign-born and economically precarious Arab Americans is connected to their invisibility.

Our survey also helps us to better understand complex and important considerations regarding the addition of a Middle Eastern/North African, or MENA, category onto the census and other administrative forms. This includes documenting community needs, detailing experiences with discrimination or other forms of racism, assessing community experiences, etc. It is critical to be able to identify and track Arab Americans conditions and experiences and also to disaggregate them in order to capture the important variance for groups who are, for example, recently arrived refugees as compared to those who are 2nd or 3rd generation residents. Being classified as Arab-American is meaningful for understanding all of these groups but not always with the same effect. It is important to have disaggregated, or specific data that documents the differences across Arab American communities and between different class and educational markers. Documenting and understanding Arab Americans as a diverse group with wide-ranging various histories, geographies, and migration patterns is important to delivering social justice and not homogenizing and silencing the most vulnerable Arab Americans.

PART THREE: RACISM IN EVERYDAY LIFE

In this section, we present data collected in a dozen focus groups with Arab American Chicagoans. We worked with community organizations (e.g., Arab American Action Network, Arab American Family Services, Yemeni Community Group) and local educational institutions (Moraine Valley Community College, University of Illinois Chicago) to bring together small groups of Arab American Chicagoans to discuss their experiences. Questions mirrored those asked in the survey (e.g., experiences with local organizations and in different institutional settings, assessment of community needs, experiences with profiling) so that we could explore respondents' experiences and understandings in more depth. Focus groups were held either both in Arabic or English.

Respondents described the different manifestations of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in Chicagoland in the contexts of schools, policing, airports, and workplaces. These conversations echoed the well-established data that show how hate crimes against Arab Americans increased by over 500 percent between 2000 and 2009 and that, since 2016, hundreds of incidents of hate violence continue to be reported nationwide.⁸¹ These experiences of racism in everyday life should not be understood as individual acts of a few "bad apples" or perpetrators but as systemic. The individual acts of racism Arab Americans shared are an extension of and are fomented by state structures and corporate media rhetoric that have institutionalized anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism across society.⁸² Overall, we found that Arab Americans are subject to the commonplace and generalized patterns of racism that other minority groups are subject to in the U.S. By general forms of racism, we are referring to everyday instances of racism that affect non-white groups in the United States. These include situations such as the one that an interviewee described where they would sit alone and stay away from others at school after repeated experiences of racial exclusion. He told us that he would get stared at a lot and would get dirty looks. He said, "I'd have people literally get up from their table and leave if I sat near them."

Although Arab Americans are subject to generalized patterns of racism, in this part of the report we focus on the prominence of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in Arab

American life; namely, we focus on how anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism operates in distinct ways and that, if we want to work towards ending it, we are going to need to address anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism specifically. More pointedly, we show how anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism works through two kinds of specific racial assumptions: **cultural racism** and **nation-based racism**.⁸³

Cultural racism has its roots in the centuries-old framing of those from Arab countries as uncivilized, culturally inferior, or “backwards” that we detailed earlier in the report. Even though framed as “cultural” differences, they are often understood to be inherent, fundamental, and insurmountable. This is how, for example, assumptions about Islam as an extremist religion are interwoven with ideas about a deep racial inferiority. Cultural racism takes a wide range of forms from exclusion, othering, violence, and racial hatred stemming from the idea that those in the targeted “culture or religion” are not merely inherently backwards or inferior but potentially threatening to Western/white European or American civilization.

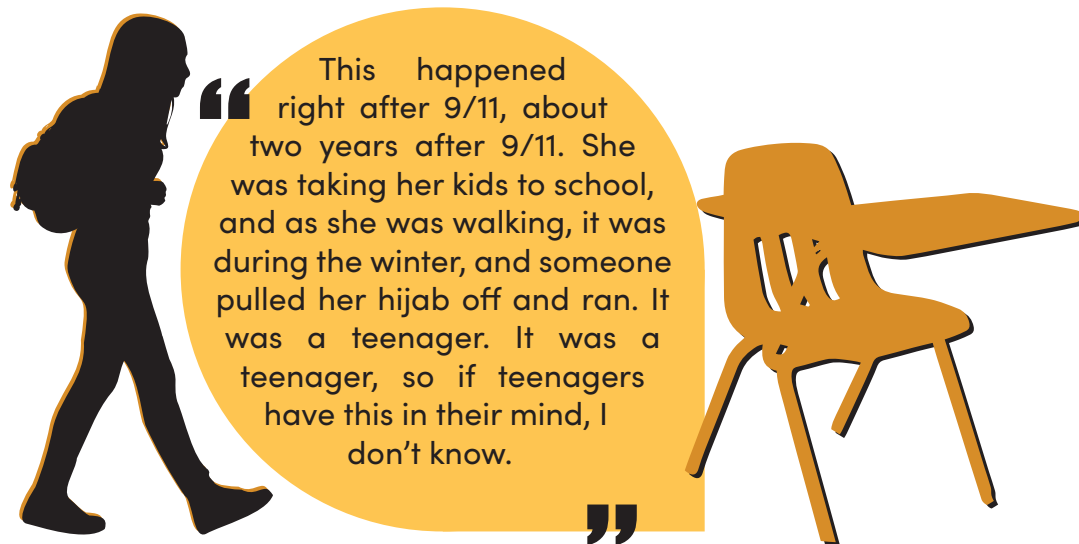
Nation-based racism entails the mobilization of racist assumptions that Arabs and Muslims are forever foreign, unassimilable, always embody the potential for terrorism, pose a threat to the nation and, therefore, need to be controlled, removed, repressed, incarcerated, and/or punished. Nation-based racism operates in the U.S. and Chicagoland in moments where individuals associate and identify Arab Americans as terrorists solely because they are from Arab countries and presume they are “guilty” until proven otherwise. Participants in our focus groups all had stories of commonplace instances of nation-based racism in schools, at work, and in public spaces where they were called a “terrorist.” Nation-based racism creates a profound sense of alienation – that feeling that one does not belong – as well as persistent fear and a general sense of repression based on the sense that at any time, one might potentially be harmed, arrested, deported, or worse.

In what follows, we draw on focus group data to illustrate how anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism shows up in Chicagoland through instances of nation-based racism and cultural racism in the context of schools, policing, and employment. The data in this report illustrate that systemic patterns of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism are exacerbated by national security policies and practices like Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programs in Chicagoland that mark Arab and Muslim Americans as terrorists and deputize community members as terrorist watchdogs. Portrayed as terrorist threats in public policy and popular media, Arab

Americans in Chicagoland have experienced high rates of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim harassment, discrimination, and bullying in schools, in their encounters with police officers, and in workplaces from customers and coworkers. The accumulated weight of these experiences demonstrates that anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism is not an interpersonal problem but rather a structural problem that will require making structural changes attuned to the specificities of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism if we hope to alleviate its pernicious effects.

Racism in Everyday Life: Chicagoland Schools

Focus group participants painfully detailed how different forms of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim bullying defined their schooling experiences from K-12 through college. As students, participants confronted bullying on multiple fronts: peers who threatened their lives, physically harmed them, and hurled hurtful comments at them as well as school adults who refused to intervene or even contributed to anti-Arab/anti-Muslim bullying through racist comments. Constant bullying had cascading effects on Arab American students, including on their psychological health, their relationships with teachers and students, their understandings of themselves, their sense of belonging, and their academic performance. Scholar Souzan Naser explains that the problem of racism in Chicagoland schools has been shaped by the general histories of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism and the specific realities of the Trump era that profoundly inspired more targeting and harassment of Arab American students.⁸⁴



– Ruba, Yemeni American woman

Participants in the study named patterns in how they experienced bullying in school. For example, participants identified how peers often called them terrorists, assumed they hated the United States, or implicated them in the September 11 attacks. Sharifa, an Egyptian American woman reported, "Growing up, I heard terrorist, too. I heard stupid Arab. I heard all that growing up." Nawal, a Palestinian American woman explained, "In high school [...] kids used to say really messed up stuff like, 'Ha-ha-ha, you're a terrorist.'" In fact, even peers who knew them their entire lives harassed them and defined them as anti-American terrorists. More perniciously, participants explained how discrete instances of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim bullying accumulated so that, as Sharifa noted, it felt like "that stuff just follows you." In fact, Mustafa, a Yemeni American man even reported feeling pressured to minimize their religiosity which changed their relationship to Islam, saying:

I [didn't] wanna be looked at as an extremist. [It's] bad enough people think I'm associated with Osama bin Laden. [...] it's had an impact. Growing up I've lost a lot of interest in Islam. [...] being a Muslim made it feel like I was a target. In that sense, I was like, "Whoa. If I'm not Muslim, then I'm technically not a target." That wasn't true. It was very difficult for me. Because I always thought like, "Hey, why am I getting treated differently for my beliefs." It hurt.

As anthropologist of education, Thea Abu El-Haj, describes, Arab and Arab American students are confronted not only with physical and verbal threats directed at them, they are also having to make sense of "notions of patriotism (held by both students and teachers) that limit empathetic connection" and define them as "outside the boundaries of concern."⁸⁵ As expressions of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism, this pervasive bullying marks Arab American young people as fundamental outsiders.

The killing of bin Laden intensified anti-Arab/anti-Muslim bullying. Here, we can see how the terms "Arab" and "Muslim" became increasingly conflated into the idea of an "Arab-Muslim enemy" in the years after September 11, 2001. Related research on Arab American college students in Chicagoland found that the post 9/11 backlash had a great impact on students' everyday life experiences. Shoman-Dajani writes, "Like many Arab Americans living in the U.S., they felt stereotyped [...] and often felt like they had to explain that Arabs and Muslims are not bad. This is weight that has been carried around since they were children."⁸⁶

Mustafa described the different kinds of “death threats from kids” that they received while in school, such as: “Yo, I’m gonna get you back for what you did,” alluding to September 11. He continued, “I’m gonna get you back. We’re gonna kill you. We’re gonna hang you. We’re gonna do you like ISIS does our people.” Mustafa explained that threats were commonplace throughout elementary school, high school, and as an adult after finishing school, saying, “I’ve gotten threats to getting beat-up for just existing ‘cause I’m Muslim.” Farida, an Egyptian immigrant mother reported that when her son was in public school, “kids were sending emails to my son telling him they will come to our house [...] and that they would kill us.” She noted that she moved her son from this neighborhood school to another school an hour and a half away. Arab children faced constant verbal harassment, physical assaults, and even death threats during their school years “for just existing.”

Arab American youth reported that “their peers hurled hurtful or racist words or comments against them, such as ‘terrorist’, ‘boarder’, ‘go back to your country’, ‘violent and animals’, and ‘towel heads’.”⁸⁷ For example, Omar, a Palestinian American man described how, as the only Arab and only Muslim student in his school, he “got name called a lot” and experienced “just a lot of Islamophobic, racist comments towards me. Often, I felt like I was seen different or treated different. Yeah. A lot of times it was just people having a conversation with me and through the middle of it, they put a random insult towards me, like terrorist or something [...]” Nawal, the Palestinian American woman we introduced earlier, recalled:

I remember one time in high school, in the hallways, this guy that I went to school with since we were in kindergarten asked me why I hated America so much. I just remember in that moment, I laughed. I was like, ‘I don’t hate America.’ [...] I just was so shocked at the question. I didn’t know how to properly respond at that time.

Sharifa, an Egyptian American woman we quoted earlier described a memory that made her “heart hurt for the little girl I was.” She said:

I just remember having this backpack that I loved so much. [...] I remember this one day I had left my bag down outside the school. I don’t even remember what I was doing. I just remember leaving my bag. I walked away, and I come back, and my bag is empty. Then on it, you just see ‘terrorist’

“ They say some really, really messed up stuff. I remember I used to have kids throwing pork on me, bacon, and shit like that. That’s the stuff that’s not being triggered. That’s just genuinely infuriating. People do it for a reaction. Once you get — and for me, especially growing up, I had to laugh with these kids. Even if it was laughing at me because that was the only way of fitting in, I would laugh. ”



Mustafa's experiences from elementary school to college as a Yemeni American Man

“ It was very hard going to school in a predominantly non-Arab community, having kids just constantly get on me. Even teachers at times. It’d be very difficult. As [...] a first generation Arab American in the U.S., my parents were not well educated. I had to go home with no resources. No one to help me. None of that. I would get criticized at school by the teachers on why I’m not trying hard enough, or etcetera. They wouldn’t reach out. I felt very alienated. There was only two other Arabs in the schools. I didn’t even speak to them. ”

“ I was on the football team. I ended up leaving because kids would pick fights with me about 9/11 every freaking day. I would be sitting there, someone would make a joke about 9/11, and I would chuckle. Then they would get up and like, “What are you laughing at?” This and that. I remember coaches seeing this, and coaches promoting this kind of thing. It’s fine with them. They have security on the top floor because that’s where most of the Arabs’ lockers are. They called it the camel corner, like the desert, or whatever. They had really racist nicknames for that hallway. You just had security posted left and right. ”

“ It’s every — it’s the stereotypical white kid that’s, “Oh, the college experience. It’s just full of just parties and having fun [...]. It’s just an amazing atmosphere” when it’s not. I don’t like walking through [University campus], especially at night. I don’t feel comfortable at all being brown, having a long beard, especially with [University] police. That kind of thing scares me. I don’t like it at all. During the day, I get to my class, and I get out. Some of the kids are cool and friendly. [...] I don’t like the fact that people will stop and stare. That just makes me very uncomfortable. [...]. [The] college experience for me is more or less get your degree, and just get out. You’re not here to enjoy this. Because it’s not enjoyable. ”

scribbled all over it. I actually had to transfer schools 'cause it was pretty aggressive of a kid. That's why I ended up going towards a more diverse area 'cause my mom was like, 'Okay, enough of this.' Yeah, I think that stuff just follows you.

Perhaps most insidiously, some participants expressed how bullying was a never-ending experience. Omar, the Palestinian American man we quoted earlier reported, "I would say probably starting from middle school is when I really started experiencing [bullying] and it just continued on throughout high school."

Racialized bullying also targeted specific aspects of Arab and Muslim students' cultural and religious identities, such as the hijab, which created what Ghenwa, a mother in one of our focus groups described as "hard times in school" for her daughter as "people at school have a hard time accepting girls wearing hijab." Salma, a Palestinian American woman echoed similar comments to others that we heard when she reported hearing comments like, "Oh, you wear your hijab; you look prettier without the hijab." Zahra, a Palestinian American woman recounted often hearing comments such as, "Why don't you just take off the hijab. You guys have beautiful hair. You guys should take it off and have fun, enjoy it. You guys are young. It's not like you're married or with kids or anything." In some cases, youth used the hijab as a pretext to bully Muslim students. Abeer, a Yemeni immigrant woman, for example, reported that a group of boys "threw things" at her niece and called her a "towelhead." Continuing to recount her daughter's experience, Ghenwa described how a "girl pulled the hijab away from [her] daughter's friend's head." In response, "all the Arabs and Muslim students revolted against what had happened in the schoolyard."

Focus group participants reported that teachers and school staff also perpetuated and participated in anti-Muslim racism against students. They noted that students and staff "mocked" and "made fun of" participants who wore the hijab. As Abeer stated, "I remember, one time, my other sister, believe it or not, her teacher would joke, and was telling her, 'I wanna see your hair. I wanna see your hair.'" Fayrouz, a Yemeni immigrant woman recalled that her high school gym teacher harassed her constantly about wanting to dress in an outfit that would cover her full body, stating: "I remember the gym teacher coming up to me. She was like, 'Oh, you can't wear

that.' I'm like, 'I can't wear shorts,' and I wore long sleeves under the shirt. She's like, 'No, you can't. You have to have the actual school uniform'." Teachers and staff often used anti-Muslim school policies to discipline Arab and Muslim students as in the case of Attia Grey, a fifteen-year-old girl in Hammond, Indiana, whose teacher sent her to the principal's office for wearing a hijab in the classroom. The principal reported that Grey's removal followed the school's dress code policy banning head coverings, while Grey's parents argued that the incident was racially and religiously motivated.⁸⁸

Participants also reported experiencing other forms of racialized harassment in school that targeted their bodies as being different from the white norm in their schools or communities. Majidah, a Yemeni immigrant woman described an incident her kindergarten daughter experienced on the playground:

[She] was playing on the [school] playground, playing just with random people, and she told a girl, 'Pass the ball to me,' and the girl goes, 'No. I don't like you because you have black skin.' [...]. She also took the ball and she rammed it into my daughter's stomach.

Nawal, whom we introduced earlier reported "being bullied" because she "had hair on [her] arms." She explained:

The boys would say I was hairier than them, or girls would question and make fun of me for having hair on my upper lip. They called me a man. In those moments, I definitely remember then what hair color I had, or what the color of my skin was. It wasn't really until high school that I started to become really aware of the things that people would say, and the passive-aggressive tones in which they were insinuating to me.

These examples illustrate how Arab youth often experienced schools as sites of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

"Don't bomb my potato salad": Bullying in After-school Programs

Arab youth also faced harassment in after-school activities, especially sports. Mustafa, who played on his local little league football team explained:

They played games on 9/11. I'd get beat up for it because 9/11 happened. The coach would tell me, 'Don't bomb my potato salad.' Which was supposed to be a joke to an eight-year-old. That would just incite these other kids who would tell me to jump on the field saying Allahu Akhbar and just implode. [...] And I just had to laugh with it. I never really understood what any of it meant until I grew up. I knew that it was wrong. I knew it hurt, but [...] I didn't know how to respond to these things.

Student-athlete Amani, a Palestinian American woman who wore the hijab, described always "trying to prove [...] or trying to convince [her peers], 'Oh, I can do this. I'm literally a normal person. I'm literally the same. There's absolutely nothing that's different between me and whoever I was interacting with.'" Reflecting on her experiences, she also explained:

I do remember my teammates on my sports team, they'd always be like, 'Wow, you're the first Arab girl we've ever met,' and they'd always make jokes about [the hijab]. They're like, 'Oh, do you have to wear that at night? Do you have to shower in it? I know they were joking. It was just a realization to me, though, that [they] never met anyone or was friends with anyone, interacted with anyone that was like me.

These examples highlight how, in a "pervasive climate of ignorance about or hostility toward Arab culture," Arab youth in schools "often find themselves confronting negative and monolithic images of their cultural or religious practices," evident in the demonization of their hijabs, skin color, and facial features.⁸⁹ Peer bullying can define Arab children's experiences in schools.

As the previous examples indicate, teachers, coaches, and other school staff also participated in anti-Arab/anti-Muslim bullying and harassment. In fact, research has shown that Arab students have experienced "being bullied and discriminated against by their teachers" and that "teachers blamed the victims for being bullied."⁹⁰ Amani further described how, when participating in a sports competition:

[...] if I felt like someone was just staring longer than they needed to or longer than just oh, passing by, looking at the competition, I just felt nervous, like 'Why are they - it's just like why are they staring at me?' I was just kind of nervous like are they gonna come up to me and say something

or are they saying stuff behind their teammates' [backs]? I get that a lot from the coaches, too, which is not even the other players. It would be the coaches.

Traveling for sports introduced additional layers of bullying and harassment by adults, most evident in how spectators stared at them. For example, Amani worried about going to unfamiliar schools since spectators could also bully them. In their experience, the adults were often the ones that stared and made her the most nervous because, as they explained:

Those adults [...] don't travel for school on teams, so they would never, especially in an area does not have large MENA population, they would never see or be exposed to MENA students or Arab students [and they saw] that clearly I was wearing a hijab, so they were obviously like "Oh, she's different than everyone else." The adults, I would say the adult spectators would stare more for sure.

