

Getting Through the White Tape:
A Reexamination of Arab American Racial Formation

by

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DEDICATED

To Najla Zurayk, for turning stones into pillows

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Introduction

On April 28th 2008 John McCain dropped Ali Jawad, a top financier, from his Michigan Financial Organization because of an alleged connection with Hezbollah, a Lebanese organization identified by the United States as a terrorist group. The rumor of this connection was started by Debbie Schluskel, a right-wing blogger and political commentator who became famous for her frequent infiltration of mosques and Arab/Muslim organizations to expose “Radical Islam.” Her report gave no material evidence of Jawad’s connection other than a trip to his hometown of Bint Jbeil, Lebanon (Schluskel “Who is Ali Jawad?” par. 3-4). Although Jawad does recognize Hezbollah as a legitimate political party, there were no financial or ideological ties between him and the political organization, and many other Arab Americans share the same recognition of Hezbollah without suffering the same punitive and embarrassing measures as Jawad. The founder of the Lebanese Heritage Club, Ali Jawad is a leader and philanthropist among the dense and highly populated Arab American community in Michigan. He was going to attend a \$2,300-a-plate benefit for John McCain’s campaign before being informed of McCain’s decision to drop him (Tapper par. 6). As president of Armada Oil and Gas, Jawad is not merely an everyday Arab American facing discrimination in a post 9/11 United States. Given his notoriety and leadership within the Arab American community, McCain’s rejection of him and his financial support due to unconfirmed rumor was a clear message that Arab Americans can not be given the benefit of the doubt, and that their ties to their former country are and will remain stronger than those they have with the United States. This became the

suspicion even about Jawad, who spent his own money supporting an American candidate for presidency.

Ralph Nader, a presidential candidate for the past five elections, is also a controversial political leader, although the ideological antithesis of Ali Jawad. His 2000 campaign as the Green Party candidate provoked special controversy because of the close race between Gore and Bush; Nader has been widely blamed for Bush's victory in the election. In 2004, when he again ran for president as the Independent Party candidate, many Democrats who saw his legacy as "[getting] us eight years of George Bush" urged him not to run. He often stands alone on issues in Washington, and has lost friends and support for his actions in recent elections. According to many bloggers and political commentators, Nader is a "selfish, self-absorbed prick," an "asshole" and a "lunatic." One thing he has never been called, however, is a terrorist, although, like Jawad, Nader is an Arab American from a small town in Lebanon.

That an Arab American could be kicked off a finance committee in a presidential campaign because of the mere rumor of his connection to the Middle East, while another Arab American from a different generation can run for president numerous times without even the mention of his heritage and the problems that may surface because of it, speaks to the vast disconnect between the recent Arab immigrant experience in the United States and the longer history of Arabs in America. Ali Jawad is a recent Shiite immigrant to the United States. Ralph Nader is the son of Maronite Catholic Lebanese immigrants. While both these Arab American leaders have been insulted by the media and by different political groups, Jawad has been racialized and "othered" in a way that Nader has not. While he is racialized by

the media and the public, Jawad also publicly self-identifies as an Arab in a way that Nader does not. As the head of the Lebanese Heritage Society in Michigan which gives many scholarships to young Arab American high school students, Jawad openly reveals himself as part of the Arab American community. Nader, on the other hand, rarely talks about his Lebanese roots, and few people are actually aware of his background. Why should there be such a racial disparity and disconnect between two people whose roots originate no more than 100 miles from each other in a place most Americans could not even find on a map?

This contrast exemplifies the larger problems Arab Americans have faced in recent years. Historically, people from the Middle East were not victims of racial targeting in the way they are today. Because they were largely incorporated into mainstream America, these people did not develop an identity group with which to monitor civil rights and advocate for their rights. In recent years, however, people from this region have been the targets of hate crimes and government scrutiny, and have been personified as the face of danger against the United States. In this way, Arab Americans are caught in a strange position within the United States' racial politics: Arabs have felt the exclusion most often felt by people of color; however, they are still placed in the "white" category. Scholars such as Nadine Naber, Hanan Samhan, and Michael Suleiman have all commented on "Arab Invisibility;" because Arabs do not fit into the racial categories present in the United States, they do not have a way to articulate the problem they now face.

