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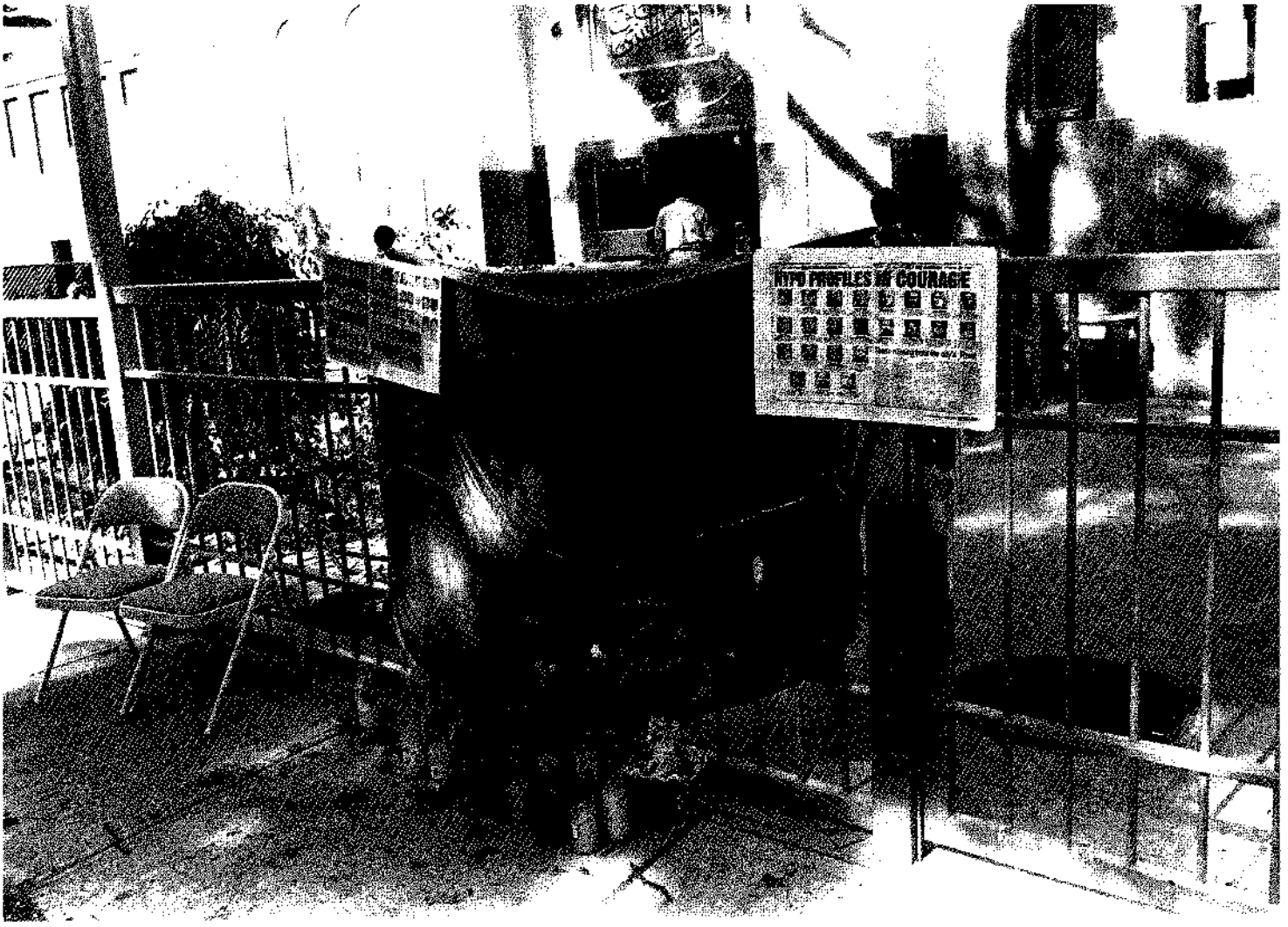