“My kid was a smart boy and there was an indication through his math as he got 120 over 100 and, since he is smart, we decided to get him to private school instead of being kept in public school. In private school, my kids started getting bad grades. We inquired [...] and we were told he is a trouble maker. What you mean? I asked. He has been in public school and never had that kind of problem. My son told me that he was being treated as a Mohammed [...]. He said "They are not treating me as a student, a normal American kid, I am a Mohammed to them. They are not even teaching me.”

– Sumayya, Palestinian immigrant woman



Mental Health

by Souzan Naser



Souzan Naser is a Professor and Counselor at Moraine Valley Community College in Palos Hills, Illinois where she has won awards for her work increasing diversity on campus. She is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with a Master's degree in Social Work from the University of Michigan - Ann Arbor, and a Doctor of Education in Educational Stewardship, Leadership & Learning from the University of St. Francis. Her doctoral dissertation addressed the paucity of Arab American cultural competency training available for counseling professionals.

As conversations related to diversity, equity, and inclusion continue to dominate the national landscape on college campuses, there is one group in particular, Arab Americans, who continue to remain invisible in these conversations. Instead of receiving support, an extraordinary amount of negative attention is placed on Arab American students who are championing moral causes, like the Palestinian struggle for freedom and actively working to change the discourse on Palestine on their respective campuses. Rather than empowering their Arab American students by offering them solidarity and centering their political and social needs, institutions of higher education are responding with hostility. The repression these students are experiencing in the form of being silenced, scrutinized, and criminalized for their activism takes a toll on their mental health.

Since 2015, I have been working with and examining the experiences of Chicagoland Arab American college students. In this work, I have facilitated focus groups to capture the mental health needs of Arab American college students enrolled at my institution, Moraine Valley Community College (MVCC), located about twenty-five miles southwest of Chicago. My research found that although MVCC sits in a congressional district that has one of the largest concentrations of Palestinians in the United States, students feel misunderstood and misrecognized. In student focus groups we conducted, participants reported they were concerned about the hostile political climate and where counselors get their information about Arab American students.

"Are they getting [it] from media outlets?" asked one student. If so, "how does this impact the way counselors work with us?"

"Every counselor should have a basic understanding of Arab culture and information on Islam," another student said.

Another student added, "If they do not understand us, then they are going to believe what they see in the media."

As these students are suggesting, supporting the mental health needs of Arab Americans requires a basic understanding of the historical and current oppressions encountered by this population. It means taking a deep dive into their lived experiences of racism and exclusion that exist in many forms. These are students who are impacted by U.S. imperialism and who are living, studying, and working in a country that has devastated the regions they come from or have ancestral ties to. They are post-9/11 students who are under surveillance and are scrutinized in their neighborhoods and communities, at school, and in other public places. They are victims of racial profiling programs promoted under the “countering violence extremism” framework, which unfairly targets members of their community and aims to identify “radicalized” people by connecting community and religious leaders with local law enforcement, and asks health professionals, teachers, and social service employees to report on students. They are students recovering from Donald Trump who assaulted their communities with executive orders like the Muslim Travel Ban, and attacked them with disparaging comments such as when he asked “why do we want all these people from shithole countries coming here?”

Some Chicagoland Arab American college students were directly impacted by the Muslim Travel Ban and indicated that the hostile political climate magnified their insecurity and left them questioning their place in the United States. Students said they feared deportation and worried they might not see their families again, acknowledging that the stress had affected them academically and psychologically. “The Muslim ban was very traumatizing,” said one student in a focus group, “not just to me, but to people who could not come back to the States when they left for vacation.”

As a counselor at MVCC and a community organizer with the Chicago based chapter of US Palestinian Community Network (USPCN), I have repeatedly witnessed how the hostile and divisive political climate compromises the psychological, social, and academic well-being of Arab American students across the Chicagoland area. Their experiences on college campuses are a microcosm of the challenges they face outside of their campus community, and responding with compassion is not enough. Instead, mental health professionals need to look beyond individual expressions of distress and explore the impact of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim and Islamophobic foreign and domestic policies to better understand their worldview. In other words, we must identify the relationship of these existing programs and policies and how they can contribute to the development of mental health issues or exacerbate already-existing psychological disorders. We also need to consider how an over reliance on interventions rooted in Euro-North American counseling theory and technique may not be suitable when counseling Arab American students.

Seeing that institutions of higher education pride themselves on cultivating diverse, critical and analytical thinkers, it is hardly surprising that they have long been the hub of student activism, protest, and unrest. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Arab American students attending universities and colleges across the Chicagoland area have taken center stage in debating the occupation of and political future of Palestine. They are rallying against more than half a century of Israeli occupation and are insisting that their institutions take an ethical stance on Palestine. They are critiquing programs that normalize the occupation of Palestine (like cultural and academic exchanges) and are demanding that their institutions divest from corporations that contribute to human rights abuses.

As a counselor and community organizer I have witnessed how Arab American college students must contend with the double burden of being academically successful while challenging discrimination, oppression, and inequity on campus and in other public domains. Arab American students who are actively countering the effects of institutional betrayal and discrimination in their communities are in a constant state of exhaustion and mental fatigue. They shared these concerns in the focus groups I facilitated:

"I feel like we are not being given a chance due to the current political climate."

"After Trump got elected things have been pretty rough. I've seen a lot of change. People are noticing me more now than ever. They look at me differently and of course I stand out because I wear the hijab."

"We need to know our rights considering the political climate we are living in. It would be helpful to meet with a counselor who understands us if we feel like we are being singled out because of who we are."

Not only are institutions often *ignoring* Arab American students' mental health needs, but they are also making the situation worse through their repressive measures. Across the Chicagoland area, Arab American students' efforts to dismantle oppressive structures and programs are tragically thwarted by the repressive measures of their own institutions that drain Arab American students of their capacity to organize. Students and faculty who have engaged in Palestine activism across campuses in the Chicagoland area have faced oppression including the suspension of student led clubs like Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP), the disrupting or canceling of student sponsored activities, the censuring of social media activism, and in the most extreme cases, the expulsion of students from the university or firing of faculty members from their position. These punitive

measures contradict the institutions' values of diversity, equity, and inclusion. As a result, Arab American students on college campuses are in a perpetual state of trauma. The backlash they experience trickles down into their everyday lives in the form of racism, sexism, and anti-Arab/anti-Muslim hate crimes that leave them vulnerable to various forms of psychological distress.

Arab American students are in pain. I know because I work with them. Their student activism is as much about effecting change as it is a form of collective care. From a wellness perspective, when students come together in protest to assert their demands and critique their institutions for not taking an ethical stance on Palestine, they are in essence also prioritizing their mental health. They come together in recognition of their collective trauma, grief, anger, and fear. They are powered by love and justice and find community with one another when everyone around them is attempting to dismiss who they are and invalidate what they stand for.

So, yes, when Arab Americans use student activism as their vehicle to both affect change and manage their psychological distress, it is incumbent upon institutions of higher education to offer them solidarity, not to respond with resistance. Institutional responsibility means encouraging these agents of change by taking their grievances seriously and offering concrete resources and solutions in support of their demands.

“Palestinians also are violent”: Anti-Palestinian Racism and Political Repression in Schools

Research has demonstrated how Arab youth “find little room to voice dissenting opinions about contemporary Middle East politics and U.S. foreign policy” and “find themselves confronting negative and monolithic images of their cultural or religious practices.”⁹¹ Chicagoland participants emphasized that the repression of their political opinions in school often took the form of anti-Palestinian racism, whereby teachers and other school staff policed, monitored, and silenced critical discussions of the Israeli occupation of Palestine. For example, Dalia, a Palestinian American woman, “distinctly remembered” a fifth grade “cultural heritage unit” in which students were asked to “make flags of our place of origin out of construction paper.” As she explained:

Obviously, I knew what the Palestinian flag looked like, but I was a kid, I was so excited. “Oh, I wanna see the Palestinian flag in a book,” stuff like that. When I looked in it, the flag wasn’t there. I looked through all of them. It wasn’t there. Just remember feeling so, so angry, and so frustrated that everyone else in my class had their flag in the book, and there’s absolutely nothing [on Palestine], but, of course, Israel is in there. That moment made me feel like. I don’t know, super angry about it. It made me, I think, really learn, “Oh, I have to represent this.” Even a book is not gonna do that for me.

More generally, Dalia reported that, “I’ve had teachers, if I were to say something about Palestine, try and rebut me with a Zionist point of view.” Nawal reported that they applied to work at the U.S. Embassy in Uzbekistan through an opportunity offered through a university, which required a security clearance. When the student asked why their security clearance process stalled, they were asked, “Where are your parents from?” When she responded, “Well, my dad’s Palestinian. My mom is Uzbek but born in Azerbaijan,” they were told, “That’s probably why.” The painful erasure of Palestine and Palestinians, the harmful repetition of “a Zionist point of view,” and the denial of educational opportunities resonated with participants across our interviews and focus groups.

“
On [the University] campus, I’m involved with Students for Justice in Palestine. We had an event last year when we were on campus, a “Moment of Silence for Gaza.” A lotta people had been killed on one week. We wanted to do [a] commemoration for it. We were just in the quad area. We got flipped off by some other [University] students that didn’t really like what we were doing. I mean, it’s kind of expected, I guess, but, you know, that’s just, I guess, an experience.
”



– Dalia, Palestinian American woman

Summary: Pervasive Anti-Arab/anti-Muslim Racism in Schools

Many of our participants felt excluded or alienated in school. Nawal, a Palestinian American woman in college, explained that they felt pressure to “tone down” their politics in school, saying, “I feel like I always have to tone down what I really believe because it might come off as ‘radical’ or ‘extreme.’” This experience resonated with Khadija, a Yemeni American woman and student, who feared any “all-white-majority” space, especially when she was wearing her hijab, saying, “You feel all eyes towards you, and you feel like just out of place. Especially [...] since I went to an all-white-majority middle school. Every time I look back at that I’m just like, woo, that was the worst thing ever ‘cause like, those white kids did not like me, and they didn’t say that in a subtle way. They would straight out let you know that they don’t like you.”

Taken together, participant experiences illustrate how bullying and discrimination in schools from K-12 through college took on many forms: from death threats to taunts about wearing a hijab to “getting beat up” because “9/11 happened” to erasures of Arab histories and politics. These experiences communicated to participants that they were “different” and incited fear about what teachers, peers, coaches, and spectators might do or say to them. Even when not themselves participating in it, teachers were often complicit as they rarely interrupted the persistent and all-pervasive harassment Arab youth faced in schools.

The Repression of Palestinian Activism in Chicagoland

by Dima Khalidi



Dima Khalidi is a Chicago-raised Palestinian American lawyer and advocate. She founded and directs Palestine Legal, a non-profit organization that engages in legal and advocacy work to protect people speaking out for Palestinian freedom from attacks on their civil and constitutional rights. She has a JD from DePaul University College of Law, an MA in International and Comparative Legal Studies from the University of London – SOAS, and a BA in History and Near Eastern Studies from the University of Michigan.

In this essay, Dima Khalidi addresses a specific form of racism that Palestinian Americans, and other Arab Americans who support Palestinian struggles for justice and liberation, experience.

Even as their experience overlaps and is intertwined with those of other Arab and Muslim-American communities of which they are a part, Palestinian Americans have a distinct history and set of experiences in the U.S. – stemming in large part from the distinct political repression that they have faced, which interplays with anti-Muslim and anti-Arab bigotry both pre- and especially post-9/11.

Specifically, anti-Palestinian racism and discrimination have become a feature of the current landscape of social and political repression that Arab and Muslim communities face. Given Palestinians' experience of dispossession and criminalization at the hands of Israel, Palestinians are disproportionately targeted by forms of racism that rationalize Israel's colonization of Palestine. The Zionist project of creating a Jewish state by displacing and supplanting Palestinians in Palestine with Jewish people from all over the world has engendered various tactics of erasure and criminalization which require a fundamental dehumanization of Palestinians and a delegitimization of their narratives, their histories, and their experiences. For over seven decades, this settler-colonial project in Palestine has relied upon the promotion of racist ideas about Palestinians as uncivilized, hateful, and violent to continue to dispossess Palestinians of their land – thereby increasing the Palestinian refugee and diaspora population, and to oppress the millions of Palestinians who live under military occupation or are second-class citizens in their own homeland.

These racist stereotypes and tactics have extended across the globe as Israel has attempted to stop a growing grassroots movement calling for Palestinian freedom. And they have permeated U.S. mainstream perceptions of Palestinians, as well as Arab and Muslim communities with which they are associated, dovetailing with broader anti-Arab and anti-Muslim narratives, especially post 9/11.

In the context of U.S. law, these tactics manifest in the criminalization of political and humanitarian activity, often under “anti-terrorism” regimes, as well as censorship of speech by Palestinians and their allies, in violation of fundamental First Amendment rights. They also manifest in discriminatory actions (by government actors, as well as private institutions and employers) against individual Palestinians, Palestinian groups, and Palestinian communities (and by extension, those who support them) who are treated differently because of their national origin and ethnicity, and social and political expressions of that identity.

Chicago’s large Palestinian community has a long history of vibrant political activity around the Palestinian struggle for freedom from Israel’s occupation and apartheid regime. Chicago-based organizing is part of a nation-wide movement for Palestinian rights that has expanded over the last two decades, led by Palestinian American youth.

The following Chicago-focused narrative provides examples of the ways that these tactics of repression have played out locally, affecting not just Palestinian individuals but the Palestinian American and solidarity communities writ large. Overall, they have had an enormous chilling effect, creating fear for individuals and the community here and back home in Palestine. At the same time, a strong resistance to repression has emerged from within the Palestinian community in Chicagoland, which has reverberated in a solidarity movement nationally as Chicago communities have stood up against this repression. Chicago-based organizing has thus served as an example of resistance and resilience for other communities and movements under attack.

Criminalization and Community Resistance

In Chicago, mirroring national trends, Palestinians have been targeted with backlash for their public activism for Palestinian rights. This targeting has included everything from law enforcement surveillance⁹² and criminal prosecutions to the targeting of individuals with smear campaigns, false accusations, and attempts to ruin careers and reputations by both the U.S. government and private pro-Israel groups.

In the early 2000s, with the expansion of the “War on Terror,” there was a federal government focus on criminal prosecutions, especially of Palestinians, for sending humanitarian support to Palestine. These prosecutions had in common Israel-driven narratives painting Palestinians as threatening, as “terrorists” motivated by hatred and violence, and the willful erasure of any context about Palestinian lived experiences of oppression, occupation, and dispossession.

One of the targets of these prosecutions was Muhammad Salah, a well-known Chicago community member who in the 1990s delivered humanitarian aid to Palestine. He was arrested, tortured, convicted, and imprisoned by Israel for five years. After returning home to his family in the U.S., he was surveilled by an informant and ultimately prosecuted, with other co-defendants, based on the claim that he was involved in a “conspiracy” to provide material support to Hamas, which hadn’t yet been designated by the U.S. government as a “terrorist” organization when the alleged offense took place.⁹³

Salah’s trial laid bare the close collaboration between U.S. prosecutors and the Israeli government. The vast majority of “evidence” was provided by Israel, and the court acceded to the U.S. Government’s argument that it should remain classified based on Israel’s classification, and thus not accessible to the defendant to refute. Israeli intelligence agents were allowed to testify anonymously, in disguise, to a closed courtroom, preventing the defense its constitutional right to confront witnesses against Salah.⁹⁴

The highly politicized trial illustrated the extent to which the prosecution of the “War on Terror” was exploited by Israel against Palestinians in order to showcase U.S. “success” in prosecuting “terrorists.”

Salah was ultimately acquitted of the main charges against him but was convicted of “obstruction of justice” for his refusal to testify in another case. He served a sentence of 11 months in prison. Salah’s case exemplifies the way community members are targeted and prosecuted in the U.S., often at Israel’s behest, and the ways that such prosecutions create fear and intimidation in Arab American communities.⁹⁵

This case also exemplifies, however, the importance of community support in attempts to criminalize community members. The Chicago Palestinian community and allies rallied to Salah’s defense. They packed the courtroom during his entire trial and engaged in advocacy on his behalf, giving a powerful signal that Salah had a community behind him that would not be intimidated by his dehumanization and unjust prosecution, which supporters believed influenced the result of the trial.

Similar community organizing was central in two other cases that illustrate both the trend to criminalize Palestinians and their political organizing for Palestinian freedom, and the power of solidarity.

In September 2010, the FBI served grand jury subpoenas on 23 activists in Minneapolis and Chicago (the “Midwest 23”) to testify to a grand jury.⁹⁶ Agents procured the search warrants to gather “evidence related to ‘providing, attempting, and conspiring to provide material support”

to organizations in Palestine, Lebanon, and Columbia designated as “terrorist” by the U.S. government.⁹⁷ Documents show that an undercover special agent repeatedly attempted to convince a Palestinian American community organizer to send \$1,000 to a Palestinian organization designated by the U.S. as “terrorist.”⁹⁸ All of the subpoenaed activists refused to testify before the grand jury and no indictments were ever issued.

The united refusal to testify and the active organizing around the case in Chicago, including the Palestinian American community, were a formidable show of defiance against coercive subpoenas that were a fishing expedition against leftist activists working on Palestine and other internationalist justice issues.

The Midwest 23 investigation appears to have led to the indictment of Rasmea Odeh, a colleague of a Palestinian American target of the raids working at the community organization Arab American Action Network (AAAN).⁹⁹

In October 2013, the Department of Homeland Security arrested Rasmea, a Chicago-based civil rights advocate and widely respected organizer in the Arab American community. She was indicted for the highly discretionary and rarely prosecuted offense of lying on a naturalization form – in this case for failing to indicate on her naturalization form a decade prior that an Israeli military court had convicted her in 1970 of an offense she maintains she did not commit and only confessed to under severe torture in an Israeli prison.¹⁰⁰

In November 2014, a jury convicted her after a judge barred her from referencing her torture at the hands of Israeli agents and the trauma it produced during her naturalization process, even though the prosecution relied on Israeli military court documents and repeatedly referred to the crime the documents alleged she had committed.¹⁰¹

In March 2015, she received a sentence of eighteen months in prison, denaturalization, and deportation, but she appealed the conviction and the sentence. In February 2016, the U.S. Court of Appeals overturned the conviction and ordered a retrial, ruling that the district judge erred in denying Rasmea and a torture expert the opportunity to testify about her PTSD.¹⁰²

Because the new indictment that prosecutors issued against Rasmea in December 2016, which included added charges that she was engaged in “terrorist activity” and was associated with a “designated terrorist organization,” Rasmea pled guilty to the original charge against her. Her attorney, Michael Deutsch explained, “the government took a run of the mill immigration violation case and they made it into a terrorism case [...]. We knew that [...] given all the things the government

was prepared to do, she was not going to get a fair trial around these charges [...and] if we won this case, the government could still deport her."¹⁰³ Ramea accepted a deal that would strip her of her U.S. citizenship and require her deportation, but that allowed her to stay free until her departure. She was deported to Jordan on September 19, 2017, with a crowd of supporters gathering at the airport to see her off.¹⁰⁴

Throughout Ramea's case, Chicago's Palestinian community led a national defense committee that organized protests, packed the court during her trial and other court appearances, brought her case to the media, and rallied people nationwide in her defense. The committee's website chronicled the case and the mobilization around it, including the critical framing of the case as a political prosecution that was part and parcel of government repression in concert with the Israeli state, designed to intimidate the community.¹⁰⁵ The organizing around the case thwarted this agenda, and Ramea became a symbol of resistance to unjust prosecutions, of Palestinian insistence on narrating their own history and experience, and of resilience in the face of harsh realities throughout her life, including surviving the Nakba of 1948, when her family fled Zionist terror that ethnically cleansed three quarters of a million Palestinians to create Israel.