One solution to this problem has been for Arab Americans to try to make a place for themselves within the U.S. racial paradigm. Some see this most effectively done through the United States census. The U.S. census has been collecting data since 1790. Its racial classification categories provide the government as well as lobbying organizations with vital information about certain groups. At the same time, these categories work to box people into socially constructed groups, a detriment to our nation's movement away from racial biologic essentialism. The history behind the census makes it a racially-loaded institution; therefore adding a Middle Eastern category would have large ramifications.

The first census was taken in the United States in 1790, about one year after George Washington took office. It had six inquiries: the number of free white men above sixteen, white men below sixteen, of free white women, of all others in the house who were free, and of slaves. Differentiations were made between free and enslaved people because of the 3/5th rule which allowed slaves to be counted as 3/5 a full person. This rule was put in place to make sure southern states did not receive an unfairly large representation in the House of Representatives because of their disproportionate slave population. Through the implementation of this rule, then, the census became a racially-loaded institution that categorized and managed based on race. This remained a driving factor of the census throughout the 19th century. The census implemented the "one-drop" rule, placing citizens in the "black" category if they had any ancestors classified as black. With the influx of immigrants during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the census also became a means to categorize, monitor, and understand the new peoples who were entering the country. With the

loosening of immigration restrictions in 1964, the census was used to keep a record of emerging immigrant groups and better classify the different ethnicities within those groups. Concurrently, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 gave the government a new interest in voter statistics among minorities. Thus, the census changed from a purely oppressive force to a way to monitor different groups' use of rights (Samhan "Not Quite White" 4-6). Because of this shift in purpose, the census has shifted both the categories and the methods of data-collection used. When the census was a monitoring agency, the census taker was in charge of observing and recording the race of the participant. The census now focuses on self-identification: the census taker has little involvement with the race the participant chooses.

In 1997, the census was again reassessed. Directive 15, the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) "Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of the Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity," outlined the changes to the census that would take place in 2000. It explains the response to a petition for the creation of a separate racial category for Arabs and Middle Eastern people. Historically, people of Arab and Middle Eastern origin have been placed in the white category. The request for a new category was denied, but the discussion of reasons determining the categories that were changed and those that were not highlights the contradictions and ambiguities of race in the United States today.

Although race is a category used in the U.S. census, the OMB refused to define the term, and instead insisted that in their categories race

represents a social-political construct designed for collecting data on the race and ethnicity of broad population groups in this country, and are not anthropologically or scientifically based. (OMB 1)

Although the census takers use both race and ethnicity as terms of classification, they do not hold themselves responsible for the definition of these terms. They also exempt themselves from methodological accountability by not utilizing scientific or anthropological data-collection. In this way, they presume that each census taker understands fully the meaning behind each category presented on the census.

According to the American Anthropological Association, keeping these terms undefined or broadly defined allows race to be understood as biological or innate, and not a social construct. It also allows race and culture to be conflated. For example, although the OMB puts race and ethnicity in different categories, they never explicitly distinguish between the two terms. Instead, they broadly assert that “race and ethnicity may be thought of in terms of social and cultural characteristics as well as ancestry” (OMB 2). However, they also write that “race and ethnicity should not be interpreted as biological or genetic in reference” (OMB 2). Thus, they link race to ancestry but assert that it has nothing to do with genetics. This contradictory double-speak is dangerous because the OMB does nothing to present its definitions as contradictory or problematic. Instead, they move forward and elaborate the general principles which they presume are intrinsic to their shaky concept of race.