Memorial display outside a New York mosque. EDWARD GRAZDA/POWERHOUSE BOOKS

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Arab and Muslim Exclusion After September 11

Louise Cainkar

Unlike other ascribed and self-described "people of color" in the United States, Arabs are often hidden under the Caucasian label, if not forgotten altogether. But eleven months after September 11, 2001, the Arab-American is no longer invisible. Whether traveling, driving, working, walking through a neighborhood or sitting in their homes, Arabs in America—citizens and non-citizens—are now subject to special scrutiny in American society. The violence, discrimination, defamation and intolerance now faced by Arabs in American society has reached a level unparalleled in their over 100-year history in the US.

In the seven days following September 11, Arabs and South Asians reported 645 "bias incidents and hate crimes."[1] According to the Council on American Islamic Relations, the post-September 11 anti-Muslim backlash has been characterized by a higher degree of violence than in prior years, and includes a number of murders.[2] In Chicago, more than 100 hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims, as well as persons mistaken for them, were reported to the Chicago Commission on Human Relations by the end of December 2001. On September 12, the largest

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predominantly Arab mosque in the Chicago metropolitan area was surrounded by a mob of hundreds of angry whites, some shouting "kill the Arabs," some wielding weapons. Local police and concerned citizens acted to protect Muslims in the area. Suburban police encouraged Muslims to close the schools affiliated with the mosque until their safety could be assured, and not to attend Friday prayers at the mosque. The schools were closed for one week, but prayer at the mosque continued. An Assyrian church on the north side and an Arab community organization on the southwest side were damaged by arson in the late fall. The rebuilt community center was again vandalized in March 2002. In the months immediately following September, Muslim women in Chicago repeatedly reported having their head scarves yanked off or being spit at on the street. Although the level of hate crimes and attacks against Arabs, Muslims and those perceived to be Arab or Muslim has sharply decreased since the fall, vigilant media monitoring reveals that there is still at least one reported hate crime or attack each week nationwide. Arab and Muslim concerns about profiling, intolerance and the long-term effects of discrimination are increasing.[3] Some blame the US government and its sweeping and unfocused actions in their communities for encouraging anti-Arab and anti-Muslim sentiments.[4]

Indeed, the greatest source of discrimination against Arabs and Muslims in the US today is the US government, mostly the Department of Justice and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). According to a Council on American-Islamic Relations report released in April, more than 60,000 individuals have been affected by government actions of discrimination, interrogation, raids, arrests, detentions and institutional closures. Secrecy, due process violations, arbitrariness, unlawfulness and abuse of power are among the terms used to describe the Bush administration's post-September 11 activities by, among others, Human Rights Watch, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Reporters' Committee for Freedom of the Press and the US Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court.[5]

"Watchful Potential Warriors"

Public opinion polls continue to show widespread support for special treatment of Arabs in America. A poll conducted September 14 and 15 found respondents evenly divided over whether all Arabs in the US, including American citizens, should be required to carry special identity cards.[6] Two late September Gallup polls found that a majority of Americans favored profiling of Arabs, including those who are American citizens, and subjecting them to special security checks before boarding planes.[7] A December 2001 poll by the Institute for Public Affairs at the University of Illinois found that some 70 percent of Illinois residents were willing to sacrifice their civil rights to fight terrorism, and more than one quarter of respondents said Arab-Americans should surrender more rights than others.[8] A March 5, 2002 CNN/Gallup/*USA Today* poll found that nearly 60 percent of Americans favored reducing the number of admissions to the US of immigrants from Muslim countries and an August 8, 2002 Gallup poll found that a majority of the American public said that there are "too many" immigrants from Arab countries.[9] Possibly to push for deeper restrictions in US immigration policy, the anti-immigrant Center for Immigration Studies issued a report in August 2002 whose most prominent finding was that "Middle Easterners are one of the fastest-growing immigrant groups in America." The report added: "By 2000, an estimated 73 percent of all Middle Eastern immigrants were Muslim."[10] One should note that the Center purposely defines the Middle East quite broadly, sweeping through Islamic countries in Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, including Turkey but excluding non-Muslim-majority countries between it and Bangladesh. About 40 percent of their Middle Easterners are Arabs.