Censorship and Harassment in the Face of Palestinian Narratives

More recently, Palestinians and their allies have been regularly attacked in efforts to silence the growing movement for Palestinian rights that has elevated Palestinian experiences and narratives. As Palestine Legal and the Center for Constitutional Rights documented in the 2015 report, *The Palestine Exception to Free Speech: A Movement Under Attack*, in addition to criminalization efforts like those described above, Israel advocates employ a number of tactics aimed at intimidating and harassing individuals and groups who speak out for Palestinian freedom.¹⁰⁶ These tactics include lawsuits and complaints, pressure campaigns against institutions to censor Palestine advocacy, smear campaigns against individuals, and legislation to punish boycotts and other advocacy for Palestinian rights.¹⁰⁷

Chicago activists have been the targets of campaigns in several instances, illustrating the range of tactics Israel-affiliated groups use to thwart the movement, and the ways that racist anti-Palestinian narratives are attached to Palestinian efforts to assert their identities and advocate politically for their people's freedom. Campuses have been a primary target of such efforts given the significant growth of student activism on Palestine, as well as an increase in scholarship, teaching, and organizing around Palestine by academics.

In late May 2014, students at DePaul University organized a referendum that called for the university to divest from companies that profit from Israel's human rights abuses. The referendum ultimately passed with 1,575 students in favor and 1,333 opposed after weeks of mobilizing by a coalition of students, faculty, and staff, despite the extensive pressure it faced.¹⁰⁸

According to Students for Justice in Palestine DePaul's press release, "This victory did not come without immense outside interference by pro-Israel lobbyist group StandWithUs, whose paid staff frequently presented themselves as individuals affiliated with DePaul University [and] canvassed the student body in a counter campaign to DePaul Divest." Opponents sought to undermine the referendum by labeling it "anti-Semitic" and falsely accusing the coalition of seeking to cut funding for Jewish student groups.¹⁰⁹

Students also reported that the Israeli consul general organized against the referendum, going as far as to canvass students personally on campus on the final day of voting, while members of his entourage photographed pro-divestment student campaigners as they spoke with other students and leafleted.¹¹⁰ Such surveillance presented a serious threat to Palestinian students who feared consequences for them and their families, given Israel's documented practice of denying Palestinian Americans entry into Israel and the West Bank and harassing them at borders.¹¹¹

Similar interference by Israel-affiliated groups occurred in 2014-15 during students' divestment campaign at Loyola University Chicago, where outside groups pressured the administration and the student government to condemn and overturn three successful student votes for divestment.¹¹²

Complaints of bias and discrimination against student activists have also been a common tactic by pro-Israel groups, leading to undue scrutiny, investigations, and chilling of student activism on Palestine. Also, at Loyola in 2014, when students saw that there was a table advertising Birthright Israel, a program that takes Jewish youth from around the world on free trips to Israel on the premise that all Jews have a right to the land, Palestinian students lined up at the table to attempt to register for a Birthright trip in order to highlight the discriminatory nature of the program. About fifteen students quietly lined up at the Birthright table and calmly raised questions about why they could not register for Birthright, even though their ancestral villages are located in what is now known as Israel.¹¹³ As the students later explained, "Any Jewish student worldwide can register for the program, while indigenous non-Jewish Palestinians are not only ineligible for the program, but often are denied the right to live in or even visit their homeland freely."

After receiving complaints from students affiliated with Hillel who were involved with the tabling, the administration opened an investigation. Within days, the administration suspended Loyola University Chicago Students for Justice in Palestine while the investigation remained open.¹¹⁴

After a month-long investigation, administrators charged Loyola University Chicago Students for Justice in Palestine with six disciplinary violations, including bias-motivated misconduct, harassment and bullying, disruptive conduct, and violating the demonstration policy by failing to register their event.¹¹⁵

After a four-hour hearing, Loyola University Chicago sustained only one of the six charges against Loyola University Chicago Students for Justice in Palestine – failing to register the “demonstration.”¹¹⁶ It also sustained a similar charge against Hillel but the university meted out strikingly disproportionate sanctions to the two groups.

These kinds of taxing investigations based on false accusations made by pro-Israel groups, sometimes in the form of civil rights complaints, have been a primary tool of repression against Palestine organizers and academics on campuses. The paradoxical use of anti-discrimination laws against Palestinians who are calling out the discrimination that they face is enabled by the same characterization of Palestinians that has driven criminalization efforts, namely that they are threatening, motivated by hatred and violence rather than by a desire for justice and human rights. It also ignores pro-Israel motivations to distract from and whitewash Israel’s crimes by undermining protests against them.

Harassment of individual students has also been a common tactic that creates a chilling effect for others who don’t want to be subjected to doxing and harassment for publicly speaking out for Palestinian rights.

In Fall of 2015, members of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) and Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) at the University of Chicago faced harassment on campus and online. Much of the harassment targeted students based on their perceived sexual orientation, gender, and gender identity. Students’ posters were torn down or vandalized with Islamophobic and anti-Arab/anti-Muslim messages. SJP and JVP members faced online harassment that included homophobic, disparaging comments and fake social media profiles targeting students’ sexual orientation. Nearly a year later, in October 2016, a number of defamatory, hateful posters made by the euphemistically-named David Horowitz Freedom Center were found around campus naming and targeting individual students due to their support for Palestinian rights.¹¹⁷ That year, students were also profiled on an anonymous website, Canary Mission, that blacklists students and other activists, falsely claiming their advocacy for Palestinian rights makes them anti-Semitic and supporters of terrorism.¹¹⁸

More recently, at the University of Illinois Chicago, students have been individually targeted by Canary Mission and other pro-Israel groups following their attendance at a virtual event by the

School of Public Health featuring an Israeli official. When students began questioning Israel's discriminatory vaccination program, calling out its vaccine apartheid, they were quickly kicked out of the virtual program.¹¹⁹ On top of this violation of their First Amendment rights by the University, they have been subjected to a vicious campaign calling them anti-Semitic and urging the university to punish them. These have included rape and death threats to the SJP group on campus.¹²⁰

In Summary

These examples illustrate the distinct repression that Palestinian Americans in Chicago have faced over the past decade, mirroring rising repression across the country. This repression is fueled by Israel and allied domestic groups that spearhead and bankroll harassment and lawfare campaigns,¹²¹ and that also push for government repression through legislation and criminal prosecution, aided by a racist, anti-Palestinian narrative which plays into already deep-seated anti-Arab and anti-Muslim racism in the U.S.

Chicago's vibrant Palestinian community and strong solidarity movement have helped to blunt the chilling effect of these repressive efforts through concerted organizing that ensures that targeted groups and individuals aren't isolated, illustrating that there is strength and protection in solidarity. While the government investigations and trials against Muhammad Salah, the Midwest 23, and Rasmia Odeh resulted in negative consequences for the individuals targeted, the incredible organizing around them played a big role in achieving significant legal victories and in building the strength of Palestinian communities and the movement for Palestinian rights.

This current history of repression of the Palestinian community and movement in Chicago is, for one, a warning sign of the threat to all of our fundamental rights to organize, to speak out for justice, and to advocate for a more just future when forces align to repress a community and movements.

But it's also an example of the ways that targeted communities can overcome these threats. Legalistic approaches – strong criminal defenses and anti-discrimination laws, for example – can only go so far in protecting against anti-Palestinian racism that permeates government and private institutions. As is the case with anti-Black and anti-Brown racisms that systemically define every aspect of U.S. institutions, we have to understand that the law is often created and manipulated by powerful interests to enable or continue systemic injustices. Palestinian American organizing against repression in Chicago has shown that community and grassroots movements can begin to effectively shift racist discourses and build power to assert Palestinian humanity and visions for justice and freedom from the ground up.

Racism in Everyday Life: Interactions with Police and Homeland Security Personnel

If participants hesitated about reporting bullying and harassment to their teachers and other school personnel, they found calling the police similarly problematic. Participants rarely viewed the police, security guards, or other members of the criminal legal system as protectors of their safety and security. They talked about getting little to no response from reporting incidents to the authorities and reported experiencing harassment from police themselves. For example, Bilal, a Palestinian immigrant man, described the police as having “scary racism” and noted that the police had stopped him “several times although I had no violation except that I’m an Arab.” When asked if he reported this police officer who constantly harassed Arab residents, he said, “We talked to the judge but uselessly. He wouldn’t believe a normal citizen [over] a policeman.”

Farida, an Egyptian immigrant woman, reported that after a theft in her neighborhood, police officers refused to help her husband when he called to report the theft once they learned that his name was Mohammed. However, when their neighbor David called about a similar theft the very next night, the same police officers and more flooded the area, making Mohammed want to change his name to Michael. For Arab Americans, their contact with law enforcement has been rife with harassment, discrimination, and sometimes outright abuse.

These experiences mirror the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) 2017 findings that the Chicago Police Department largely refused to respond to anti-Muslim hate crimes and unjustly targeted Muslim and Arab residents. A Chicago Police Department (CPD) sergeant even told the DOJ, “If you’re Muslim, and 18 to 24, and wearing white, yeah, I’m going to stop you. It’s not called racial profiling, it’s called being proactive.”¹²² In fact, the DOJ also reported:

Several CPD officers posted social media posts containing disparaging remarks about Arabs and Muslims, with posts referring to them as “7th century Islamic goat humpers,” “Ragtop,” and making other anti-Islamic statements. One CPD officer posted a photo of a dead Muslim soldier laying in a pool of his own blood with the caption: “The only good Muslim is a fucking dead one.” Supervisors posted many of the discriminatory posts we found, including one sergeant who posted at least 25 anti-Muslim

statements and at least 43 other discriminatory posts, and a lieutenant who posted at least five anti-immigrant and anti-Latino statements.¹²³

Emblematic of such anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism, a Saudi Muslim American woman, Itemid Al-Matar, filed a lawsuit alleging that six CPD officers racially and religiously profiled her, used excessive force to detain her, and violently removed her hijab. According to surveillance footage, Al-Matar was walking up the stairs alone to a Chicago Transit Authority train stop when she was approached from behind by five police officers, with one grabbing her and forcefully bringing her to the ground. The other officers circled Al-Matar, searched her, revealed her midsection, and ripped off her hijab. The officers charged her with reckless conduct, which was dismissed

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I used to have an issue with my husband and I used to call the police a lot, I was lucky to get the same two policemen often but one of them was constant, he was white with blue eyes and blonde hair [and] was treating me so bad. The first time came asking me if I needed to report my husband and I said “No, but I need you to make my husband stay away from me as he mistreated me.” [...] And I found out [...] my husband asked the policeman not to ask me, interrogate me. I didn’t speak English that good and not understanding and was afraid. What matters is that [the policeman] told me more than once that the problem is between you and your husband, the last time he came in, I asked him to bring an interpreter, somebody who speaks Arabic, he didn’t like my request and said “no, there is none available now.” They were three and he was talking to me with anger because I didn’t understand what he was talking about and I didn’t know how to make him understand my situation and I was crying. The policeman was angry yelling at me and I asked the other officer why he is mad and why he is mistreating me. [...]. I wasn’t wearing a scarf, veiled, no indication that I am a Muslim woman knowing that veiled women are the ones that suffer more in situations like this. [...] But I had a language barrier unlike my husband who speaks English perfect.

”

– Yara, Egyptian immigrant woman



by a judge, as well as several counts of obstructing justice, of which she was found not guilty.¹²⁴ These public incidents of racial violence, harassment, and profiling in anti-Arab/anti-Muslim policing, combined with people's own everyday experiences with law enforcement, made Arab participants fearful of calling the police or of encountering them in their everyday lives.

"A Bunch of gangs that protect its members only": No Trust in Police

Several participants reported calling the police to no avail. Sabah, an Iraqi immigrant man, for example, explained that his brother worked for Uber and "used to call the police whenever he face[d] any trouble at his work during the night." One night, the police "told him they knew his name and [the] next time he calls, they're not responding to him. They also told him to save this emergency button for himself and drive on your way acting as if you don't see or hear anything." In Sabah's view, "This is against our ethics and culture; we're raised to help if somebody needs help. Unfortunately, this is the type of issues we see and suffer from." Farida summarized that, because of her experiences with police and what she has seen and heard from other Arab Americans, "I see the people at police stations like a bunch of gangs that protect its members only." These examples echo the Department of Justice's finding that Arab American experiences with the police often "offend and humiliate people and diminish residents' willingness to work with law enforcement."¹²⁵

Given their individual and collective experiences with the police refusing to respond to their calls, multiple participants reported that they "just don't trust the police." Ismael, a Lebanese American man, described wanting to help an elderly woman file a police report after an incident at a rally when someone threatened them and claimed they had a gun. The elderly woman expressed to him that "you know what, they are not going to do anything about it, why should I file a police report? [...]. I don't have faith that they're going to do anything." And so, they decided against filing a report with the officers on the scene because, as the elderly woman surmised, "I don't trust the police are going to follow up on it." Nawal similarly explained:

I don't think I would call the police if not for a traffic stop or something like that. If I saw a car in an accident or something like that. In terms of things happening, I just don't trust the police would actually protect me, or anyone else, if not actually hurting someone else.

““

A year or a year and a half ago, there was a meeting with the community engagement department with the police where they knew that there is a problem within Chicago police, Illinois in general, in the point that they need to be educated about [the] Middle East and the community. The police in [Chicagoland city] know that these are different people – the Arabs of America. They have an assumption that this is a Jewish area, they can't deal with it as an area that could have Muslims, Christians, or Jewish [residents]. They said that they will hold classes for policemen in order to educate them about dealing with Muslims, or the Arabs of America because they got many reports against the police and the racist way they use against Arabic or Muslim people in the street. This is all mentioned by the police themselves [by their] Investigation Department.

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– Sami, Iraqi immigrant man



““

The times I've gotten pulled over, I've been asked like, "Where you from? What are you doing here?" I've been asked, "What are you doing here?" I'm like, "This is my neighborhood. I don't know what you want me to respond with. I live here." Yeah. I will never call the police. I remember once I called – my siblings accidentally called the police 'cause my mom fainted from stress. I was there by her side. I was able to help her out. She was fine. They ended up showing up. They were really aggressive. I was like, "Oh, it's fine, this and that. I'm sorry. It was an accident." They're like, "No. We wanna come in the house. We wanna see this. We wanna see that." I'm like, "Hey, there's nothing here. You could come in. It's fine. I'm telling you everything's okay." That alone just brings extra stress and fear. I've seen what police do to people of color, especially Black Americans. I can only imagine. I've dealt with racist police. Police that are just straight up Islamophobic. They don't even – they just don't even have – they assume right off the bat that I'm Muslim. They don't even have to ask. I remember this one cop. His name was [omitted]. I remember my sister asked "how did you get that [nickname]?" He was like, "I was crushing skulls in Iraq," or something like that. I was like, "What the fuck?" I was like, "Are you serious?" That was the – that was a wake-up call. I was like, "Holy crap. This guy is insane." Yeah. No, no police for me. I'm literally afraid of the police.

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– Mustafa, Yemeni American man

Mustafa described the following experience when renting a car during a trip to California:

I was driving a new car. I got followed by this cop for almost three miles. I make the turn. I get into my house. I get pulled over. My heart drops. He asks for my license. I asked, "Why did you stop me?" He gets really aggressive, and he's like, "Give me your license." Well, he takes it. I hear on his radio that the plates come back clean. The car is not stolen. He gives 'em back to me. I'm like, "Why did you stop me?" He was like, "Your blinker is not on." I was going straight for three miles. The first time I get in any kind of vehicle that's brand new I get stopped because "it's stolen." A brown kid with a long beard, instantly. It was in the middle of the night. He had to be looking. That's what really pressed me. That guy was like – he really had to focus on who was in that car. His racism really gave him that extra vision. For me, that's just then. There have been so many more experiences.

Even members of Chicago's Arab American Police Association reported concerns about "cultural sensitivity and the treatment of Muslims in particular."¹²⁶ While driving or renting a new car for the first time can be an important rite of passage for young people in the United States, for Arab residents, these experiences are fraught and often rife with instances of police harassment and discrimination.

"We get stopped for hours at a time": Anti-Arab/anti-Muslim Surveillance at the Airport

Participants also described frequent harassment when traveling, especially at the airport. Farah, a Palestinian American woman, for example, reported that "every time" she flew, her male family members were singled out for extra security scrutiny because of their Arab names, saying:

When I was younger, when we would travel, I just remember that my dad and my brother would always have to go and get checked by security when coming back to Chicago. Me and my mother wouldn't have to, but every single time it was always my dad and my brother. So, I just always remember my pattern. Unfortunately, they go by the name "Mohammed."

I think many can probably attest to this [...]. I have TSA precheck and I still get stopped every single time. I don't think there's ever been a time I've gone through security and didn't get stopped, and pulled aside, and have [my] hijab patted down. Pretty much I always get pat-downs too. Well, I don't think there's ever a time I didn't get patted down. I've had my laptop taken away a couple of times and my phones a couple of times. I don't know what they ever did with it. [...]. I didn't even know in these situations what to do. I'm like, I don't feel like they can take that, but you wanna get back home.

– Hajar, Palestinian American woman

I was in the airport, and you know, you got to go through the metal detectors, and all that baloney, so in front of me there were two nuns, and he waived them to keep going. Okay, now I was next [laughing]. What is next, "go to the side you need to be searched." I looked at him I said "excuse me, you let the two nuns pass," but in a nice way of course you know, "now what's the difference between me and them? We're both dressed alike, almost, so we both respect our religions. So why you took me to the side and not those two?" He said "Well, you know," honest to God, I said "No, perhaps you're going to surprise me and tell me. I don't know. Can you please inform me why?" And he's smiling, he said "you know come on."

– Ahlam, Palestinian immigrant woman

I swear Chicago O'Hare Airport is really, really aggressive about Arabs coming in, flying into the airport or going through surveillance. I've been to other airports. It's not like that. It really is aggressive at O'Hare. I think it's because there's a big Arab population in Chicago.

– Nawal, Palestinian American woman

The surveillance piece for me has largely been airports. It has gotten much calmer, but post-9-11 I traveled a lot. I would have to go to the airport hours early 'cause I knew that I would be either detained or searched. Then even my wife, other people traveling with me at various points, they'd split off and make sure to not be with me 'cause they knew I'd be pulled out and dealt with in some way [...].

– George, Egyptian American man

Samah, a Palestinian American woman, similarly explained, “Every time I go to the airport, I am always nervous because I [am] wearing my headscarf and, every time, they take me and search me and tell me to do this, and put your hand on your head, and stuff.” Responding to these different stories, Mustafa described how anti-Arab/anti-Muslim harassment at the airport continued, even years after the September 11 attacks, by detailing his experience on a trip to Yemen:

We’d get stopped. It would be so blatantly obvious that it was us. This was 2008, so this was seven years after 9/11. [...]. Everyone would be going through. Then there’s this specific little section. They would take us out, and then move us there. I had to take off my pants. I had to take off my belt. I had to take off my socks. That’s what blew me. “My socks?” Like, “Why would I have to do that? I’m an eight-year-old kid. You’re making me take off my pants in a public airport.” That’s just the amount of getting through is almost impossible. We get stopped for hours at times. It’s so frustrating. I hate flying. I genuinely hate flying. I don’t like it just – I think the micro-aggressions are not even micro. They’re very macro. They’re out there. They’re just in your face. They tell you straight up if they could, they’d call me a terrorist to my face. Yeah. I remember asking a TSA agent, “Why do I get stopped?” “You match a person in our database.” What is that supposed to mean? I look Arab? Everyone looks like me. What is it? I’m gonna get stopped every time? That’s my biggest issue.

In an instance of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim profiling reported in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Northwestern University’s Muslim chaplain, Tahera Ahmad, was told by a flight attendant that she could not have an unopened can of soda because she “may use it as a weapon,” while the man seated next to Ahmad requested and was given an unopened can of beer. When Ahmad appealed to other passengers, she was met with anti-Muslim remarks, such as, “You need to shut the fuck up [...]. You know you could use it as a weapon so shut the fuck up.”¹²⁷ These experiences highlight how airports and air travel are sites of intense anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism as TSA watchlists, screening practices, and security agents harassed, surveilled, and scrutinized Arab travelers to the point they “genuinely hated flying” and expected to “get stopped every time.”