The OMB created a list of principles to govern their process which are as problematic as the process itself. The OMB asserts that “the concepts and terminology should reflect clear and generally understood definitions that can achieve

broad public acceptance (OMB 3).” At the same time, their first principle is that “ideally, respondent self-identification should be facilitated to the greatest extent.” In the same breath, the OMB recognizes that race is subjective but asserts one of its main principles is to make it objective. By making race something understood and accepted by the broad public, the OMB also assumes that race is unchanging (American Anthropological Association 15). That the census itself has to change its racial categories every time it administers the census, but expects the “broad public” to “self identify to the greatest extent” with a “clear and understood definition of race” is not only contradictory, but irresponsibly so since the OMB refuses to set a clear definition of these terms.

This tension between self-identification and imposed racial categories is the main critique in the American Anthropological Association’s response to Directive 15. The AAA emphasizes that race consists not only of the properties of an individual, but also is “defined by an individual’s **relation** to society at large” (AAA 4). Although the purported purpose of the race category is to ensure civil rights, by ignoring race as a relational category, the OMB misrepresents the causes of these lacks of rights:

Consider, for example, the way in which racial and ethnic identity supposedly “predict” a range of social outcomes. The typical correlation is that by virtue of being a member of a particular racial or ethnic group imprisonment, poor health, poverty, and academic failure are more likely. Such an interpretation, while perhaps statistically robust, is structurally and substantively incomplete because it is not

the individual's association with a particular racial or ethnic group that predicts these various outcomes, but the attribution of that relationship by others that underlies these outcomes. (AAA 5)

Census racial classifications, although purportedly there to recognize social problems, rely on the old and harmful classifications of those problems in order to find a solution, which, as the AAA concludes, could "cause more harm than good" (AAA 5).

Not only do the OMB's theoretical principles fall short, but their more practical guiding principles seem to highlight their own ambivalence about race. After stating that self-identification is ideal, they go on to say that sometimes data collectors' observations are more practical. In suggesting that observers are more practical, the OMB again implies that there is something fixed and unchanging about race that is more practically observed through an objective eye.

Manageability is another guiding principle of the OMB. They state that "the number of standard categories should be kept to a manageable size," implying that these categories should serve practical and not identity-based needs. If a new category should be added to the census, "research should be included not only on the usefulness of the resulting data but also on the comparability of any new categories with existing ones." This last statement is ambiguous and seems to imply that no new racial group should be documented, or rather that new racial categories should conform to pre-existing categories. In fact, in Spotlight on Heterogeneity: the Federal Standard for Racial and Ethnic Classification, the book written by the Commission of

Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education (CBSSE) about the process of creating the guiding principles of the project, the commission asserts that

there is a desire for historical comparability in the data. The overall sense was that while the need for statistical continuity should not be a barrier to needed change, it should serve as a strong deterrent to superficial change, and especially to untested change. (CBSSE 18)

Thus, the OMB creates an irresolvable problem for itself: how can it hope to change the purpose of its categories without changing the categories and the definitions of the categories? This again follows the logic that race is fixed and unchanging, a view contested by the American Anthropology Association.

Despite the contradictions and ambiguous standards of the OMB, Arab Americans petitioned to create a separate racial category for Middle Eastern people. The petition cited racism against Anti-Arab as the cause of creating this category. Better and more precise data collection would monitor Arab and Middle Eastern people's civil rights to a greater extent, and petitioners "pointed[ed] to the lack of available data that would enable study of discrimination and the special needs of Arab Americans (CBSSE 33)." Although the reasoning behind the creation of the special category seemed compelling, Arabs and Middle Easterners were denied a special category and continued to be placed within the definition of white for the 2000 census.

The reasoning behind not creating a new racial category for Arabs and Middle Eastern people seems less in line with the OMB's new purposes for taking the census than with a notion of race as being universal and unchanging. The OMB had three

main reasons for not allowing for the change. The first was that they could not create an adequate definition for an Arab or Middle Eastern person. This rationale, of course, throws out of the window the idea of self-identification that the OMB asserts is ideal for the census. Moreover, that the OMB uses racial categories although they do not (read cannot) define race, yet will not include Arab/Middle Eastern because they cannot define it is contradictory. The OMB also stated that they did not want to include the category because they are trying to avoid “the expansion of the minimum set to include new population groups” (OMB 10). The statement proves that the OMB sees race as unchanging; by stressing that adding Arab/Middle Eastern would be acknowledging a “new population group,” the OMB ignores the fact that racial categorization is fluid and groups can move in and out of being categorized in a certain way. In Spotlight on Heterogeneity, the commission indicates that the OMB wants to only add new categories that are an amalgamation of older categories, i.e., multiracial categories.