Though not all Arabs in the US are Muslims (some 1.5 million are Christian), the categories are often fused in the media, quite often in a manner that openly advocates the *de facto* criminalization of both overlapping groups. Statements that collapse distinctions between Arabs, Muslims and Islamists—and call for regarding all three as innately suspicious—are no longer the exclusive preserve of right-wing commentators like Daniel Pipes, but have moved into the mainstream of conservative and even moderate opinion. A *Wall Street Journal* piece entitled "Under the Circumstances, We Must Be Wary of Young Arab Men" appeared on October 19, 2001. In her column, former Reagan speechwriter Peggy Noonan said:

> In the past month I have evolved ... to watchful potential warrior. And I gather that is going on with pretty much everyone else, and I'm glad of it. I was relieved at the story of the plane passengers a few weeks ago who refused to board if some Mideastern-looking guys were allowed to board.

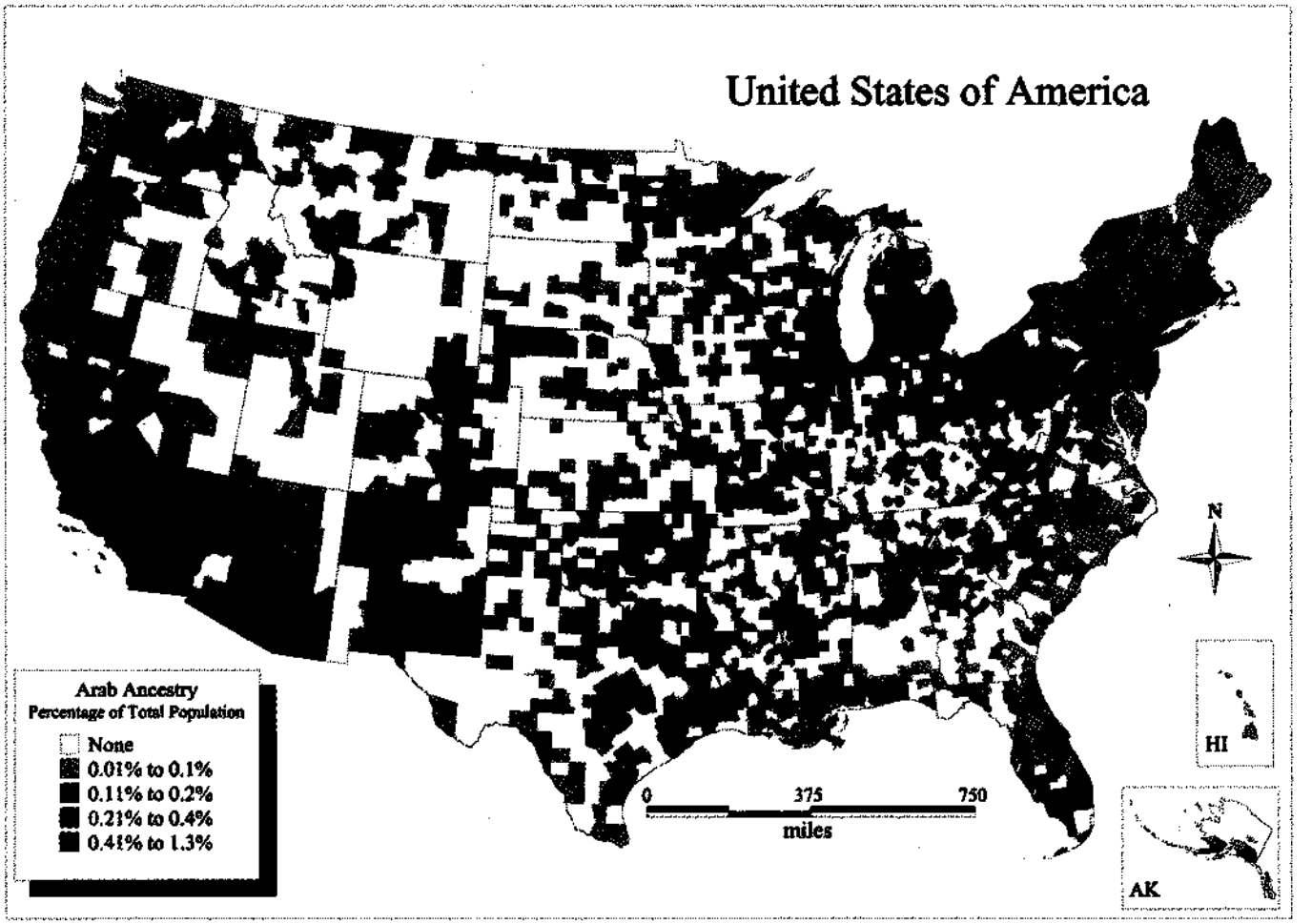
Noonan's "watchful potential warrior" has provided the FBI with thousands of tips about suspicious-acting Arabs that have proved baseless, nonetheless subjecting Arab families to intrusive home and work visits by government agents. The special handling of Arabs at airports simply because of their names or looks reveals just how widely and unguidedly the net in the terrorist search is being cast.