Summary: Pernicious Anti-Arab/anti-Muslim Racism in by Law Enforcement

These examples illustrate how participant interactions with police officers and airport security feel “tense,” “demeaning,” and “condescending,” such that they “never want to ever call the police.” The Oak Lawn police beating of Hadi Abuatelah in July 2022 exacerbated this sentiment, especially since the beating went viral on social media. The 17-year-old suffered a broken nose, bruises on his face, arm and back and internal bleeding near his brain and forehead.¹²⁸

Instances of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in policing were commonplace throughout all of our focus groups. In one case, Ismael, the Lebanese American man we quoted earlier recalled that a youth that they worked with told him that she was “stopped by a cop in the [Chicago] suburbs” for a routine traffic stop. When the police officer approached the young woman, he asked, in reference to her hijab, “Oh, do you have a bomb or something under there?” Ismael noted that he witnessed a high-level police officer “actually put his hands on somebody and slammed the door into

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My experiences [with discrimination] are always in the airport. Every time being randomly stopped. It’s — I think the most significant experience was I went to Turkey in 2015 for a program that I was part of. I was there for two and a half months. I traveled alone. Whenever I came back, and I was going through passport control [...] my ticket had a red X through it. I didn’t know what that meant. I was like, “That’s strange.” ‘Cause I was looking at other peoples’, and I was like, “They don’t have this on there.” I was like, “What does this mean?” I take it up to the passport control guy. He was like, “Oh, you need to follow me.” Took me to this room that was full of brown men essentially. I was the only woman there besides young children that were with [the] men. I was 16 at the time and I didn’t know what to do. I had just landed back from the U.S. after a very long flight. I just remember hearing the way in which these TSA workers were talking to the people in the room. Very demeaning. Very much like, “You don’t belong here.” Like, “Why are you here?” I just remember being scared, but scared for no reason. Because I was like, “Where are they gonna send me? I’m only a citizen here. What are they gonna do with me, except let me back in?” At the time, I didn’t know the answer is jail. I was just very frustrated at that moment. The past few times that I traveled, especially whenever I go to Palestine, and I go through Tel Aviv, very much feel that discrimination in a way much the workers look at me, and treat me.

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– Nawal, Palestinian American woman

“ My son was with his friends outside. Like they went to buy something from the store [...] and this [40 year old white] guy, because he bought near to him, he starts screaming at them, and then he got down and start[ed] punching [...] my son[’s] friend. Punching and hit[ting] him. My son he came to just tell the guy, “Don’t do that! Why you hitting him? [...]” And he punches my son in his face, he broke his jaw. [...]. And the police, they call the police. And the police came, and instead they saw like my son, like bleeding from his mouth, and instead [of] just calling the ambulance or something, they arrest him! And they took him to jail. And they call us and tell us “your son, he did problem and you have to come.” We went, my husband went and he, you know bailed him out [...]. And I took him to the hospital, they said he has a broken jaw [...].



– Samah, Palestinian immigrant woman

someone’s back.” Although that person called the police to file a complaint, the police “called them back and [...] said], ‘Essentially you have no evidence. This is nothing, and so we are not going to bother following up on it.’” The overwhelming sentiment from our focus groups participants as a result of the anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism they experienced in police encounters was that the person who was supposed to protect them was the one they felt afraid of.

Racism in Everyday Life: Chicago Workplaces

Participants also discussed how they experienced anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in the workplace. As in schools, anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism surfaced in multi-layered forms of bullying, harassment, and discrimination from supervisors, clients, and co-workers. Given these experiences, participants described strategies they used to manage such microaggressions, such as teaching their co-workers about Arab culture and learning English to assimilate to dominant U.S. culture.

“Her racism was very obvious”: Anti-Arab/Anti-Muslim Harassment by Clients and as Clients

Several participants reported experiences of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim harassment by their clients. Their stories articulate with a previous study by report author Nadine Naber who found that, after the September 11 attacks, “the harassment of cab drivers by their passengers” transformed the cab into a site of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism.¹²⁹ Participants in our study reported similar incidents, such as with Fadi, an

Egyptian immigrant man and Chicagoland taxi driver, recounting that a customer swore at him repeatedly on a trip to the airport. As he explained:

“ I work in renovating houses. I got a call from a customer so I went to his house. He was white [...]. While we were talking, he asked where I’m from so I told him “I’m a Muslim from Palestine.” I noticed that his tone had changed. I asked him what he needs me to do in his house, but he replied that he doesn’t like me working for him. So, I said, “me neither” when I noticed his attitude. He told me that he doesn’t like Muslims, nor Arabs. ”

– Bilal, Palestinian American man

She was calling me “a bitch” and stuff like that. I was silent at the time because I was afraid to be fired, but I couldn’t hold it any longer. [...]. I told her to get [out] because I’m not driving anymore. She threatened me to call the police and the company, and I told her to do so! [She...] told me to move on and drive otherwise I would be fired. I said, “I don’t care, let them fire me.” The company sent her another car, because I refused to continue with such a provoking white American and racist woman. Her racism was very obvious; the minute she came into the car [...]. She sat down and ordered me to get her suitcase in the car, and I told her that it’s not part of my job [...]. I could have helped if she had multiple suitcases, but she only had a carry-on bag.



Sabah, the Iraqi immigrant man we quoted earlier, works as an Uber driver and he similarly explained that many clients asked questions that expressed their “ignorance about us.” In his experience,

It’s not only a matter of [ignorance of] Islam [...] because people here do not know that Iraqi Christians are different. [...]. They don’t know, for example, [...] that Saudi Arabia is different than Iraq, Egypt. [...]. Many of them ask about the reason for allowing men to marry four women, wearing hijab, or prohibition of eating pork.

The effects of these interactions were compounded by the fact that, in some of these encounters, participants in our study often could not discern if their experiences were driven by racism or ignorance or both. As Sabah explained, he “could not say that there is racism behind such [a] conversation, but from their body language I assume that their question [is] due to ignorance and in a way that they’re not satisfied with these things.”

Instances of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism when engaging customers were abundant among the Arab Americans in our study. Whether working in classrooms, law firms, or in healthcare, workers in our study identified similar experiences with hateful comments and other forms of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism. Beyond the emotional toll of enduring these forms of harassment and discrimination in the workplace, participants also described taking on the extra labor of explaining Arab culture and politics to their clients or coworkers. Rami, a Jordanian immigrant man and healthcare worker, for example, described that, “as the first Arab Muslim young person” in his facility, he was “always sharing with them [his] story.” Once he began sharing his story, he said, “they became more curious over time. [...]. I made sure to let them know like, ‘Hey, if you have any questions about what you see, or when a patient who’s wearing a hijab comes in, and she doesn’t want to enter the room, if you have any questions, let me know. I can clarify why and give you some background on it.’”

The extra labor required to navigate and mitigate anti-Arab/anti-Muslim harassment and discrimination in the workplace could be significant and sometimes meant that Arab American workers were unable to perform their work requirements. One example of this came from Zahra, a Palestinian American woman who was enrolled in a certified nursing assistant class and was subsequently assigned to a clinical site in a “majority, predominately white” community. She described walking into a

patient's room with her classmates, a group of "two girls that didn't wear the hijab and one girl that did," wearing their required "beige and navy blue" uniforms. The client looked at the group of students and commented, "Oh no, that's war [...] like in Iraq." Zahra further explained:

“

I was a [hospital] transporter [...]. I was taking [one of the patients] back to the room, and the first thing they're [asking], "Oh, what's your name?" [...]. "Where are you from?" That whole conversation. He's like, "Oh, so you are Middle Eastern as well?" [...]. I take him back to his room, and his nurse, she's also Arab American, and then out of nowhere – I don't know if he was confused or what's going on – but he was like, "I don't want any of these Middle Easterners give me any care." I was like, "Wow." [...]. He was old, I don't know if he was confused, or it was just more anger or whatever.

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– Rami, Jordanian immigrant man



I guess maybe for some reason she remembered those certain colors, [which] reminded her of something. [She said] to the hijabi that was in the room with us, she's like, [...]. She's like, 'They're gonna cut your heads off, the men are gonna cut your heads off' [...]. So at that point we were like, Okay, we need to detach ourselves from this lady, just out of respect for the other girls in the room as well.

Ibtisam, a Palestinian American woman, even described how their supervisor "used to come and apologize, telling me that the clients refused to get the service from me." At the same time, "there were some people who liked to learn and know about us. The point is that it's a two-way problem; they may feel uncomfortable dealing with you expecting racism and vice versa." Arab workers engaged in a wide array of practices to try and mitigate discrimination for themselves and others.

Arab American workers not only faced the threat of harassment from clients at work but were also subject to racial harassment when they themselves were clients. Ruba, a Yemeni woman, recalled an incident at a north side bookshop:

“I was at work. Right before my class began, the school campus security officer walked in and introduced himself and was talking, talking. He started asking about Islam [...]. He just out of nowhere says, “Are you associated with the mosque in [Chicago suburb]?” The way he worded it was so strange, and it was so inappropriate ‘cause we were both at work. I just said, “Do I visit the mosque? Yes. Do I associate myself with a specific mosque? No. I’m not sure why that’s relevant.” He said, “Well, at one point, I used to investigate it as an investigator or a detective. They were under scrutiny or something for working with terrorist organizations.” It made me so uncomfortable because in some way I felt like he was trying to tie me into that just because I’m Muslim, just because I wear a headscarf to work. He [...] just took it upon himself to kind of interrogate me. It just made me so uncomfortable. Then my students walk in, and I’m like, “Okay.” I had to quickly get my emotions together, and my mental state back to perform. I had to ask him kindly to leave. I said, “You kind of have to leave right now. My class is beginning.” I don’t know if he was just being ignorant, or if he just wanted to kind of intimidate me. I don’t know what his intention was, but I’ll never forget that day. It just made me so uncomfortable.”

– Dunya, Palestinian American woman



“I have a coworker, she’s Polish. We’re talking about something, and then she’s talking about Peppa Pig. She’s like, “Oh, do you watch Peppa Pig?” I was like, “No, I’m not a little kid, I don’t care for that.” She was like, “Oh, okay, I figured ‘cause you don’t eat pork.” It was like, what does that have to do with it, you know? It’s just little things, I don’t know if they mean it bad or if they’re just trying to be funny, but.”

– Lama, Palestinian American woman

“When I first started with her back in 2018, her first question was: “So what’s the hijab and why do you wear it?” I tried to explain it, and I just remember she goes, “But you’re in America now, you can take it off, you don’t have to follow those rules.” I looked at her and my first reaction was, “What the hell, who says that?” Then I realized it’s just the — it’s the different culture. When I tried to explain it to her, it just wasn’t clicking in her head.”

– Zahra, Palestinian American woman

I was just minding my own business. I was about to purchase two books and I went to the cashier. He asked me, "Where are you from?" and I told him, "From Yemen." He's like, "Why are you living here? Why don't you go back to your own country, since you have signs on flags that say, 'Death to America?'"

They had not expected this response from the cashier and left in shock, understanding then that "he was clearly eyeballing me waiting for me to go to the cashier." Experiences of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism and of being "eyeballed" and surveilled were commonplace for our respondents whether as clients at a store, traveling through an airport, or working as taxi drivers or nurses. Participants in our focus groups expressed being continually shocked when experiencing these instances of racism even as they all noted their commonplace occurrence.

They "have an idea about Arabs": Anti-Arab/Anti-Muslim Harassment by Coworkers

Participants also reported that their coworkers enacted anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism, which was especially damaging because of its frequency. When we asked about who was enacting workplace micro-aggressions, Mustafa remarked that the principal and primary source of microaggression at work was from "coworkers for sure 'cause we would spend more time together [...]. It was just really coworkers who were always there non-stop." Khalil, a Jordanian immigrant and manufacturing worker, similarly explained that his coworkers "have an idea about Arabs." He said that to manage their anti-Arab/anti-Muslim assumptions, he "tried not to show [his] identity" and "learned Spanish and English to hasten [his] involvement in society." Lama, a Palestinian American woman, recounted that one of her coworkers, "a Muslim hijabi, she was praying and she was on the prayer rug. One of the ladies [they worked with] called her Aladdin 'cause she was on a rug." Nidal, a Palestinian American man, told a story about his sister who works for a major airline and was in the breakroom on the morning of September 11th:

[She] was in the breakroom with a bunch of people she thought were friends, colleagues and friends, and she heard, overheard, a couple people [say...] "We need [to] carpet bomb Iraq and Afghanistan and Palestine and all of them!" Right in front of her! She said she had never felt that kind of distress before. She ended up going to the bathroom and bawling her

eyes out [...] for minutes before she was able to gather herself. [...]. I know that my family and a lot of millions of other people had to deal with all kinds of disgusting things.”

For Arab workers, the threat of discrimination and harassment always lurked, particularly given how closely they worked with others.

“He yelled at me really, really bad”: Anti-Arab/Anti-Muslim Harassment by Supervisors

Work supervisors and business owners also expressed anti-Arab/anti-Muslim sentiments, which sometimes led to the discriminatory firing of Arab workers. In one instance, Mina, a Palestinian immigrant Muslim woman and a graphic designer, recalled the following:

I used to work for a family business, [a] family-owned business. And they were super nice. [...]. The son got his own firm and hired me [...]. I accepted the job, and I wasn't wearing hijab at that time. But then I decided to cover up while I was working after a few months, and he started changing. He started changing. Talking to me different. And one time I had done a small mistake on one of the designs and he yelled at me really, really bad.

After this incident, she assumed she had been “let go” from the job because she “left there because he yelled at me and couldn't handle it.” The store owner's mother, however, told her that her son had said to her that he “let you go because you started wearing the scarf.” In relation to wearing a hijab, an owner of a dental practice similarly advised Zahra, a Palestinian American Muslim woman in our study, “in a friendly way like, ‘Oh, but you're in America now, the rules are easier’, meaning she could not be “forced” to wear a hijab, ultimately misunderstanding how it “was a decision [she] made.” Eventually, the owner's questioning and everyday demeanor towards her got “very, very touchy” and she quit.

Hajar, a Palestinian American Muslim woman, similarly described how they had a great phone interview for a job with a bowling alley that the family of one of her best friends owned. However, when she showed up in person to begin her training, and they saw that she was a Muslim Arab American, their tone changed. It began with the supervisor asking: “Oh, do you wear – are you gonna have that on your head?” When Hajar replied that she was going to wear a hijab, they replied, “Well, you can't wear

that. It's a fire hazard." The supervisor also mentioned that "we serve alcohol here," and the participant explained that, "well, I'm underage so I can't serve alcohol." It was clear at this point that the supervisor "was just trying to find an excuse" for her to "not work here." Even though they had already hired her over the phone they ended the conversation by telling her, "Oh, well, this is just not gonna work. [The hijab] is a fire hazard [and] we need you to serve alcohol. It's just not gonna work for us."

Jumanah, a Palestinian American Muslim woman, described experiencing anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in the hiring process, reporting that, in a job interview, she was asked questions about her hijab. She assessed, "I didn't think the questions were a problem, I just didn't understand why or how this would have to do with the job I'm interviewing for. My hijab has nothing to do with my job or my prayers also won't affect my job." Other study participants described instances of workplace discrimination during the hiring process as a result of the lack of a MENA category on forms and the disconnect between them marking white on their applications and employer's reactions upon meeting them. As Mustafa, noted:

Another thing that I just don't like is the fact that I have to say I'm white for job interviews. I've had times where I've showed up to the job interviews and have been told to leave. I remember waiting, I was 17, applied for a job at Buffalo Wild Wings. I sat there in my Sam's Club shirt, and my Costco shoes that I just got for this interview six hours waiting for the manager. They ended up coming out and told me, "Well, hey, we really appreciate you waiting. It doesn't look like it's gonna work out." They just expected me to leave [...]. That's my biggest frustration. It's I say I'm white, but you see the name, Mustafa, you know I'm not white.

These cases of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism and workplace discrimination that led to some Arab participants not being hired, others to quitting their jobs, and some to being fired make evident the real stakes of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism and harassment in the workplace.

The experiences detailed by research participants correspond to recent Chicagoland lawsuits citing anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism and discrimination in the workplace. For example, Muslim American Nathan Henderson sued his former employer for religious discrimination after he was fired in 2007 for "not meeting [his] job requirements"

after requesting to take his breaks in accordance with his daily prayer schedule and offering to make up lost time by working on the weekends. Henderson's requests were denied by his supervisor and he was fired a few days after making his requests.¹³⁰

A Muslim woman of Saudi Arabian descent, Fozyia Huri, similarly sued her Chicago employer for religious discrimination after she reported numerous complaints of religious discrimination from her supervisor over seven years, without any resultant action. Her supervisor regularly referred to herself and other employees as "good Christians," while calling Huri "evil" and forcing her to participate in non-Muslim religious activities, such as praying out loud in the name of Jesus Christ.¹³¹

Muslim Iranian Ramtin Sabet filed a formal lawsuit against the North Chicago Police Department, alleging that he was fired after making both formal and informal complaints regarding the "severe and pervasive" discrimination and harassment he was subjected to while working for the department. While the department argued that it fired Sabet for violating its rules and regulations, Sabet noted that he was terminated after making a formal complaint to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, reporting that his supervisors and coworkers mocked his religion, culture, and food, treated him less favorably than his coworkers, and denied him training opportunities and resources that would have made him eligible for promotions.¹³² Muslim American teacher Safoorah Khan filed a lawsuit against a Chicagoland school district after resigning from her teaching position when school officials refused to accommodate her religious practices. Khan had requested a leave from work to perform Hajj, but her request was denied as it was "not related to her professional duties."¹³³

In a prominent case from Oklahoma, Muslim teenager Samantha Elauf sued popular clothing company Abercrombie & Fitch after she was not hired because she wore a hijab to her job interview. Company officials argued that they sought a certain "look" when hiring and maintained a no-hat policy. Elauf's case made it all the way to the Supreme Court, which ruled 8-1 in her favor.¹³⁴ Although racial discrimination in the workplace is illegal, these experiences illustrate how anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism often define not only where Arab Americans can work but also the conditions of the workplace, with participants enduring daily degradations leveled by their supervisors, coworkers, and clients.

Official Data on Harassment and Violence Committed Against Arabs and Muslims

Acts of harassment and violence against Arabs and Muslims in the U.S. are not new. They have been documented as far back as the 1970s, paralleling the rise in negative media portrayals of Arab Americans. While there have been a number of empirical studies of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim violence, most suffer from the absence of official, quantitative data. Such data are difficult to locate for a few reasons. First, the publicly available, official data on anti-Arab/anti-Muslim hate crimes (i.e., interpersonal discrimination) have only been collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) since 2015. Second, the FBI uses police reports and police often miscategorize Arabs and Muslims (for example, as Asians) or determine that an alleged hate crime is instead a personal dispute, as in the case of three North Carolina students murdered point blank by their white neighbor.¹³⁵ Third, as we have noted in this report, the underreporting of hate crimes is a well-known phenomenon, but it is amplified for Arab Americans since they not only tend to underreport hate crimes but also tend to underreport instances of discrimination. As scholar Diane Shammass found through her own study, Arab American students underreported discrimination in surveys and only in focus groups were researchers able to understand anti-Arab/anti-Muslim discrimination.¹³⁶ As the Arab American Institute Foundation has noted, this exclusion from hate crime statistics was yet another means of rendering Arab Americans invisible in official statistics.¹³⁷

The FBI data that have been collected demonstrate that anti-Arab/anti-Muslim hate crimes have increased faster than those perpetrated against other historically discriminated ethno-racial groups. Since anti-Arab/anti-Muslim hate crime statistics started being collected in 2015, the number of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim single-bias incidents, which refers to one or more hate crime offense types motivated by the same bias, has grown 2.2 times. In that time, anti-Black and anti-Latinx hate crime incidents have grown 1.6 and 1.1 times, respectively. The overall growth rate in racially motivated incidents across all racial groups is 1.2.