I discuss the census so thoroughly because it highlights the major problems that Arab Americans face in outlining their own history within the United States and relating it to the larger themes of U.S. history. While there have been a number of books written about Arab American history, these works fail to locate Arab Americans as occupying an anomalous position within the United States’ racial regime. In this way, scholars’ work mostly finds a place for Arab American history within existing racial paradigms, instead of launching critiques based on the Arab American experience. I propose the latter task: creating not only a more cohesive understanding of relations between the United States and the Middle East as the

context for a new history of Arab Americans, but also proposing a more nuanced approach to understanding the way in which race functions in the United States.

The hardest part of beginning a discussion about peoples of the Middle East is the various terms that are used at different historical moments to refer to more or less the same group of people. Before World War I, the place we now refer to as the Middle East was generally referred to as the Orient. Thus, when writing about that region before World War I, I will use the term Orient. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the people from this region have also changed the way in which they identify themselves. In this project, I focus on people from present-day Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. During the period of the Ottoman Empire, however, these people were referred to as “Syrians.” The region itself also was called “The Levant.” After World War II, the people of the region began to identify as Arab, a term uniting peoples from all across the Middle East (a term that also surfaced during this time).

My project begins with an examination of the intersections of American and Middle Eastern history. Middle Eastern and American history have been intertwined since the creation of the United States, and arguably even before that. Islamophobia and Orientalism, transferred from Europe, affected the way in which Americans understood the Orient. But unlike the Europeans, Americans were not at first interested in the Orient as a colonial conquest. They were interested in the region as a place of religious conversion. Religion painted the way in which Americans first saw the region. Viewing the Muslims who resided there as heathens, and the Christians as merely “nominal Christians,” American missionaries tried to convert Middle Eastern peoples to Protestantism. However, their experiences in the Orient made them vilify

and politicize the Muslim rulers in a way that painted Christians and Muslims in the region as starkly different. As the United States approached its imperial period, Islam was increasingly seen as becoming a significant threat against the nation.

A new era in the Middle Eastern/American relationship began when Syrians from the Levant region began to migrate to the United States. This period is pivotal in the creation of the modern Arab American identity, and is often used as the prime explanation of “Arab American invisibility.” Given their circumstances and unique place in the American racial arena, these first immigrants were able to lobby for and achieve a place within the white racial category. Because naturalization laws prohibited any person from naturalizing who was did not fit into the white or black category, these Syrians had to work to gain their whiteness in a way that exemplifies racial formation in the United States, and also the ways in which race as a construction can be used and manipulated to gain access to whiteness. While most literature focuses on why Syrians easily assimilated into U.S. society, I propose an in depth look into the logic behind the prerequisite cases that solidified Syrian whiteness in American law, the ways in which Syrians advocated for their whiteness, and the United States’ relationship with the Ottoman Empire at the time. Again weaving the national and the international, I show how the United States' obsession with the Ottoman Empire and its vilification of Islam actually worked in these new immigrants’ favor.

After the prerequisite cases, Syrians were rather easily incorporated into U.S. society. Again, however, the international affects the national, and the treatment of Arabs (as they are called today) in the United States drastically changed with the

creation of Israel, U.S. interest in Middle Eastern oil, and the violence on September 11th. These events have drastically changed the way in which Arabs are identified and choose to identify themselves. These changes produced the ultimate question of whether Arabs and Middle Easterners deserve to be recognized as an officially different racial category.

My thesis explores the ways in which race, religion, and international relations function to create a shifting meaning of Arab and Middle Eastern people in the U.S. imagination. Islamophobia and colonialism have drastically changed the way in which Arabs are viewed in the United States. While always in an ambiguous place in the United States, Arabs are now excluded in a way that might well merit the creation of a new racial category. This thesis explores and tracks the process of the racial formation of Arabs in the United States in hopes of addressing this question in the most thorough way possible.