Islam has come under vehement attack. Critics of the National Education Association's "September 11 Remembered" website, featuring lesson plans for teachers, say the topics covered "miss the mark." Schoolchildren should be warned that the root of the problem is in Islamic teaching, according to William Lind, terrorism expert and conservative spokesperson. Right-wing Christian activists in North Carolina have filed a lawsuit to bar the University of North Carolina from assigning an interpretive work on the Quran by an American scholar to entering freshmen. A recently released booklet authored by evangelists Franklin Graham and Jerry Vines, entitled *Why Islam is a Threat to America and the West*, argues that Muslims "should be encouraged to leave. They are a fifth column in this country."[11]

History of Exclusion

Many Arab-Americans view the post-September 11 scrutiny, denigration and harassment of Arabs living in and seeking to enter the US as something not altogether new. Over the past 35 years, a series of US government actions taken against Arab communities, particularly against leaders and activists, has aimed to stifle the Arab voice in American civil society. For years after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the FBI spied on Arab-Americans and their organizations as part of Operation Boulder. Families, friends, neighbors and employers of Arab individuals were interviewed by FBI agents; profiles of community activists were developed. The intimidation resulting from these efforts discouraged Arab-Americans from participating in lawful, organized community-building activities just when the media began its steady anti-Arab pitch. In 1987, seven Palestinian activists and a Kenyan—the famous Los Angeles Eight—were arrested on charges of being "alien terrorists" in the service of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. (After repeated failed attempts to win this case, the US government is now seeking to retry it—and deport the eight—under the provisions of the USA PATRIOT Act, which shift the burden of proof onto the defendant.) The same year, the *Los Angeles Times* uncovered an INS-FBI Contingency Plan to detain Arabs in America *en masse* in a camp in Oakdale, Louisiana. In the 1990s, Muslim activists in Chicago were arrested and had their assets seized despite the absence of criminal charges. Other actions have included repeated INS attempts to deport Palestinian activists who were naturalized US citizens, consecutive pieces of anti-terrorism legislation that replaced anti-communist laws with laws that mainly targeted Arabs and the exclusion of Arabs from political campaigns, including the intentional return of Arab-American campaign donations. These actions have been perceived by most Arab-Americans as ways to ensure that they are politically voiceless in the US.[12] In the view of Arab immigrants and their American-born children, over the past 35 years they have not been accorded the constitutional right to freedom of speech on the same scale as others.