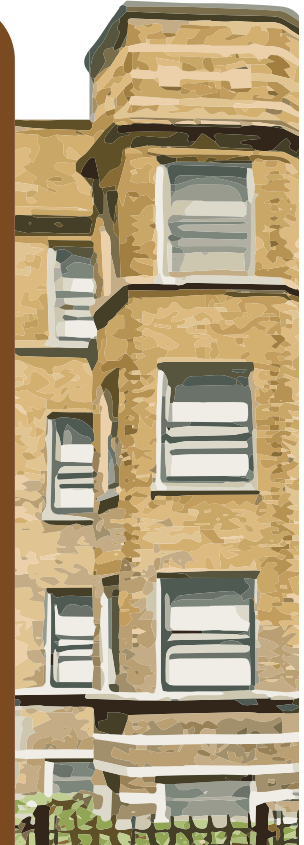
FBI Hate Crimes Statistics on Racially Motivated Hate Crimes by Select Ethno-Racial Groups, 2016 - 2019		Total Incidents	Anti-Black	Anti-Latinx	Anti-Arab
	2016	3,489	1,739	344	51
	2017	4,131	2,013	427	102
	2018	4,047	1,943	485	82
	2019	3,963	1,930	527	95
Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).	Percent Change	+13.59%	+10.98%	+53.20%	+86.27%

Racism in Everyday Life: Impacts and Implications

As these examples poignantly illustrate, Arab Americans in Chicagoland experience anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in schools and airports, in their interactions with police officers, in their workplaces, and in their everyday lives as they move through public space. These multi-layered and multi-sited experiences produced palpable impacts in participants as fear of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim harassment, discrimination, and violence shaped their sense of safety and security, which, in turn, had significant impacts on their health, their education, their housing, their economic status, and their overall wellbeing. For example, participants described that they were uneasy in seeking healthcare because of instances of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism. Amani, a Palestinian immigrant woman described how, unless they had to because it was an emergency, they “will definitely not go [to the doctor] or I’d want to go to the hospital,” explaining, “I guess it’s just back on that [theme] of being uneasy.”

Arab Americans in our study provided countless examples of discrimination in public spaces and at work but they also experienced anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in their own apartments and houses and did not feel safe at home. Fayrouz, a Yemeni immigrant woman and mother described how a neighbor regularly “violently knocked” on her door, “cussing and calling [her] a terrorist,” a frequent experience that led her to “stay at [her] dad’s house or sister’s house because [the neighbor] didn’t like [her] child walking around [making noise in the apartment]. [...] It shouldn’t be that bad where a neighbor will come out and call you a terrorist or bang your door.” It was common in our focus groups for participants to note instances where their neighbors or people outside of their homes told them to “Go back to your country.” Expressions of racial antagonism often followed this phrase and were manifested in negative comments about Arab bodies or customs such as the following that Nabila, a Yemeni immigrant woman heard while at an outdoor carnival with her children: “I know your wearing a hijab is not for religious purposes [...]. I know you are hiding bombs under there.” Qamar, another Yemeni immigrant woman and mother assessed these experiences – of being told to “Go back to your country” or “Go ride your camels” – as “mainstream Islamophobia” they often experienced from white neighbors and peers. Anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism stalks the daily lives of Arab Chicagoans in the form of bullying, harassment, and discrimination whether in their homes, at the park, attending school, going to work, or seeking services.

“ I have a problem with my neighbors, I have racist neighbors who live in the third floor. They are older people, old couple. We’ve been harassed by them since I moved in the building three years ago. Now we go to court. I have a restraining order against them. But they do keep bothering me because I am a Muslim, and I am Arab. [...]. I feel like I am a hostage in my own apartment. [...]. If my curtain is open, they will knock on the window and say, “You close your curtain! You F* close your window!” If I open my window, “Oh, your house smells like shit.” [...]. They still have surveillance cameras on their garage facing my window. They walk around my apartment [outside the windows] with their phones taping us. I cannot open my curtains when they are around. I cannot open my windows. I cannot leave my kids alone even though they are teenagers. I have fifteen and seventeen year olds. I cannot leave them alone at home. I am jobless! I am almost gonna be homeless because I cannot afford to pay rent. I cannot go back to my job to leave my kids. [...]. Even though I had the restraining order, the police cannot do anything about it. They said, “if you don’t have proof, we cannot do anything about it.”



– Sumayya, Palestinian immigrant woman

“ These [microaggressions] have made me more cautious, especially going around [Chicago university campus...]. I’m not as comfortable if I’m being honest, especially when traversing the campus. The only time I’m comfortable is when I’m at the library, on the second floor, and there’s 40, 50 other Arabs there. All I can hear is Arabic. That’s the only time I’m comfortable because I know they wouldn’t go and attack a whole group of kids at once.

– Mustafa, Yemeni American man

“ Well, you know what, we are probably more comfortable around our you know, our people and uh, I mean it’s just more comfortable to be around, I mean we’re proud with wearing the hijab, we’re proud about where we came from and, you know, we tell people we’re where we’re from, and we don’t hide anything. And it is like we’re here, you know. And one time I was on the train [...]. And there was this guy [...]. And then, he just started talking about Muslims, and [...] it’s like out of nowhere. And then I just got kind of scared. I’m like “what is he doing?” [...]. Yeah, you know, you don’t know what’s going to happen when you walk out there.

– Faiza, Palestinian immigrant woman

“ Obviously what’s close to me is the conflict in Palestine and the Zionism and [...] you continue to explain, explain, explain and the fact that you have to continue to explain it to people who have no idea or have no recollection or they don’t even want to or they always just have something to say against it. It’s [...] very tiring to continue to explain and fight for it, but obviously it means a lot to you and so, you have to do that, but [...]. Most of the people around you don’t even know what’s happening. [...]. It’s just very hard expressing your beliefs and also expressing your religious beliefs.

– Amani, Palestinian immigrant woman



Racism in Everyday Life: Strategies for Negotiating Anti-Arab/anti-Muslim Racism

Participants described different strategies they used to survive and sometimes confront anti-Arab/anti-Muslim aggression. Some participants, for example, tried to ignore or laugh along and play off the bullying and harassment they faced. Jad, a Jordanian American man, for example, explained that, when Osama bin Laden died, their classmates made comments to Arab students such as, “Are you guys disappointed that he’s dead?” Jad felt that “Half of them were either joking or probably serious about it. Most of us [Arab students] were just like, ‘Oh, whatever.’ I just didn’t care, ‘cause I think if you show people that you care, I think that’s what makes them want to do it more. I just ignore it.”

Nawal, a Palestinian American woman, explained that, when they were younger, “after [other students] would say something super fucked up [...] I would just laugh along with them because I didn’t know any better. Then after becoming aware, it was just, if I said anything, they would also use that against me. It was upsetting.” This meant that, “In high school whenever kids used to say really messed up stuff like, ‘You’re a terrorist,’

“ I think kids just don't know what they're saying. They're just repeating things that they hear either on TV or from their parents. Their parents also don't know what they're saying. They're just repeating shit that they hear from politicians, Government, media, Hollywood. It really all stems from Government policies.

– Nawal, Palestinian American woman



my reaction would be to laugh with them, and be like, 'Ha-ha' like, 'Sure.' Because if I was outraged or angry, I would come off as like, 'Oh, she's being aggressive.' Oh, she's triggered'." For Arab students, laughter was a way to defuse and contain situations that were upsetting. Laughing along with people making hurtful anti-Arab/anti-Muslim jokes or derogatory comments was also a way that some Arab Americans in our study attempted to fit in when engaging with mainstream white society.

Although our study participants felt hurt and angry, they sometimes reacted with laughter, especially as children and teenagers, because they didn't have the energy, capacity, or support to explain to those making racist anti-Arab/anti-Muslim comments or jokes why it was wrong. As Nawal put it, "I didn't know how to properly respond at that time. I think, like, what really frustrated me too when I reflect back on my high school experience was that I knew a lot of the things that people were saying were wrong, but I just couldn't communicate myself and explain why it was wrong or know how to refute against it." Some participants in our study expressed interest in perhaps taking the time to educate their peers. Hamza, a Yemeni immigrant man, stated, "I don't really care. I don't know how to react to it. I'm not gonna be angry about it. Maybe educate them. Give them facts and be like, 'Hey, yo, our race isn't – our religion isn't the one that causes most of the terrorism."

However, some of our study participants wanted to confront hostile behavior but expected or knew from experience that school adults would not support them and that reporting bullying could lead to amplification of the negative treatment. Recalling his days playing youth football, Mustafa recounted his thought process:

[I] didn't wanna go up there and report that this white kid on the football team is calling me a terrorist, just to be told, 'Hey it's fine,' or whatever. To punish him and then have them retaliate even further. Because that's all that would happen. If you said anything [...] you would end up getting twice as hard bullied.

At another point in our focus group, Mustafa further explained that the possibility of retaliation circumscribed his Arab peer's responses to anti-Arab/anti-Muslim bullying, reporting:

I've seen Arab kids get into fights with kids who have done some stuff to them. I knew they would get punished. The other kid would walk free. I didn't wanna – I had this fear that I was risking my school career if I even tried to retaliate. That was the fear all of high school. Even when kids would literally grab things out of my backpack. Mind you, I could fight them. I could easily fight them. If I did, I would get expelled. That was the biggest fear walking through those halls.

As a survival strategy, Arab students tried to ignore anti-Arab/anti-Muslim harassment and “not let it get to them,” despite the daily bullying, intimidation, and expressions of a desire for violence against Arab people from other students, staff, and teachers.

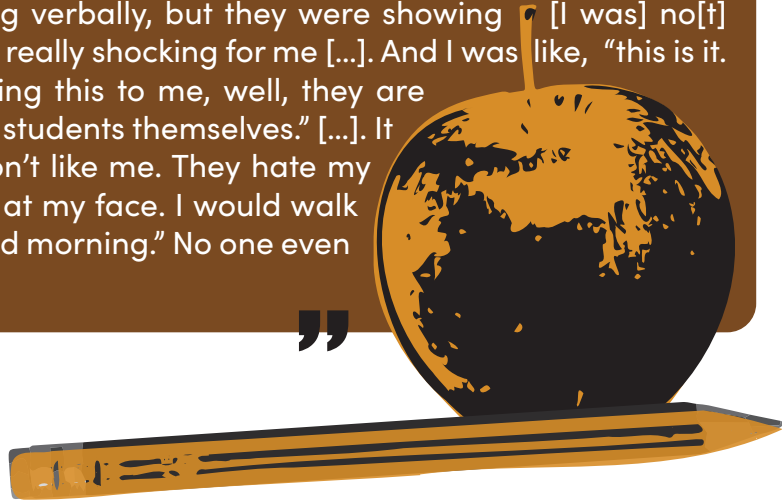
As we have noted, the anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism that our study participants experienced was not confined to schools, workplaces, healthcare, or homes but permeated all aspects of their lives. Study participants used the strategies they had developed to negotiate anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in schools in other settings such as in their workplaces or when seeking healthcare or housing. At work, participants would sometimes ignore or brush off anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism and sometimes try to “educate” their coworkers about Arab culture. Some feared backlash if they spoke up and reported anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in the workplace. Rami, a Jordanian immigrant man, for example, explained that, “In the workplace, I didn't feel I could [speak up].” When he approached “other Arabs who work in my department” about how they deal with instances of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism, their response to him was, “We just don't bring it up.”

Zahra recounted that, when she was a healthcare student and was working in a nursing home and a patient complained about having an Arab caregiver, her boss

““

When I did my masters, I had to go for a half-year [to] work in public school, so they choose for me a school. Then I worked there. That school, they have a lot of students that are from Yemen and other [Arab] nationalit[ies], but no staff. There is no Arab staff at all, so I was the first one who was working there. [...]. They never sa[id] something verbally, but they were showing [I was] no[t] welcome very clearly. It was really shocking for me [...]. And I was like, “this is it. The school, if they’re showing this to me, well, they are showing it to the kids, to the students themselves.” [...]. It was very clear that they don’t like me. They hate my guts. They don’t like to look at my face. I would walk every morning saying, “Good morning.” No one even said “Good morning.”

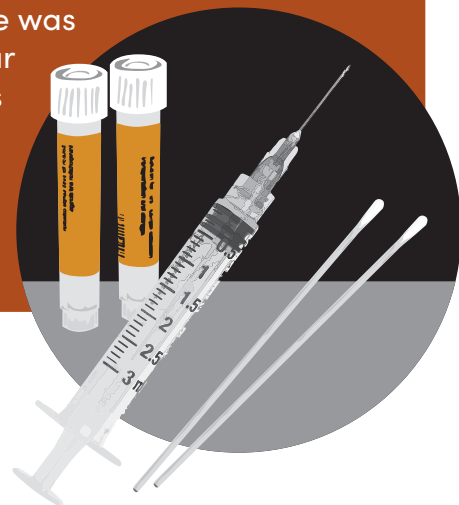
– Abeer, Yemeni immigrant woman



““

I’ve [...] worked at a trauma one hospital for the last six years. Thankfully my bosses have always been very understanding about my identity. [...]. I did have one negative experience with one of my coworkers when I started wearing [the] hijab back in November. It was so eye-opening ‘cause I didn’t realize how – I don’t know. It’s like you don’t think that these people are your coworkers or that they’re your peers or classmates, but they’re actually super-racist. You’re just like, “Wow, that’s a really huge shock.” [...]. She was like, “Why do you wear that thing on your head?” I’m like, “It’s for my religion.” Then she was like, “Oh, you don’t wear it to protect yourself from COVID?” I’m like, “How would my hijab protect me from COVID?” Then I was like, “No, pretty sure it’s for my religion.” Then she was like, “Oh my god, so no one’s ever gonna see your hair again? What about your husband? He’s never gonna see your hair?” [...]. I said something like, “Do you come to work to see my hair, or do you come to work to work?” and I walked away ‘cause I was so upset.

– Sharifa, Egyptian American woman



would “send someone else in there.” She empathized with their employer, stating, “I understand where they’re coming from.” Yet, when attempting to discuss the discomfort that these encounters with clients caused them with a teacher in her school program, the teacher “just brushed it off, and was like, ‘Oh, it’s because the [nursing home patients] are old, they don’t really know what they’re saying,’ that kind of stuff.”

Jumana, another Palestinian woman and healthcare worker, stated that her supervisor continually brought up her hijab and said that, while patients encouraged her to report this discrimination to the Better Business Bureau or a human resources representative, she felt:

I couldn’t do that to a person [...]. No, if I’m at least able to educate her about something, even if it doesn’t want to go through her stubborn head, that’s fine. I at least [will] try rather than report it, especially because it’s her office and it’s her business. I look at it like that’s her income. I don’t want to be the person that ruins that for her.

The reasons that Arab workers in our study gave for refraining from reporting anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in the workplace ranged from fear of retaliation to the desire to educate their clients and coworkers and up to showing restraint because they did not want to “ruin” business owners.

Other participants described that, in response to disparaging comments or to being excluded or unwelcome in their workplace, they felt a need work even harder. Abeer, a Yemeni immigrant woman explained, “I made the promise to myself that I have to show them how good we are. I have to show them that we are not stupid. [Wearing] the hijab, it doesn’t mean that there is something wrong with us. I worked very hard.” This meant “going [into work] before everyone” and “leaving two hours after everyone.” In her words, “I was [...] doing extra things that I didn’t have to do.” While her coworkers were friendlier to her after taking on this extra work, she confided in her husband that, “I don’t know how I’m gonna finish this.”

Study participants experienced a considerable mental and physical toll from constantly dealing with anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism and the need to educate others about Arab culture or to prove the humanity of Arab Americans. Many participants described a feeling of “uneasiness” when “praying in public or fasting” because of the constant need to respond to negative comments or endless questions from

**A CONVERSATION BETWEEN AN ARAB HEALTHCARE WORKER AND
A HEALTHCARE WORKER WHO IS A U.S. VETERAN OF THE IRAQI WAR**

HEALTHCARE WORKER AND IRAQI VETERAN

“Oh, you’re one of the — you’re the good ten percent of your region.”

ARAB HEALTHCARE WORKER

“What? You think in your head that ninety percent of the people there are not good?”

HEALTHCARE WORKER AND IRAQI VETERAN

“Yeah, that’s my experience in Iraq, and you don’t know.”

ARAB HEALTHCARE WORKER

“No, I lived there 18 years of my life. You’re not gonna tell me I don’t know, and you know by just serving and going there for a specific mission.”

The healthcare worker reflected on his interactions with this veteran healthcare colleague, saying, “Over time, I think I had some positive — I hope some positive impact on him and how he thinks of Arabs and Muslims.”

– recounted by Rami, a Jordanian immigrant man



coworkers, bosses, or clients. Even though some participants like Munira, an Egyptian American woman, willingly took on the extra labor of “speak[ing] on behalf of an entire group of people” as the “only Arab American Muslim [...] in a space,” they also reported that “it gets so taxing because you feel like you can’t mess up and you’re under a microscope all the time.” Omar, a Palestinian American man, echoed this sentiment, saying, “it hurts knowing that [...] I have to put in the effort to humanize myself. They can’t even see me. I have to explain. [...]. I have to convince people that I’m just like you and that just feels very unfair and it’s very frustrating.” As Amani summarized, Arab Americans feel pressured at once to spend “more time convincing people or making a space” for themselves even as they also feel that “there was no point in me trying to explain myself or trying to convince them otherwise of the image that they already had about me.”

Racism in Everyday Life: Summary

As the experiences and examples of the Arab Americans in our study amply demonstrate, U.S. society is rife with assumptions about Arab Americans as “others” whose cultural differences make them unassimilable or “forever foreign.” These are the hallmark of nation-based racism and cultural racism. Enduring historical conditions, foreign and domestic public policies, and popular narratives mark Arabs as terrorists, foreigners, outsiders, and as threats. As Muslim writer Suhaiymah Manzoor-Khan explains, “Our hijabs are pulled off in the street because they are criminalized at [the] state level; and we are called terrorists on the bus because we are constructed as terrorists in public policy.”¹³⁸ In this way, these experiences of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism and hatred are not merely the expressions of an individual perpetrator’s biases or expressions of interpersonal racism; they are manifestations of the systemic anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racial bias that permeates state policies and the corporate media’s popular narratives.

Our focus group research reaffirms the limitations of existing data on Arab American experiences with racism. Many participants did not feel comfortable or did not find any structures in place to report racist incidents. As Nina Shoman-Dajani documented in her study on Arab American college students, even when Arab American students reported racism or discrimination, incident reports at schools and public institutions do not collect demographic information on Arab/MENA populations. Since the report would be documented as that of a white student, it would not be treated as an incident of racial discrimination. Shoman-Dajani’s research participants, like ours, tended to agree that they are not treated as “white” and that the “white” label should apply to people from Europe, not Arab Americans.¹³⁹

Although our focus groups made clear that the effects of pervasive anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism have shaped the lives of all our study participants, their joy, resilience, determination, and love for each other and for Arab American communities was also evident in our focus group interviews. Abeer, an older Yemeni immigrant woman reflected on what she and older generations of immigrants to the United States had gone through and the differences in how younger Arab Americans were growing up by stating:

Back then, I don’t think that we were that aware [...]. We were not that strong. We were just – I don’t know. It wasn’t like now. Now, I raise my kids,

[...] my two daughters go to Aqsa, to Islamic school. My other sisters, their kids go to public school, but they raised them in a way that you are Muslim. You're Arab, whatever. This is your culture. This is your nationality. You have to be proud of it. We did not dress that way. Oh, no, we didn't dress that way. I don't know. When we came, we were not confident with our world.