Chapter I

The United States' Perception of the Levant Region and its People Pre-Syrian Immigration

The history of U.S. presence in the Middle East has played a significant role in the creation of Arab identity in the United States. Until recently this history went largely unnoticed by American Studies scholars because the field tended to focus on immigrants after they had arrived and established themselves within the United States. It also seems that because Arabs have been racialized as white in the United States, scholars haven't viewed their experience as a way of analyzing how race and colonialism function in the United States. Ironically, this assumption is a direct product of the way race and colonialism function in the United States. Lisa Lowe addresses this issue concerning the Asian American experience in "The International within the National: American Studies and Asian American Critique." She argues that the field of American Studies needs a more international approach to studying the United States. Drawing from her argument, a fuller approach to the study of U.S. presence in the Middle East seems the best channel to understand the way imperialism functioned to racialize Arabs in the United States in the precarious way that it did. Indeed, much of the perception of Middle Easterners was already created before any Middle Easterner actually presented himself/herself on U.S. soil. Before the first large wave of Middle Eastern immigrants to the United States around the turn of the 20th century, the United States already had a long history with the region which would affect the way the broader US public understood the place from which these new immigrants came.

The Creation of the East/West Divide

Most scholars privilege Europe's relationship with the region and often overlook the US presence there. While there is no doubt that the history of European encounters with the Middle East is vastly longer, and arguably more relevant in the creation of European culture and self-perception, overlooking US cultural exchange and imperialism in the Middle East leaves out critical events which shaped Americans' view and understanding of people from that region. The United States' adoption of a European style Orientalist relationship with Islam and American Christian presence in the Middle East fundamentally shaped US public opinion about people from the Middle East. This had a critical effect on Middle Eastern people's assimilation and racial categorization in the United States during the turn of the twentieth century.

The way in which the United States viewed the Middle East was largely shaped by the way that Europe viewed the Middle East. This relationship, identified and discussed by Edward Said in his critical text, Orientalism, is defined as "a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience" (Said 1). According to Said, the creation of the Orient was critical to the creation of the Occident, as can be seen through the massive body of Western literature which deals with the Orient as a place of wonder and excitement, as well as terror, heathenism, and chaos. Said reviews a vast amount of scholarly work from almost every country in Western Europe, and examines its discourse concerning the Orient. While his text is exhaustive and can not be discussed in great detail within this work, Said's analysis of syntax, stereotypes, and discourses

which have been used by Europeans throughout modern history are essential to understanding how Europe created the Orient as the ideological, spiritual, intellectual, and geographic other to Europe.

Said argues that the Orient became known to the West “as its great complementary opposite since antiquity” (58). In each cultural interaction that came about through travel or military conquest, the same sort of stereotypical conclusions about the Orient/Occident divide resurfaced and an “internally structured archive is built up from literature that belongs to these experiences” (Said 58). Thus, through repetition of similar conclusions, something “patently foreign acquires...a status more [rather] than less familiar” (58). As Said argues, “a new median category emerges, a category that allows one to see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of previously known things” (59). It is through the theoretical framework of viewing the unknown through previously understood discourses that Said launches his argument about Orientalism. In no instance is it more apparent than the West’s depiction of Islam:

Islam is judged to be a fraudulent new version of some previous experience, in this case Christianity. The threat is muted, familiar values impose themselves, and in the end the mind reduces the pressure upon it by accommodating things to itself as either “original or repetitious.” Islam thereafter is “handled:” its novelty and its suggestiveness are brought under control so that relatively nuanced discriminations are now made that would have been impossible had the raw novelty of Islam been left unattended. The Orient at large,

therefore, vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in—and fear of—novelty. (Said 59)

Islam is not seen as a different religion, but as a lesser and incorrect version of Christianity. Medieval Christians saw Mohammed as a “false prophet” because of the analog they created between Mohammed and Islam, and Jesus and Christianity. For Medieval Christians, Mohammed became an imposter because they could only view Islam through structures set up within Christianity. Mohammed “became an image...whose function was not so much to represent Islam in itself as to represent it for the medieval Christian” (Said 60). In this way, Christians' images of Mohammed became the dumping grounds for all things anti-Christian; debauchery, lechery, and filth were all used to describe Mohammed and his followers.