Research conducted in Chicago's Arab communities in the 1980s and 1990s[13] revealed an even broader exclusion of Arabs from American civil society, including community-based organizations, boards of directors, foundations and local political campaigns. Participation was awarded to those few Arabs who were light-skinned, and agreed to downplay their Arabness and keep quiet about US foreign policy in the Middle East. In the mid-1990s, this local exclusion was beginning to change for the better.[14] Still, throughout the 1990s, Arab Christians and Muslims, low-income and middle-class, immigrant and American-born, shared the view that the Arab voice is largely not welcomed in American society. In Chicago, even highly educated Arab men and women explained their preference for working in small business partly as a



US BUREAU OF THE CENSUS, 1990 BRENT ALLISON/UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

measure to protect themselves from the pain of interacting with Anglo-Americans.

Negative media portrayals of Arabs and Muslims are not new either. In two books examining the portrayals of Arabs in American media, communications professor Jack Shaheen documents an extensive history of negative stereotypes of Arabs.[15] He concludes that from the late 1960s into the new century, Arabs and Muslims were the only group for whom it was socially acceptable to attach negative stereotypes on television and in the movies. Long-standing, organized Arab-American protests against these images, including meetings with Hollywood producers and network executives, have largely fallen on deaf ears—yet another sign of the exclusion of Arabs from the norms of American civil society.

Impact on Identity

As a result of exclusion and denigration in American society, the normative pattern among Arab immigrants arriving in the last 40 years and their American-born children was to develop a range of transnational identities. Global political movements affected the particulars of this identity, so that during the era that pan-Arabism was strong in the Arab world, many in the immigrant community preferred an Arab identity. They were Arabs in America. During strong nationalist periods, national identities were highlighted, so they were Palestinians in America or Jordanians in America. Many of the American-born children of these immigrants shunned a hyphenated identity, while they waited for a society more willing to incorporate them as full members of the American mosaic. Arabs who immigrated around the turn of the twentieth century, and their children, were incorporated more smoothly into American society. It helped that they were largely Christian and were considered white. Also, at the time, US government involvement in the Arab world was limited.

Not all recent Arab immigrants and second-generation Arabs responded to the inhospitable American social context in this way. Some preferred to mask their Arab identity by changing their names from Muhammad to Mike and Farouq to Fred and by organizing their social relations around non-Arabs.[16] Arab women were far less likely respond in this way, for reasons described in great detail elsewhere.[17] Some were able to blend well their American and Arab sides and comfortably viewed themselves as Arab-American. This type of self-identification was usually found among college-educated members of the second generation, but it became conflict-ridden during

Iraqi Chaldeans at cultural club, Detroit. JOAN MANDELL

domestic or international crises involving Arabs. Younger Arab-Americans asked themselves: "How can I be American when that means supporting the killing of my people, justified by denigrating my ethnic identity?" The exclusion of Arabs from American civil society and government meant that the answer to this painful question was sought in transnational affiliations, rather than the affiliations sought by minorities able to participate in a democracy.

During the 1990s, a major shift in identification, affiliation and behavior occurred among a significant proportion of Arab Muslims in Chicago, one that is mirrored nationwide. Their primary affiliation changed from secular to religious. They began to identify as Muslims first, and Arabs, Palestinians or Jordanians second. Mosques and religious institutions replaced secular community centers as locales for community social life, organizing and education. Secular Arab student organizations dwindled while Muslim student organizations thrived. Muslim women who in the 1980s did not cover their hair began to do so. Islam became more than a private way of life; it became a public, active way of being.