Despite the challenges Arab Americans in Chicagoland face, as we undertook the research for this report along with our community partners during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen and been reminded of the ways in which Arab Americans support and hold each other. The contributions of Arab Americans to Chicagoland are significant, but so are their challenges. In our last report section, we outline a critical policy proposal that government, philanthropy, schools, media, and our business sector can enact in order to create greater opportunities and better support for Arab Americans in Chicagoland and beyond.

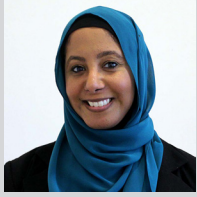
“ My son was with his friends outside. Like they went to buy something from the store [...] and this [40 year old white] guy, because he bought near to him, he starts screaming at them, and then he got down and start[ed] punching [...] my son[’s] friend. Punching and hit[ting] him. My son he came to just tell the guy, “Don’t do that! Why you hitting him? [...]” And he punches my son in his face, he broke his jaw. [...]. And the police, they call the police. And the police came, and instead they saw like my son, like bleeding from his mouth, and instead [of] just calling the ambulance or something, they arrest him! And they took him to jail. And they call us and tell us “your son, he did problem and you have to come.” We went, my husband went and he, you know bailed him out [...]. And I took him to the hospital, they said he has a broken jaw [...].



– Samah, Palestinian immigrant woman

Sudanese in Chicagoland

by Hind Makki



Hind Makki is an interfaith and anti-racism educator with the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) who holds a degree in International Relations from Brown University. She is the founder and curator of Side Entrance, an award-winning website documenting women's prayer experiences in mosques around the world and has served on the Islamic Society of North America's Mosque Inclusion Taskforce. In 2018, Hind was recognized as one of CNN's 25 Influential American Muslims and her work has been featured in a variety of national and international media.

There are no precise numbers for Sudanese Americans in Chicago. The difficulty in obtaining data for this immigrant group is emblematic of the challenges facing a community limited by intersectional invisibility.¹⁴⁰ Sudanese, who are Arabic speakers from northeast Africa, share challenges and experiences with non-Black immigrants from the MENA region as well as with African Americans and other Black immigrants.

Like members of multiple marginalized groups, Sudanese Americans often find one or many parts of their identities erased, simultaneously facing Islamophobia, xenophobia, and anti-Black racism. Like many other immigrant groups, they often face obstacles to achieving financial security. This brief commentary will describe Chicago's Sudanese community, highlight some of the challenges faced by immigrants and their U.S.-born children, and offer recommendations for funders and local officials to better serve this community.

First Stop: The North Side

The best estimates of the number of individuals in Chicagoland from the Republic of Sudan – the rump state that remained after the secession of the Republic of South Sudan in 2011 – come from the community itself.¹⁴¹ The Sudanese community in the Chicagoland area numbers between 600 to 1,500 individuals and is mostly clustered in two geographic regions: the north side of the city and throughout the western and southwestern suburbs. The majority practice Sunni Islam and roughly 1% belong to the Coptic Orthodox Church. Although Arabic and English are the official languages, many Sudanese are Arabized native speakers of Cushitic, Kordofanian, and Nubian language groups, among others.

Sudanese immigration started in significant numbers during the late 1990s and early 2000s, due to political and economic instability in Sudan. The challenge in obtaining accurate local data may be due in part to the fact that Sudanese typically emigrate to the U.S. through the Diversity

Visa “lottery” program and student and family-based visas, none of which track individuals upon entering the U.S. This is in contrast with Somali or Syrian refugees, whose migration is facilitated by programs that keep detailed records of the number of migrants and where they live. Upon attaining Legal Permanent Resident status, Sudanese immigrants usually apply to become U.S. citizens.

When a Sudanese immigrant first arrives in Chicago, their first stop is almost always the north side. After a family establishes itself, they may decide to move to the suburbs. The mother of one family, N.S.¹⁴², describes the north side – home to a plurality of Chicago’s Sudanese – as a close-knit community of recent immigrants renting affordable apartments in diverse neighborhoods. Strong bonds are made as women socialize with each other, providing crucial mental health and wellness support for those who feel lonely and isolated as they are away from their home country and alone in small apartments while their husbands are at work.

Upon achieving financial stability, families may purchase a house outside of the city. Southwest suburbs such as Bridgeview, Oak Lawn, and Palos Hills are attractive because of good public schools and significant populations of Arabic-speaking Muslim immigrants, the prevalence of which leads to high levels of cultural competencies in schools, libraries, and hospitals, despite being whiter and less diverse overall than the north side of Chicago. N.S. was pleased that she did not need to explain to her children’s schools about Ramadan¹⁴³ since they already accommodate the religious needs of their Muslim students and staff. She also found it easier to wear a headscarf after moving to the suburbs, feeling less conspicuous than when she occasionally wore it while living on the north side of Chicago.

Overeducated and Underemployed

Sudanese men typically emigrate before their families. They are usually highly educated, proficient English speakers who belong to a professional class in Sudan. Yet, they often face obstacles in transferring their educational qualifications in the U.S. As important breadwinners for their extended families, there is an urgent need to find employment and they are often inducted into the Sudanese cab driver community. The profession used to provide a good salary and path toward financial stability through the purchasing of taxi medallions. However, the popularity of ridesharing applications over the last two decades decimated the industry, making it no longer profitable. The example of O.H. is typical. A married father of three in his 50s who holds a Master of Engineering, he emigrated to the U.S. in the mid-1990s and became a cab driver. More than two decades later, he works as a long-haul truck driver, which offers more stability and a higher income.

Sudanese women are similarly highly educated and proficient in English. Unlike their male counterparts who are mostly employed, roughly three quarters of Sudanese immigrant women in Chicago are homemakers, often until their children reach high school age. Deviating from this norm are divorced and single women, who do work, though not always in the field of their qualification. Among those who are employed, roughly half work in their field of education, often after struggling to transfer their academic credentials or obtaining further higher education. Some work as entrepreneurs, administrators in local businesses, and several are Arabic language instructors at high schools and universities, regardless of their previous academic and professional backgrounds in Sudan. Like other visibly Muslim women, those who wear headscarves may face religious bigotry during the interview process or at work.

Check All That Apply: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity

It does not take long for a Sudanese immigrant to find that their racial and ethnic identity does not fit neatly in the boxes of U.S. racial categories. The U.S. Census designates people from the MENA region as racially white.¹⁴⁴ Sudan is not classified as part of the MENA region by the Census,¹⁴⁵ but the country is a member of The Arab League and many Sudanese identify as Arab, feeling connected to the Middle East due to religious, linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and political ties. Additionally, many Sudanese believe they are an Arab and African admixture, not only culturally, but genetically.

When a group of local Sudanese leaders were asked, "How do you identify racially?"¹⁴⁶ their responses illuminated the difficulty in fitting Sudanese identities into U.S. racial categories. Among all participants and interviewees, there was general frustration at having to choose one identity, noting that the Sudanese identity inherently contains multitudes. While several respondents identify as Black and Black African, one participant stated that as he was born in Cairo, Egypt, he is automatically designated as white – in contrast to his own self-identification as a Black African. A number stated their race is "Sudanese" and that they check the "Other" box in government documents. Several of the respondents said they are disconnected from African American culture but feel an affinity for Arab culture, so they identify as "closer to Arab." Several participants stated that their Islamic faith is more important than racial or ethnic classifications and questioned why the federal government tracks race or ethnicity.

Anti-Black Racism, Gender, and Islamophobia

Sudanese racial self-perception is often based on generational and gendered experiences of Islamophobia, as well as levels of political awareness. N.S. is an Arabic language instructor and

describes herself as Black despite her own diverse Egyptian-Sudanese background and ethnically ambiguous features – prior to donning the headscarf full time, she was often “mistaken for Mexican.” She identifies with the struggles of African Americans, noting that the same anti-Black racism that impacts African Americans impacts Sudanese. She chose not to enroll her children in Islamic schools because of the anti-Black racism in Arab communities and her belief that society will interact with her children based more on their Blackness than their Muslim faith. For similar reasons, M.M., a young Millennial raised in a Levantine Arab community in suburban Chicago, identifies as Black. Based on his experiences and observations, he believes that the same systemic racism that impacts the lives of African Americans can also apply to Sudanese Americans, particularly racial discrimination, economic hardship, and lack of access to quality healthcare.

M.M.¹⁴⁷ describes that tensions between Sudanese and other Arabs are due to deep-seated anti-Black racism. Growing up, “the ‘*Abeed*’¹⁴⁸ conversation happened at least once a month,” he said. There is rising awareness in the activist Arab community about the intersection between Islamophobia and anti-Blackness after the murder of George Floyd and President Trump’s “Muslim Ban,” which targeted citizens of several African and majority-Muslim countries, including Sudan. At the same time, “The Talk”¹⁴⁹ that his immigrant parents had with him as a teenager wasn’t about being a target of the police as a young Black man in the U.S.; rather it was about how to respond to TSA questions at the airport. Growing up, his body awareness was as a Muslim. After moving out of his Levantine Arab neighborhood, he quickly realized “I’m a police target,” who is viewed by the broader society as a Black male body.

Recommendations

Chicago’s Sudanese community is a small, tight knit one, divided by the Dan Ryan and Stevenson Expressways. New immigrants are assisted by those who came before in finding employment and affordable apartments and second-generation Sudanese Americans typically financially surpass their parents’ generation while achieving the same levels of higher education. However, attaining financial success remains a challenge for individuals and families due to the difficulties in authenticating their foreign academic and professional credentials. The community remains overeducated and underemployed, making it overall strapped for resources. It struggles to build collective capacity in order to serve its own spiritual, cultural, and social needs.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the report we have documented the conditions and experiences of Arab American Chicagoans. We have described challenges related to the communities' lack of visibility: how a lack of data and historical understanding about Arab Americans makes it exceedingly difficult for Arab American communities to be accurately seen and to get essential needs met. We have also described the ubiquitous experiences of being mis-seen as Arab Americans navigate pervasive stereotypes and racial targeting in everyday life. In part one, we provided demographic data on the status of Chicagoland Arab American communities in relation to housing, insurance rates, income, employment, and education. This first section demonstrated the vital importance of having access to data about Arab American communities in order to understand their diverse realities. By disaggregating the data, part one also makes a compelling case that paying attention to the diversity of Arab American communities is vital. Treating Arab Americans as a monolith erases their diversity and masks how housing-cost burdens, economic challenges, and access to education vary by ancestry group and in relation to that group's immigration history (i.e., whether people came as refugees or as middle-class professionals). By focusing on the diverse conditions of Arab American communities, we find that they are, by and large, at one or the other end of the socioeconomic spectrum, among both the most advantaged groups in Chicagoland and among those that are facing the most challenges.

In part two, we argue that to understand, discuss, and address anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism we need to attend to the specific ways it operates, specifically through *cultural* and *nation-based* racism. We exemplified how cultural racism targets Arab Americans through the incorrect idea that "Arab and Muslim culture and religion" are backwards and uncivilized (i.e., cases where people pressure women to remove their *hijab*) and how nation-based racism targets Arab Americans through the false idea that "Arabs and Muslims are enemies of the West."

After presenting our definition of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism, part two also presents the findings from our survey. Our survey, including 496 participants,

reveals the profound challenges that working-class Arab American migrants face in accessing social services, especially within institutions (e.g., schools, police, non-profit organizations, etc.) that do not have familiarity or cultural competency related to serving Arab Americans. The survey reveals that verbal assaults and threats are the most common types of racism experienced and that, while physical attacks, vandalism, and loss of employment are not everyday occurrences, the rate of such occurrences is high. Moreover, the survey documents the fear many Arab Americans face when it comes to participating in public life or filling out forms containing personal information whether at the doctor or DMV.

Survey results reiterate the link between these urgent problems: (1) invisibility, or the ways the lack of quantitative/administrative data about Arab Americans as a result of their official governmental classification as “white” makes it extremely difficult to account for their needs and simultaneously fosters a lack of knowledge and understanding about Arab Americans across society; (2) hypervisibility, or the consistent and profound realities of racial targeting, harassment, intimidation, and profiling; and (3) the resulting problem whereby Arab Americans lack access to resources necessary to survive and thrive – such as the lack of Arab American staff at organizations who are not only able to speak Arabic but who understand their diversity, histories, and needs.

In part three, we draw from the focus groups we conducted to deepen and personalize our analysis of how anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism plays out in the daily lives of Arab American communities in Chicagoland. Portrayed as terrorist threats or culturally/religiously backwards in public policy and popular media, Arab Americans in Chicagoland have experienced high rates of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim harassment, discrimination, and bullying in schools, in their encounters with police officers, and in workplaces from customers and coworkers. Together, our survey and focus groups provide tangible evidence that anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism is a structural problem. Our focus groups also reveal that Arab Americans’ classification as white and the lack of knowledge about Arab Americans and their experiences across society obstructs the possibilities for challenging, resisting, and dismantling anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in the lives of Arab Americans.

Collectively, this data suggests there is a great deal of work to do address the needs of the Arab American community. This includes work at multiple levels and across

all key social institutions. Doing this work remains all too difficult because of the challenges of accurately locating and tracking the population. Thus, in the next section we outline our central policy recommendation to begin to address Arab American invisibility: the MENA category.

MENA Category

Scholars, community organizations, public officials, and community members have organized for years for a more accurate categorization of Arab Americans, lobbying (with other MENA communities, such as Iranians) for the creation of a new Middle East/North African racial category on the U.S. Census and all government forms. Currently everyone subsumed within the MENA (Middle East/Southwest Asia and North African) category is officially racially categorized in the United States Census as “white” even as their conditions and experiences are quite distinct from other white groups (i.e., those of European origin) and more similar to those of people of color. The current U.S. Census Bureau’s categories follow guidance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) that determines the minimal reporting criteria (Directive No. 15¹⁵⁰) for race and ethnicity for all federal agencies. Scholars have written extensively about the history of the federal government’s racial categories and how they are intrinsically intertwined with racialization processes more generally; the history of changing categories is itself a kind of map of shifting political and social dynamics.¹⁵¹ The categorization process is not just symbolic. As the U.S. Census Bureau recognizes, “Federal, state, and local governments, along with businesses, universities, international organizations, and researchers, use the Census Bureau’s population statistics for funding allocations, to inform policy, and to aid in city planning.”¹⁵² The statistical and demographic information collected by the U.S. Census is one of the main sources of nationwide data utilized by public and private institutions and thus it has high stakes implications across the country for how public and private resources get distributed. Counting Arab Americans as white is inaccurate and serves as a major obstacle to capturing the experiences of Arab American communities and addressing their needs.

One effect of Arab Americans being classified as white is that, as Detroit epidemiologist Kaitlyn Akel states, “In consolidating us into the non-Hispanic white population, my

community is not recognized federally as a minority. [...]. This directive invalidates our lived experiences, whether those are the outcomes of discrimination, health disparities, or even our achievements.”¹⁵³ As scholars Awad, Abuelezam, Ajrouch, and Matthew Jaber Stiffler further explain, “accurate and robust collection of ethnic and race data” are necessary to identify and address inequities.¹⁵⁴

Trying to fill the gaps left by the lack of a U.S. Census racial/ethnic classification for people from the Middle East and North Africa, (i.e., a MENA category), scholars of Arab Americans have used the less than ideal “ancestry” data collected by the Census Bureau from a small sample of the U.S. population to describe Arab Americans. They have also done the important work as we have here of gathering data within specific locales, using surveys and focus groups, and raising research funds to study issues around education and health, among others, within Arab American communities. All of this research demonstrates that the lived experiences of MENA Americans are distinct from whites. As these scholars have documented, and as we have shown in this report, MENA Americans often fare differently when compared to non-Hispanic whites in relation to their economic, educational, housing, health, criminal legal, and racialized experiences.¹⁵⁵

Nationally and locally, this is not a new conversation. Multiple scholars and local organizations have studied the distinct experiences of the MENA population in and around Chicagoland over the last three decades. In 1998, the first ever needs assessment was published on Chicago’s Arab American communities and provided an overdue and crucial understanding of the gaps in services provided to Arab American communities. An effort initiated by the Arab American Action Network and funded by the Chicago Community Trust, the needs assessment articulated that Arab American communities were “voiceless” and were “misrepresented” and “shut out” in various sectors; in other words, they were invisible where being visible matters.¹⁵⁶ A decade later, Chicagoland’s Arab and Muslim communities were the focus of sociologist Louise Cainkar’s study of the impacts of 9/11, where she found hypervisible communities bearing the brunt of public anger for attacks in which they played no part.¹⁵⁷ Nearly twenty-five years after 9/11, this report documents that little has changed for the better in the intervening period. The needs and challenges of Arab American communities remain largely invisible while the context of threat and fear due to hypervisibility persists. The time for change is now. In the

focus group conversations and discussions with various community partners for this report, we heard over and over how the lack of a MENA data category is an underlying challenge that affects all aspects of Arab American life. Without being counted, community organizations find it challenging to access adequate funding or advocate for specific services and opportunities to address the very real challenges that impact Arab American communities such as poverty, discrimination, and access to housing, education, and healthcare. Without being counted, community members experience harms that go unnoticed by the larger public.

What is the Impact? Here, we provide a brief outline of some of the tangible harms that come from not having a MENA category.

Bad Science, Bad Policies

Several scholars of Arab American studies have articulated how the lack of accurate and systematic data on MENA Americans constitutes bad science and thus leads to bad policies. As a recent study notes, “Sampling schemes that do not include MENA individuals compromise scientific inquiry by inaccurately attributing trends to Whites, making invisible the unique challenges faced by MENA populations and further obscuring disparities between White and minority individuals and groups.”¹⁵⁸ The authors refer to a number of studies to make the point that the lack of an MENA category not only renders Arab American experiences invisible but also produces inaccurate information about the white racial category and thus potentially masks larger disparities between whites and other racial and ethnic minorities.

Misrepresenting data and rendering a community invisible due to an assigned racial category that does not fit their lived experience can cause great harm. One example of this is expressed in Abboud and Shalabi’s expert commentary in this report on the challenge faced by the lack of data around Arab American COVID-19 infections and deaths. As the state did not record this data using a MENA category, organizations and groups supporting Arab Americans through the pandemic had to rely on cobbling together piecemeal data, anecdotal evidence, and their own studies to be able to determine needs and access resources to support Arab American communities during the crisis. The time, effort, and resources used to assess needs could have

been spent instead on *addressing* the real issues on the ground. Moreover, because the needs of Arab Americans are largely invisible, community, state and healthcare institutions were slow to provide appropriate Arabic interpretation, create outreach and informational material in Arabic, and hire Arab American staff to communicate accurate and trustworthy information. Instead, community organizations had to hire additional staff and produce their own outreach and informational material on COVID-19 to address those needs.

Invisibility vs Hypervisibility

As discussed in the report, the current U.S. Census classification of Arab Americans within the “white” racial category is reproduced throughout all national, state, and local institutions, rendering MENA Americans invisible in nearly all of the data collected by myriad government, state agencies, and private sector organizations. These data are often the key factor in determining how resources are to be distributed, what problems/patterns exist, and how agencies support and serve their citizens in accordance with their lived realities. This void includes information on, but not limited to health conditions and healthcare, nutrition, housing distribution, income, educational levels, violence, and poverty. When Arabs are categorized as white, their experiences are effectively disappeared, obscured by those of the substantially larger white population.