These changes in identity and spirituality firmly locate the Arab community in the US as part of a global community. Their Islamicization was part of a global pattern, evident from Indonesia to Iran, Egypt to Morocco, France to Chicago. It is explained by scholars as an outcome of the failure of secular political movements—nationalism, socialism or pan-Arabism—to improve the basic living conditions of people or enhance their democratic participation. Secular movements failed to save Iranians from torture by the Shah's regime, to end the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, or to put food on the table in Egypt.

Lurking behind these failures, in the view of many Arabs and Muslims, was a US foreign policy that put its strategic interests first and the human and democratic rights of people second. Arabs in the US linked their civic exclusion, political voicelessness and popular denigration to the same US foreign policy interests. They shared a sense of powerlessness with many across the globe, who found faith in God the only hope for change. The strong support shown by many organized Muslims for George W. Bush's presidential campaign reflects the importance of global issues to Arab America, as Bush was perceived as being more capable of evenhandedness in Middle East policy than Bill Clinton and the Democrats. The Bush administration's domestic activities since September 11 have all but destroyed this support.[18]

Whether secular or religious, transnational identities are nourished by return trips to the homeland, interactions with new immigrants and foreign students and solidarities cultivated by community institutions. Ties with the homeland are maintained in material form through periodic remittances to family members and charitable donations to support local projects. Satellite television and the Internet have greatly expanded immigrants' capacity to communicate with counterparts across the globe without traveling, but technology cannot replace the importance of face-to-face encounters to the maintenance of family ties, building communities and cross-cultural exchanges and linkages. All of these homeland ties—return travel, family visits, foreign students, family reunification, remittances and charitable donations—are likely to drop significantly due to changes in policies, the social climate and Arab-American fears after September 11.

After September 11

US government initiatives since September 11 are destined to have a profoundly negative impact on an already alienated community in the US. Of the roughly 20 rule changes, executive orders and laws affecting immigrants or non-immigrant visitors, 15 predominantly target Arabs.[19] These changes have sent a chill through all of Arab America. The number of Arabs able to study, work, attend trainings, meetings and conferences in the US will probably plummet. Profiling of Arabs at US airports, in-

cluding special security checks and removal from airplanes, has dampened their desire to travel domestically or abroad. In February, *Arab-American Business* magazine provided special safety tips for Arab-American travelers—in a sidebar to an article entitled "Flying While Arab." Overall, these policies, most of which were never subject to a Congressional vote, target millions of innocent people on the basis of their religion, country of birth or ethnicity in response to the actions of tiny number. The fingerprinting and registry initiative announced on August 12, 2002 for persons from select Arab and Muslim countries is only the latest in a string of actions targeting Muslim and Arab communities, which began with the detention of upwards of 1,200 citizens and non-citizens, most of them of Middle Eastern descent, directly after the September 11 attacks.

In late October, the State Department issued a classified cable imposing a 20-day mandatory hold on all non-immigrant visa applications submitted by men aged 18-45 from 26 countries, most of them Arab. All such applicants were to be subjected to special security clearances. Even stricter procedures have been put in place in certain countries. For example, in early August the US Ambassador to Jordan announced that visa applications were no longer being approved at the American Consulate in Amman. All visa applications are sent to Washington for approval, with no time limit imposed on the response. The ambassador stressed that Jordan was not singled out for this process; other Arab countries had similar rules.[20]

In November, the Justice Department announced its intention to interview some 5,000 individuals who came to the US from Arab and Muslim countries since January 1, 2000 on non-immigrant visas. Later, Attorney General John Ashcroft announced a second round of interviews with an additional 3,000 persons. The subject's knowledge of terrorist activity is the topic of these interviews. The Justice Department has asked local police departments to participate in interviewing the Arab residents of their towns, placing them in the position of monitoring persons they are supposed to protect.

In January 2002, the INS launched an initiative to track down and deport 6,000 non-citizen males from (unnamed) Middle Eastern countries who had been ordered deported by an immigration judge but had never left the US. There are an estimated 314,000 so-called "absconders" in the US—the vast majority from Latin America. Although less than 2 percent are Middle Eastern, they are the government's target. By May, the Justice Department reported that 585 Middle Eastern absconders had been caught. In a meeting with members of Chicago's Arab community, government officials claimed that they were not engaging in racial profiling, since other communities would be approached next.

On May 14, Congress enacted the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act. Among the many provisions of this act, which includes calls for the integration of INS databases, the development of machine-readable visas, the requirement that all airlines submit to the US the list of passengers who have boarded a plane bound for the US and stricter monitoring of foreign students, is a restriction on

non-immigrant visas for individuals from countries identified as state sponsors of terrorism.

In late June, the Department of Justice issued an internal memo to the INS and US Customs requesting that they seek out and search all Yemenis, including American citizens, entering the US. As a result, Yemeni Americans have been removed from planes and from boarding lines, waiting hours for security clearances.

On July 14, 2002, the INS announced that it will begin enforcing section 265(a) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which requires all aliens to register changes of address within ten days of moving. There is nothing to prevent the INS from selectively enforcing this rule. In fact, a statement made by INS national spokesman Dan Kane to the Spanish-language TV news Univision—that the INS will not deport persons for change of address violations and will seek jail time only in extreme cases—indicates that the agency intends to enforce the rule in different ways for different groups of people.[21] In North Carolina, a Palestinian legal immigrant stopped for driving four miles over the speed limit was detained for two months and finally charged with a misdemeanor for failing to report his address change. The INS sought his deportation. On August 5, a local immigration judge ruled that he could not be deported for this infraction because he did not willfully break this law.

On August 12, Ashcroft announced the implementation of a program that will require tens of thousands of approved, visa-holding foreign visitors to be fingerprinted, photographed and registered upon entry to the US. The program will be implemented in selected locations on September 11, 2002 and will target Arabs and Muslims. After a 20-day testing period, it will be implemented at all US ports of entry. Arabs and Muslims so registered can only leave from ports with the registry system in place. Carl Baron, an immigration attorney and researcher at the University of Texas, commented: "Just on the basis of where a person is coming from the government is going to subject them to these measures. You're going to see fewer Middle Easterners willing to come to the United States, and I wonder if that isn't the real agenda."[22]

A Few Good Things

In the midst of this environment of attacks on Arab and Muslim communities, a few good things are happening. On a local level, there appears to be a marked increase in public education about Islam, largely sponsored by local non-profit organizations. Years of Arab activists' efforts to find receptive hosts and funders for such public education suddenly bore fruit after September 11, often sponsored by institutions that had closed their doors to Arabs in the past. Curricula are being examined for their treatment of Arabs and Islam. In a major initiative supported by the Chicago Community Trust, the Chicago public school system is studying ways to reform its curriculum to include Arabs, Islam and broader treatments of the Middle East. Earlier attempts, including by the University of Chicago's Middle East Studies Center, to make these changes had been consistently rebuffed. Arabs and Muslims are being invited to speak at public forums, to engage in dia-

logue and to sit "at the table." A May 2002 Arab American Institute Foundation survey found that 42 percent of Arab-American respondents publicly discuss events in the Middle East more since September 11, as opposed to 14 percent who do it less. According to Muslim American organizations, the vast majority of Arabs and Muslims report experiencing special caring, kindness and often protection from persons outside their communities in the past year, despite the overall negative climate. Islamic organizations report that conversions to Islam in the US have increased significantly since September.[23] For perhaps the first time, Islam is being recognized as an American religion. These events reveal the apparent paradox of this historical moment: repression and inclusion may be happening at the same time.

But the plethora of new restrictions on immigration, which plainly zero in on Arabs and Muslims, and the continued acceptability of stereotyping about Arabs and Islam in the media and popular culture, tell a much less encouraging story. The Arab in America is no longer invisible. Neither is some of the ugliness in America, and it's not coming from Arabs and Muslims. ■

Endnotes

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