At the same time as the **needs** of Arab Americans are largely invisible, Arab American **people and communities** are hypervisible in ways that lead to criminalization and harm. This hypervisibility is, in many ways, another form of misrecognition or “mis-seeing” that involves not really seeing but rather involves projecting a wide array of stereotypical images and ideas onto people and communities. This hypervisibility includes persistent stereotypical representations in all forms of media (e.g., films, television, news, music, marketing/advertisements) that portray all Arabs and Muslims as the same and as coming from violent and backwards societies rooted in terrorism, sexism, and misogyny. Societies and cultures that are imagined to be fundamentally at odds with what U.S. media and government rhetoric portray as “American democracy and freedom.” Racial profiling and surveillance by police and security forces further hypervisibilize Arab Americans as a potential threat associated with terrorism.

This report clearly outlines the array of racist experiences of Arab Americans in K-12 schools and colleges, in their workspaces, in their homes, and as they navigate daily life that directly speaks to their hypervisibility. Ironically, even in this case, documenting the experiences of hypervisibility for Arab Americans is made more difficult by their invisibility in much existing administrative data.

We see one example of the pernicious effect of this potent mix of invisibility and hypervisibility at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC). The Arab American Cultural Center is in constant conversations with Arab American students about microaggressions and racist experiences they have had with professors, staff, and colleagues. While UIC promotes diversity and inclusion, unless a MENA category is recognized at all levels of the institution, the university has no way to collect data on such situations, understand how prevalent they are, or implement policies and programs to directly address them. Thus, Arab American students at UIC feel there are no official mechanisms to address their experiences. In addition to a lack of clarity about the racialized experiences of students on campus, students at UIC face the same issue of invisibility that all Arab American college students face on campuses where federal race categories have been adopted on college applications. In turn, postsecondary institutions are underestimating the diversity on their campuses and have no way to track the total enrollment, retention, academic success and graduation rates of Arab American students. Simultaneously hypervisible and invisible, these students tend to avoid challenging or reporting incidents of racism. As our findings reveal, the lack of existing structures for accounting for Arab American experiences and needs overall, and struggles with racial discrimination more specifically, leads people to either not know where or how to respond or to believe that responding will achieve little to no results.

Resources and distribution

In this report, we find clear documentation from American Community Survey (ACS) data that Arab American communities in the Chicagoland area have higher rates of poverty, lower median household incomes, a higher portion of renters, and a higher portion of residents experiencing housing-cost burdens than the Chicagoland average. While it is possible to mine the ACS data using the ancestry question,

results are based on a small sample of the population and therefore prone to underestimation. Moreover, given that these data must be extracted from the ACS by experts rather than from published, official U.S. Census reports on racial disparities, this hampers the ability of Arab American serving organizations to produce data and access resources dedicated to support minority or underserved communities and intended to decrease racial disparities. While data from the ACS demonstrates that Illinois is home to the fourth largest MENA population in the U.S. and that Chicagoland holds the fourth largest urban concentration of the MENA population, this group continues to experience disparities because of the lack of quantitative data available statewide.¹⁵⁹

The lack of an official MENA data category results in a data desert. The practical result of this lack of data is that organizations that work to address the challenges of Arab American communities are unable to apply for grants or other types of funding because of the lack of accurate data that funders require about the local population and their needs. The result is a deficit of crucial services needed by Arab American communities. Arab American Family Services, a local Chicagoland agency that provides various social services to a diverse range of clientele including Arab American immigrant communities, has advocated for the Illinois Department of Human Services to recognize the unique needs of Arab American communities for years. State agencies lack the ability to properly serve underrepresented groups when they do not have precise demographic data on the populations that seek their services.

Students on college campuses that participated in the focus group sessions organized by IRRPP and the testimonies gathered from students by researchers at the UIC Arab American Cultural Center testify to the dire conditions they face as they try to locate financial and other resources that could help them succeed in their academic careers. Many spoke of their disappointment and struggles as they were informed they are not eligible to apply for certain scholarships and internships because they are labeled as white. Previous research on the racial identity of Arab American college students in Chicagoland has demonstrated that, like community members overall, Arab American students do not believe “white” accurately represents their lived experiences as a marginalized, targeted population that continues to experience anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism on campus and in the community.¹⁶⁰ This research

documented that “higher education institutional personnel know very little about the Arab American student population on their campuses because detailed data are not usually collected on this population” because it is typically categorized as white. “However, despite the lack of data, there is no doubt that Arab American college students have become more active on college campuses and thus [are] increasing their visibility.”¹⁶¹ Another Chicagoland study found that Arab American students go unserved on college campuses due the absence of culturally competent mental health training.¹⁶² Institutions like UIC are setting an example by creating an Arab American Cultural Center, which provides a safe space on campus where Arab American students can share and celebrate their heritage. While creating a center like this is critically important, instituting a MENA category is also important for documenting the needs and experiences of Arab American students on campus and attending to and advocating for their needs.

What have Arab Americans done about it?

Arab American organizations have been mobilizing at least since the 1980s to request a separate MENA category on the U.S. Census. Arab Americans have seen that being classified as white and even at times being perceived as white (due to the closeness of some to whiteness phenotypically) has not stopped the impact on their lives of harassment, prejudice, discrimination, and structural racism that impacts their daily lives. Arab organizations believe it is important to create categories that better reflect their Arab American identities and lived realities. Collecting reliable data on the Arab American and MENA communities in the Chicagoland region and nationally would result in increased understanding about Arab Americans as well as in access to services and opportunities for the population.

In higher education in Illinois, staff, faculty, and students at Moraine Valley Community College worked for years to advocate for a MENA category on student applications. This organizing, along with the drop in student enrollment during the pandemic experienced by most higher education institutions across the country, led college leadership at Moraine Valley Community College to recognize the importance of more detailed, reliable, and updated student demographic information; they added

a MENA category in the spring of 2021. At UIC, the Arab American Cultural Center organized a MENA campaign beginning in 2019 with students sharing testimonies about the essential need for this category to their experiences and success in their higher education.¹⁶³ Several student groups at other universities and colleges have also advocated in different ways for a MENA category; for example, St. Xavier University recently implemented this change, and a group of community advocates and educators continue to collaboratively advocate for the state to include a MENA category in postsecondary education data collection. Having these data is beneficial for the higher education system and for students who have long remained invisible in campus demographic reports. By adding this category, colleges and universities will begin to address the underestimates of diversity that are currently reflected in their demographic reports. In addition, adding this category aligns with diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives on college campuses and allows student service personnel with an opportunity to better serve Arab Americans on their campuses and accurately track the retention and recruitment of MENA students.

In Summary

Given the extensive data and findings presented in this report on Arab American experiences, which echoes findings from previous studies, we argue that a primary policy change for all institutions in Chicagoland, Illinois, and across the U.S. is to create and implement a MENA data category in all places where racial and ethnic data are tracked and especially in those domains where these data are used to determine access to resources. Gathering accurate data that can better inform our policies and resource distribution is essential to addressing the economic and racial disparities and inequalities of Arab Americans and other MENA groups in our state. A MENA category ensures that social institutions would not erase Arab American realities, needs, and experiences by classifying them as white and would provide crucial data for advocates, policy makers, and institutions to use in addressing the needs of Arab American communities. It also can provide administrative structures for understanding the extent of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism, including the pervasive verbal and physical violence, fear, repression, harassment, and intimidation many Arab Americans consistently face as they navigate their lives and the social institutions and public spaces that shape them.

This change should be implemented in all public institutions (educational, economic, health, legal, judicial, law enforcement, social and human services, employment agencies, etc.) and should be a requirement for all entities that receive state funding or governmental support in any form.

In June 2022, the White House announced the beginning of a formal review of Directive 15.¹⁶⁴ This directive sets the standards on racial and ethnic data-gathering. While this is a hopeful step in the right direction, states such as Illinois and other public institutions do not need to wait for the federal government to make much needed changes. The next Decennial U.S. Census is eight years away. States can already begin gathering data to inform their policies to help address the urgent needs of their constituencies. The report makes abundantly clear that the introduction of an MENA category should be used in all state funded public service sectors including all regional and local agencies. This effort would include transforming all application processes and databases to include this racial category and ensuring that the MENA racial category is present in all surveys and data gathering research projects conducted by any government agency.

Anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism and the lack of data on Arab American communities needed to address discrimination and to understand the various needs of Arab American communities impact Arab Americans' access to resources from education to health to employment. The lack of data also serves to hide the persistent racial stereotyping, surveillance, and violence these communities endure. Arab American communities are not a monolith and include communities who are at polar opposites of the socioeconomic spectrum; however, the negative impacts of systematic dehumanization are nonetheless experienced across these socioeconomic variations.

Documenting and understanding the myriad array of experiences of Arab American communities is a critical step in being able to address the diverse challenges faced by Arab Americans in the U.S. The lack of an understanding of the experiences, needs, and conditions of Arab American communities enables the persistence of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim violence, criminalization, political repression, and social marginalization and hinders Arab Americans' capacity to challenge this violence, the targeting, and the discrimination that contribute to racial inequities. Ultimately, hypervisibility, or pervasive anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism, coupled with invisibility, or the lack of a racial category, establishes conditions that lead many Arab Americans to lack a

sense of safety and belonging and be challenged in trying to access resources, challenge racism, and secure funding for their community-based organizations. It is time for local, state, and federal agencies as well as universities and all social organizations to adopt a MENA category and collect robust, disaggregated data on Arab American communities.

At the same time, adopting a MENA category is not enough. If we really want to see Arab Americans surviving and thriving across Chicagoland, we are going to need to do more than count them. We must also increase their access to relevant resources once they are counted. For example, funders and advocates should commit to resourcing Arab American organizations that have been unable to meet their constituents' needs. In addition to counting and resourcing local communities, Chicagoland should also increase its commitment to dismantling anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism, including what has become an erroneous commonplace idea across society: the idea that Arabs and Muslims are potential terrorist threats who deserve to be dehumanized, surveilled, and punished. This will mean confronting false narratives and stereotypes and also challenging the systems and policies that target Arab Americans. For example, Chicagoland should commit to (1) increasing knowledge and education about Arab Americans in schools, universities, and across society; (2) stopping institutionalized anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in places like schools and universities, the police force, workplaces, media, housing, and within social justice activist spaces where Arab Americans, especially Palestinians, face intimidation and the denial of their free speech rights; and (3) establishing structures to support Arab American survivors of targeting, harassment, intimidation, repression, and exclusion across all areas of society.

Ultimately, if we really want to affirm Arab American life and dignity, we are going to need to establish a MENA category to count Arab Americans; educate our society about Arab Americans; provide resources to Arab Americans communities and the organizations serving their urgent needs; commit to ending anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism; and institutionalize support systems that increase the sense of community and belonging for Arab Americans in Chicagoland.

APPENDIX: METHODOLOGY

When we set out to do this report, we recognized it would have to be collaborative and thus, from the beginning, we drew upon and were informed by longstanding collaborations between faculty and staff at the University of Illinois Chicago and the following Arab American groups in Chicagoland:

- The Arab American Action Network (AAAN)
- Arab American Family Services (AAFS)
- Middle East Immigrant and Refugee Alliance (MIRA)
- Syrian Community Network (SCN)
- SANAD Food Pantry
- A network of Yemeni Americans
- A network of Coptic Egyptian Americans
- Moraine Valley Community College's Arab American students and staff
- The Arab American Cultural Center at UIC

Our research prioritized working-class recent Arab migrants because they are the primary constituents of these organizations and are disproportionately impacted by the problem of racial injustice. They are also the most likely to be invisible in other datasets. We began our research by working with these groups to help us conduct a survey and organize focus group discussions with their Arab American constituents.

We conducted virtual and written surveys depending on the participants' accessibility needs.

We advertised our surveys through community-based channels such as organizational newsletters, email lists, and social media sites. In addition, our researchers and staff from the community-based organizations provided opportunities for individuals to complete surveys in person at the various organizations.

In addition to helping us conduct surveys, our community partners also helped us organize focus groups with the communities they served. The sessions were conducted via Zoom, given the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic. They were then recorded, translated (when necessary), and transcribed. Focus groups covered themes related to engagements with race and racism with a focus on the areas of employment, law enforcement, and education. We conducted 12 focus groups with the following community-based organizations and institutions during the Spring and Summer of 2021:

- Arab American Action Network
- Arab American Family Services (two separate focus groups)
- Family Empowerment Program within the Arab American Cultural Center
- Coptic Community Group
- Middle Eastern Immigrant and Refugee Alliance
- Moraine Valley Community College (two separate focus groups)
- University of Illinois Chicago (three separate focus groups)
- Yemeni Community Group

We used a mixed-methods research design that employed both surveys and focus groups. We conducted these simultaneously. We chose to distribute surveys to capture the experiences of a large number of Arab Americans (496 in total), especially those most ignored in the U.S. The benefit of a larger sample has its drawbacks which is why we chose to follow a prior study¹⁶⁵ and simultaneously conduct focus groups. Surveys are limited in their ability to capture the complex realities of racism. Also, we knew a large portion of our sample would be Arab Americans who tend to be in very precarious positions and who might be worried to be forthcoming in their answers. In comparing the results of the surveys and focus groups we identified some factors that render the survey data limited:

1. Before migration, while living in the Arab region, Arab migrants do not gain familiarity with the language of race/racism. While racism indeed exists in the Arab region, it operates differently than in the U.S., is not a primary category

of identity, and there are limited discussions and debates about racism in most Arab countries. As a result, we determined that it took holding in-depth conversations about race/racism before many of our participants had the capacity to respond to questions about this topic.

2. Arab Americans, especially working-class immigrants, tend to be hyper alert to the reality that they may be under government surveillance and could, at any moment, be targeted, criminalized, and/or deported through racial profiling. Avoiding filling out forms, signing one's name on documents, and keeping personal information private is a common pattern among Arab Americans. Many prefer to exist under the radar, to avoid speaking publicly about topics that might draw attention, and to save their critiques about racism and U.S. government policies behind closed doors. Over time, we realized our research participants tended to hesitate when answering questions about their experiences of racial discrimination. In the group setting of the focus groups however, with trusted community members and a more explicit assurance of confidentiality, participants tended to share more about their experiences.
3. Historically, Arab migrants come to the U.S. from cultures with long-standing oral traditions. As a result, we realized that research participants, especially recent immigrants, felt more comfortable speaking about their experiences than writing about them.

In addition to the surveys and focus groups, we also include quantitative data on Arab American experiences in the report. Unless otherwise noted, our socio-economic and demographic data comes from the U.S. Census American Community Survey (ACS) 2011-2015. The ACS is administered to a sample of some 3.5 million U.S. households yearly and collects a variety of socio-economic and demographic information. It is possible to study Arab Americans using the ACS' ancestry question. Due to the small population sizes and small sample sizes, the data is increasingly limited at smaller geographic scales. The 2011-2015 ACS was the most recent available data that allowed for a breakdown of ancestry groups in the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI metropolitan area. In our analysis, we included the U.S. Census classification of Arab Americans (both aggregated and disaggregated by ancestry group) as well as additional ancestry groups that we use as an expanded classification of Arab

Americans. Our expanded set of ancestry groups builds upon the Arab American Institutes' classification of Arab Americans, which includes the 22-member countries of the League of Arab States. According to the Arab American Institute, adjustments for undercounting would increase the count of Arab Americans, as of 2017, from 2.4 million (according to the U.S. Census estimates) to 3.7 million.¹⁶⁶

NUMBERS THAT COUNT

Arab Ancestry Codes Included in Our Data Analysis

Egyptian (402-403)
 Iraqi (417-418)
 Jordanian (421-422)
 Lebanese (425)
 Moroccan (406-407)
 Palestinian (465-467)
 Syrian (429-430)
 Arab/Arabic (495-499)
 Other Arab (400-401, 404-405, 408-415, 423-424, 426-428, 435-464, 468-481, 490-494)*
 Assyrian/Chaldean/Syriac (482-489)
 Somalian (568)
 Sudanese (576-581)

Detailed List of Ancestry Codes in the "Other Arab" Category

Algerian (400)	Bahraini (415)	Qatar (439)
Libyan (404)	Kuwaiti (423)	Kurdish (442)
Tunisian (408)	Saudi Arabian (427)	Kuria Muria Islander (444)
North African (411)	Yemeni (435)	South Yemeni (470)
Alhucemas (412)	Omani (436)	Aden (471)
Berber (413)	Muscat (437)	United Arab Emirates (480)
Rio de Oro (414)	Trucial Oman (438)	Middle Eastern (490)

In order to understand anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism, we used a qualitative methodological approach involving doing surveys and conducting focus groups and simultaneous mixed-method research design.¹⁶⁷ We conducted surveys with 496 Arab Americans between December 2020 and September 2021 in Chicagoland assessing

how different organizations meet the needs of Arab Americans, their experiences with stereotyping and prejudice (e.g., “How often are you asked uncomfortable questions about Arab Americans, Islam, and/or the Middle East by the following people or groups?”), experiences with discrimination (e.g., “How often have you experienced any of the following due to your race, ethnicity, and/or religion?”), and their level of concern over participating in a range of activities (e.g., expressing political and religious views or filling out forms at the doctor’s office). Following the findings by Diane Shammass that Arab Americans in their study underreported discrimination in surveys, we implemented focus groups in conjunction with the surveys to account for this possibility.¹⁶⁸ Our focus groups provided useful qualitative data in understanding why Arab Americans underreported discrimination in surveys that mirrored what Shammass found in her focus groups where, for example, one focus group member expressed that she would be “apprehensive about answering to questions about discrimination, because of what people might think of her as a first-generation Iraqi immigrant and her connection with the U.S.-Iraqi War.”¹⁶⁹

ENDNOTES

- 1 Jamal, Amaney A. and Nadine Naber. 2008. *Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11: from Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*. New York: Syracuse University Press; Naber, Nadine. 2008. "Look, Mohammed the Terrorist Is Coming! Cultural Racism, Nation-Based Racism, and the Intersectionality of Oppressions after 9/11." *S&F Online*, Summer 2008. (https://sfonline.barnard.edu/immigration/naber_01.htm) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 2 While frameworks for addressing anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism exist, they are largely confined to a relatively small circle of researchers, teachers, and grassroots community advocates. However, the problem of the invisibility of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism is compounded by the work of a highly funded and organized anti-Arab/anti-Muslim political movement describing themselves as "civil rights organizations," and legitimized by the mainstream news media, which suppresses and silences teaching and discussion about anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism and Arab Americans. In the most recent attack on Arab American Studies curriculum in K-12 schools in January 2020 in California, the State Board of Education sided with this right-wing racist movement despite the massive efforts of a people of color led "Save Arab American Studies" solidarity movement. For more on this see <https://savearabamericanstudies.org/>; see also Naber, Nadine. 2000. "Ambiguous insiders: an investigation of Arab American invisibility." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23(1): 37-61.
- 3 Alsultany, Evelyn. 2012. *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11*. New York: NYU Press.
- 4 Lean, Nathan. 2012. *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims*. London: Pluto Press.
- 5 Cainkar, Louise. 2006. "Immigrants from the Arab World." *The New Chicago*. Edited by John Koval, Michael Bennett, et al. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Pp. 182-196.
- 6 Throughout the report, we use pseudonyms to refer to focus group participants. Protecting their anonymity is not only a best practice in focus-group based research, but it is also necessary when reporting about people who share a deep-seated, highly legitimate fear of retaliation for reporting instances of discrimination from employers and colleagues, at educational institutions and in healthcare settings, or from police.
- 7 Naff, Alixa, 1985. *The Early Arab Immigrant Experience*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press; Suleiman, Michael. 1999. "Introduction: The Arab Immigrant Experience." *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Pp. 1-21.; Shakir, Evelyn, 1997. *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States*. Westport Conn.; Praeger; Aswad, Barbara, 1974. *Arabic Speaking Communities in American Cities*. Staten Island: Center for Migration Studies of New York; Elkholy, Abdo. 1969. "The Arab Americans: Nationalism and Traditional Preservations." *The Arab Americans: Studies in Assimilation*. AAUG Monograph Series 1, Edited by Elaine C. Hagopian and Ann Paden. Pp. 3-17.; Albrecht, Charlotte Karem. 2022. "Narrating Arab American History: The Peddling Thesis." *Sajjilu Arab American: A Reader in SWANA Studies*. Edited by Cainkar et al. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press. Pp. 136-144.
- 8 B. Johnson, Ashley. Unpublished Manuscript, "The Unauthorized Mahjar: Syrian Muslim Migrations Between Mexico and the Midwest in the Twentieth Century."

- 9 Abraham, Nabeel. 2014. "Arab Americans." *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*. Edited by Thomas Riggs. 3(1): 125-140. Detroit, MI: Gale.
- 10 For example, migrants came from Lebanon fleeing the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) and the Israeli invasion of Lebanon (1982); Iraqis fled the Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988); and migrants from oil-rich states including Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Oman left due to declining economies as a result of U.S.-led oil wars. By the 1990's, Arab migration included more Iraqis who migrated because of the growing U.S.-led war, including the mass displacement of Christian Iraqi Chaldeans; more and more Egyptians as an outcome of the growing gap between rich and poor fostered by U.S.-led privatization in Egypt; and more and more displaced Palestinians. For more information about migration patterns for Iraqis, Egyptians, and Palestinians as well as groups from other Arab nations, see their entries in the 2014, *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America* 3(2). Edited by Thomas Riggs, Detroit, MI: Gale.
- 11 2016 included the largest number of Syrian refugees (12,587) admitted to the U.S. to date. See Kallick, David D., Cyierra Roldan, and Silva Mathema. 2016. *Syrian Immigrants in the United States: A Receiving Community for Today's Refugees*. Washington D.C.: Center for American Progress. December 13, 2016. (<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/syrian-immigrantmigrants-in-the-united-states-a-receiving-community-for-todays-refugees/>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- The 2000 U.S. Census counted almost 20,000 Sudanese Americans, and the population increased to an estimated 35,000 by 2005. Three-fourths of the Sudanese counted in the 2000 U.S. Census arrived in the United States after 1990. For more, see the following: Powell, John. 2016. *Encyclopedia of North American Immigration, Revised Edition*. New York: Facts on File; and Gall, Timothy L. and Jeneen Hobby, eds. 2009. "Sudanese Americans." *Worldmark Encyclopedia of Cultures and Daily Life* 2(2): 495-497.
- Estimates for the Somali population from the United Nations indicate that the total number living in the U.S. was around 2,500 in 1990 but had grown to between 140,000 and 150,000 by 2015. In all, the U.S. is home to about 7% of the world's Somali migrant population. Between fiscal years 2001 and 2015, the U.S. admitted more than 90,000 refugees from Somalia, according to the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement. This refugee flow continues today, with nearly 9,000 refugees from Somalia entering the U.S. in the 2015 fiscal year. See Connor, Phillip and Jens Manuel Krogstad. 2016. "5 facts about the global Somali diaspora." Pew Research Center. (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/06/01/5-facts-about-the-global-somali-diaspora>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 12 The U.S. Census shows that the number of Moroccans in the United States almost doubled in the decade between 2000 and 2010, from roughly 38,000 to 75,000. See Shostak, Elizabeth. 2014. "Moroccan Americans." *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*. Edited by Thomas Riggs. 3(3): 245-258. Detroit, MI: Gale.
- 13 Natter, Katharina. 2015. *Revolution and Political Transition in Tunisia: A Migration Game Changer?* Washington, DC: Migration Policy Institute. (<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/revolution-and-political-transition-tunisia-migration-game-changer>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 14 Norris, Sonya Schryer. 2014. "Saudi Arabian Americans." *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*. Edited by Thomas Riggs. 3(4): 75-85. Detroit, MI: Gale.
- 15 Saudi Arabians' interest in studying in the United States declined somewhat, however, when universities in Saudi Arabia that had begun operating in the 1960s became more established. In 1984 approximately 10,000 Saudis were studying outside of Saudi Arabia. By 1992 this figure had dropped to 5,000, with half of these studying at universities in the United States.

- 16 Norris, Sonya Schryer. 2014. "Saudi Arabian Americans." *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*. Edited by Thomas Riggs. 3(4): 75-85. Detroit, MI: Gale.
- 17 Khouri, Rami G. 2019. "How Poverty and Inequality are Devastating the Middle East." *Carnegie Reporter*, September 12, 2019. (<https://www.carnegie.org/our-work/article/why-mass-poverty-so-dangerous-middle-east/>). The growing economic devastation in the region has a number of origins including growing privatization and the increased economic disparities that sparked the Arab Spring revolutions for "bread, dignity, and justice" across the region in 2011, coupled with the interconnected realities of the U.S. war on Iraq, U.S.-backed authoritarianism in countries such as Egypt, civil wars in countries such as Syria and Yemen, and the intensified Israeli colonization of Palestine.
- 18 Naber, Nadine. 2008. "Introduction." *Race and Arab Americans before and after 9/11: from Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*. Edited by Amaney A. Jamal, and Nadine Naber. Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press. Pp. 1-45.
- 19 Majaj, Lisa Suhair. 2000. "Arab Americans and the Meaning of Race." *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature*. Edited by Amrijit Singh and Peter Schmidt. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. Pp. 320-337.
- 20 Samhan, Helen. 1999. "Not Quite White: Race Classification and the Arab-American Experience." *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*. Philadelphia: Building a New Future. Pp. 216-226.
- 21 Quoted in Conklin, Nancy Faires and Nora Helen Faires. 1987. "Colored and Catholic: the Lebanese in Birmingham, Alabama." *Crossing the waters: Arabic-speaking migrants to the United States before 1940: 69-84*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press. Pp. 75.
- 22 Samhan, Helen. 1999. "Not Quite White: Race Classification and the Arab-American Experience." *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*. Philadelphia: Building a New Future. Pp. 216-226.
- 23 Ibid., 217.
- 24 For more on the implications and history of the changing status of Arab Americans in relation to whiteness, see Gualtieri, Sarah. 2009. *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora*. Berkeley: University of California Press. For more on the history of Arab American assimilation, see Suleiman, Michael. 1999. "Introduction: The Arab Immigrant Experience." *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Pp. 1-21.
- 25 Suleiman, Michael. 1999. "Introduction: The Arab Immigrant Experience." *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Pp. 1-21.
- 26 This section draws upon the crucial work of Louise Cainkar, leading scholar of Arab Americans in Chicago. See: Cainkar, Louise. 2006. "Migrants from the Arab World." *The New Chicago: A Social and Cultural Analysis*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Pp. 182-196.; Cainkar, Louise. 2009. *Homeland insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American experience after 9/11*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- 27 MSAs are areas "containing a large population nucleus and adjacent communities that have a high degree of integration with that nucleus." Office of Management and Budget. 2010. "2010 standards for delineating metropolitan and micropolitan statistical areas." *Federal Register* 75(123): 37,246.
- 28 The Arab American population in towns and cities beyond Cook County saw a growth of over 27 thousand. DuPage County (west of Cook County) and Will County (south and southwest of Cook) saw the largest increases in the Arab American population.

- 29 For a U.S. Census Bureau analysis of the race/ethnicity question, see Mathews, Kelly, Jessica Phelan, Nicholas A. Jones, Sarah Konya, Rachel Marks, Beverly M. Pratt, Julia Coombs, and Michael Bentley. 2017. *2015 National Content Test Race and Ethnicity Analysis Report*. Washington D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau. As they note, "When no MENA category was available, Egyptians, Iraqis, Jordanians, Libyans, Palestinians, Saudi Arabians, and Yemenis most frequently reported their detailed origins in the White category. When a distinct MENA category was included, over 90 percent of people reporting in each of these groups reported their detailed origins in the MENA category and reporting in the White category was reduced to 10 percent or less for each of these groups." Pp. 65-66
- 30 In the 2000s, Other Arab Americans comprised 30% of the Arab American population growth and Palestinians comprised 15% of the population growth. In the 2010s this increased to 35% and 28%, respectively.
- 31 In Chicago, 55% of Arab Americans are foreign-born, however, as indicated above, the Cook County suburbs of Chicago and beyond are increasingly becoming home to foreign-born Arab Americans. Between 2000 and 2020, the foreign-born Arab American population grew by 74% percent in the Cook County suburbs (from over 25 thousand to over 37 thousand) and by 48% in the towns and cities beyond Cook County (or about 16 thousand to over 23 thousand). In Chicago, the foreign-born Arab American population grew from about 12 thousand to about 15 thousand, a growth rate of 17%.
- 32 "Our Mission." Mirachicago.com. (<https://www.mirachicago.org/about/>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 33 See Shamsuddin, Shomon, and Colin Campbell. 2021. "Housing Cost Burden, Material Hardship, and Well-Being." *Housing Policy Debate*. 32(3): 413-432. (DOI: [10.1080/10511482.2021.1882532](https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2021.1882532))
- 34 Suleiman, Michael. 1999. "Introduction: The Arab Immigrant Experience." *Arabs in America: Building a New Future*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Pp. 1-21.
- 35 UNHCR. 2022. "Syria refugee crisis explained. How to Help Refugees - Aid, Relief and Donations." July 8, 2022. (<https://www.unrefugees.org/news/syria-refugee-crisis-explained/>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 36 Saad, Lydia. 2022. "Americans widely favor welcoming Ukrainian refugees." Gallup.com. October 25, 2022. (<https://news.gallup.com/poll/392069/americans-widely-favor-welcoming-ukrainian-refugees.aspx>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 37 Boccacino, John. 2022. "Ukrainian refugee crisis highlights global differences in responding to humanitarian crises." Syracuse University News. April 6, 2022. (<https://news.syr.edu/blog/2022/04/06/ukrainian-refugee-crisis-highlights-global-differences-in-responding-to-humanitarian-crises/>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 38 Lawrence, Q. 2022. "U.S. is accused of a double standard when it comes to Afghan and Ukrainian refugees." NPR. July 6, 2022. (<https://www.npr.org/2022/07/06/1109965531/u-s-is-accused-of-a-double-standard-when-it-comes-to-afghan-and-ukrainian-refugee>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 39 For additional information, see IRRPP's recent report: Decoteau, Claire Laurier, Cal Lee Garrett, Cindy Brito, Fructoso M. Basaldua Jr., and Iván Arenas. 2022. *Deadly Disparities in the time of COVID-19: How Public Policy Fails Black and Latinx Chicagoans*. (<https://irrpp.uic.edu/state-of-racial-justice/reports/#deadly-disparities-in-the-time-of-covid-19-how-public-policy-fails-black-and-latinx-chicagoans>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022)
- 40 This has been generally shown to be true, for example, in Michigan, where Arab Americans are counted in health data.
- 41 Between 2000 and 2020, Arab American households in the top 20% saw median household income grow by 5% whereas those in the bottom 20% saw their income decline by 9%.

- 42 Rana, Junaid. 2007 "The Story of Islamophobia." *Souls: Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society* 9(4): 148-161.
- 43 Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon books.
- 44 McAlister, Melani. 2005. *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East Since 1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- 45 Especially after the 1970s, the US Government "officially" labeled Arabs and Middle Easterners as white (with Directive 15 which created the current U.S. Census categories).
- 46 "Special Report: RAWI (Radius of Arab-American Whiteness) Provides Creative Matrix for Writers Across America." *Washington Report on Middle Eastern Affairs* (Jan. - Feb.): 34-35.
- 47 American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. *Congressional Hearings on Anti-Arab/anti-Muslim Violence - A Milestone for Arab-American Rights*. 1986. (<https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/congressional-hearings-anti-Arab/anti-Muslim-violence-milestone-arab-american>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 48 Akram, Susan M. 2002. "The Aftermath of September 11, 2001: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslims in America." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 24(2/3): 61-118.
- 49 There are countless examples of the interrelated character of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism in the U.S. and U.S. policy towards the Middle East abroad but a few examples are the murder of the Regional Director of the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, Alex Odeh, in Santa Ana, California in 1985 alongside the U.S.' increased support for Israeli colonization on Palestinian land and expansion in the Arab region (i.e., Israel's 20 year occupation of southern Lebanon); the targeting of Arab American homes in 1986 when the U.S. bombed Libya; and how anti-Arab/anti-Muslim racism increased by nearly 800 percent during the Arabian Gulf crisis of the 1990's. The bombers who committed the murder have yet to be brought to justice, although the FBI has indicated that identified suspects are members of a Jewish terrorist organization currently living in Israel.
- 50 Goodstein, Laurie and Marylou Tousignant. 1995. "Muslims' Burden of Blame Lifts." *Washington Post*. April 22, 1995. (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1995/04/22/muslims-burden-of-blame-lifts/29d45b49-c106-46d5-bd82-94eed4adc538/>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 51 American Civil Liberties Union. 2012. *Support the Secret Evidence Repeal Act*. (<https://www.aclu.org/other/support-secret-evidence-repeal-act>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022). According to the ACLU: "The 1996 Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act established a new court charged only with hearing cases in which the government seeks to deport aliens accused of engaging in terrorist activity based on secret evidence submitted in the form of classified information. The 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act expanded the secret evidence court so that secret evidence could be more easily used to deport even lawful permanent residents as terrorists."
- 52 Smothers, Ronald. 1998. "Secret Evidence Jeopardizes Some Immigrant." *New York Times*. August 14, 1998. (<https://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/fl-xpm-1998-08-15-9808140674-story.html>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 53 Justice for Muslims Collective, HEART Women & Girls, Vigilant Love, the Partnership to End Gendered Islamophobia, Project South, the Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans (PANA), US Campaign for Palestinian Rights (USCPR). *Abolishing the War on Terror & Building Communities of Care: A Grassroots Policy Agenda for the Biden-Harris Administration and 117th Congress*. February 2021. (<https://www.justiceformuslims.org/grassroots-policy-agenda>)

- 54 In November 2001, the Department of State limited the process for granting visas to men between the ages of 16-45 from certain Arab and Muslim countries. Afterwards, when the Immigration and Naturalization Services enacted mass arrests of non-immigrant students, the only students arrested were those from countries associated with "terrorism," including Iran, Syria, Pakistan, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Yemen; see Akram, Susan M. 2002. "The Aftermath of September 11, 2001: The Targeting of Arabs and Muslims in America." *Arab Studies Quarterly* 24(2/3): 61-118.
- 55 Rights Working Group (RWG), Center for Immigrant's Rights, Pennsylvania State University's Dickinson School of Law. *The NSEERS Effect: A Decade of Racial Profiling, Fear, and Secrecy*. May 2019. (https://pennstatelaw.psu.edu/file/clinics/NSEERS_report.pdf) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 56 See Iyer, Deepa and Jayesh M. Rathod. 2011. *9/11 and the Transformation of U.S. Immigration Law and Policy*. Chicago: American Bar Association. (https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/human_rights_vol38_2011/human_rights_winter2011/9-11_transformation_of_us_immigration_law_policy/) (Accessed on December 12, 2022); Arulanantham, Ahilan T. 2005. *ACLU Testimony on Material Support For Terrorism Laws: Section 805 of the Patriot Act and Section 6603 of the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention act of 2004 Before the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security*. New York, NY: American Civil Liberties Union. May 10, 2005. (<https://www.aclu.org/other/aclu-testimony-material-support-terrorism-laws-section-805-patriot-act-and-section-6603>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022); Khalidi, Dima. 2021. "If Biden Wants to Turn the Page from Trump, He Should Support Palestinian Freedom. Here are 2 Immediate Steps." *In These Times*. January 6, 2021. (<https://inthesetimes.com/article/palestine-israel-bds-biden-trump-occupation-apartheid>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 57 This memo instructed that 6,000 "young Arab men" from "Al Qaeda harboring countries" would be the first to be targeted for sudden detention and deportation without due process of law, who had "ostensibly" ignored deportation orders (out of 314,000 individuals INS has identified who are violating deportation orders). See Nguyen, Nicole. 2019. *Suspect Communities: Anti-Muslim Racism and the Domestic War on Terror*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press and Cainkar, Louise. 2006. "Migrants from the Arab World." *The New Chicago: A Social and Cultural Analysis*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. Pp. 182-196. Affirming the global context of these racist policies, we might recall that while the U.S. was deporting people to countries like Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Jordan under the guise of the "war on terrorism," the U.S. was simultaneously working with the Central Intelligence Agency to torture individuals through the Extraordinary Rendition program in these very countries; see Suleiman, Michael W., Suad Joseph, and Louise Cainkar. 2021. *Arab American Women: Representation and Refusal*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- 58 The Domestic Security Enhancement Act allowed the government to withhold information about the identity of individuals detained in connection with terrorism until criminal charges are filed, gave the government greater authority to secretly spy on and search private property, and denied migrants of their right to a deportation hearing. This Act allowed the Attorney General to deport migrants without any evidence or hearing if the Attorney General claimed that doing so would threaten domestic security. Moreover, while it rendered membership to a so-called "terrorist" group a crime, it used an arbitrary method for defining "terrorist organizations." Given the prevalence of anti-Arab/anti-Muslim legislative policies and cultural stereotypes, it should come as no surprise that the majority of organizations listed as "terrorist" are Arab or Muslim. These policies expanded the possibilities for criminalizing Arabs and Muslims without evidence of criminal activity.

- 59 Nguyen, Nicole. 2019. *Suspect Communities: Anti-Muslim Racism and the Domestic War on Terror*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- 60 Deutsch, Michael E. 1984. "Improper Use of the Federal Grand Jury: An Instrument for the Internment of Political Activists." *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 75(4): 1159-1196. Pp. 1159.
- 61 Kumar, Deepa. 2021. *Islamophobia as Empire*. New York, Verso. Pp. 139.
- 62 Cainkar, Louise. 2009. *Homeland Insecurity: The Arab American and Muslim American Experience After 9/11*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- 63 Cainkar, Louise. 2002. "No Longer Invisible: Arab and Muslim Exclusion After September 11." *Middle East Report* 32: 224; see also Cainkar, Louise. 2005. "Violence Unveiled." *Contexts* 4(4): 67.
- 64 Naber, Nadine. "Including Arab Americans in the Biden Administration is not Enough. *Jadaliyya*. March 25, 2021. (<https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/42543/Including-Arab-Americans-in-the-Biden-Administration-is-not-Enough>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 65 Nguyen, Nicole. 2019. *Suspect Communities: Anti-Muslim Racism and the Domestic War on Terror*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- 66 Boundaoui, Assia. 2018. *The Feeling of Being Watched*. US: Women Make Movies. (<http://www.feelingofbeingwatched.com/about>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 67 Goudie, Chuck, Ross Weidner, Barb Markoff, and Christine Tressel. 2017. "DOJ Releases Scathing Report on Chicago Police Department." *ABC 7*. January 14, 2017. (<https://abc7chicago.com/justice-department-chicago-police-civil-rights-investigation-cpd-violations/1700689/>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 68 Masterson, Matt. 2020. "Chicago Police Union President Could Be Fired Over Social Media Posts." *WTTW*. December 18, 2020. (<https://news.wttw.com/2020/12/18/chicago-police-union-president-could-be-fired-over-social-media-posts>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 69 Khalidi Dima. 2014. "Odeh's guilty verdict doesn't mean her battle for justice is over." *The Hill*. November 14, 2014. (<https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/judicial/224077-odehs-guilty-verdict-doesnt-mean-her-battle-for-justice-is-over/>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 70 For more on SARs, see: <https://www.dhs.gov/nationwide-sar-initiative-nsi/about-nsi> (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
- 71 Arab American Action Network (AAAN), The Policing in Chicago Research Group at the University of Illinois Chicago. 2022. *Campaign to End Racial Profiling (CERP) Report: Suspicious Activity Reports and the Surveillance State. The Suppression of Dissent and the Criminalization of Arabs and Muslims in Illinois*. May 2022. (<https://www.aclu.org/other/aclu-testimony-material-support-terrorism-laws-section-805-patriot-act-and-section-6603>) (Accessed on December 12, 2022).
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