Said also points to the geographic closeness of Islam and Christianity as a source of tension between the Orient and Occident. Islam shared the Holy Land with Christianity; indeed, Islam planted itself atop Christian land. They shared the same Judeo-Hellenic traditions, and Muslims accepted Jesus as a prophet in their religion. Muslims adopted and manipulated other aspects of Christian and even Jewish tradition. This closeness accented the tensions that already existed between the two religions and facilitated the creation of the false familiarity discussed by Said. Islam vacillated between being otherized by Christians, and being categorized as a lesser version of Christianity. This vacillation is what creates the intrigued yet disdainful feelings that Christianity has for Islam.

Islamic military dominance over Christianity throughout the Middle Ages added greatly to historic tensions between the Orient and the Occident. Said asserts

that “from the end of the seventh century until the battle of Lepanto in 1571, Islam dominated or effectively threatened European Christianity” (74). Islamic domination of Rome’s Empire also cut straight into the imagination of European Christianity. Christianity reached the height of its power through its acceptance and dispersal by the Roman Empire, and for Islam to outshine that Empire was no easy pill to swallow for European Christians. Islamic military encroachment on Spain, Sicily, Northern Africa, and Eastern Europe made Islam a real source of fear for many Europeans of the time. There were constant tensions between these two empires: Muslim expansion over Christian lands, the Christian reconquests of Spain and Sicily, the rise of the Ottoman Empire, the crusades, and Europe’s rise to colonial power in the 17th century all added together to create a long-lasting feeling of “suspicion and hostility on both sides” (Khalaf 110). As long as the Ottoman Empire remained in its place, Christian Europe could never rest easy, because it was perceived as constantly under threat. Said argues that this original tension is the fundamental basis for Orientalism, the way in which the Occident has come to view the Orient.

Through countless examples taken from Western literature, Said reveals the structure of knowledge which marked Orientalist thought in all texts dealing with the Orient. While Said’s text is invaluable in the decoding European perception of the East, he underestimates the effects and nuances of Orientalist thought in the United States. Said writes that “Americans will not feel the same way about the Orient [as the British and French do]...unlike the Americans, the French and the British...have had long a long tradition of...Orientalism” (Said 1). With this Said explains his use of texts drawn almost exclusively from European sources. He ignores any American

texts. While the United States certainly does not have the history of conquest, occupation, and military clashes that Europe has, it nevertheless experienced its own ideological tensions with the Orient. The United States may not have had the same experience as Britain and France, but its understanding and experience with and of the Orient had lasting effects on the way people from that region were perceived by Americans. Moreover, one should not discount the European influences on American thought. The United States, seeing itself as a Christian country, imagines its intellectual and cultural roots coming from Europe. Indeed, European ideologies were transposed to the United States in such a way that Orientalism, not as an historical reality but as a structured form of knowledge, can absolutely be understood as a part of U.S. history.

Early U.S. Encounters with the Middle East

The structural knowledge Said addresses in Orientalism is both reproduced and re-imagined in U.S. encounters with the Middle East, starting surprisingly shortly after the creation of the United States. After the Declaration of Independence was adopted, England cut off all protection of U.S. ships in the Mediterranean. The curtailment of protection was harmful because the United States, “blessed with natural harbors and an abundance of superior shipbuilding wood,” relied on foreign trade as the economic means of establishing itself as an independent state, and one of its main routes was through the Mediterranean (Oren 27). With the support of Britain, the most powerful navy in the world at the time, the American colonies had no qualms about sending their ships through the treacherous waters. However, when the

American colonies declared independence, they no longer received the massive support of the British navy. While Barbary piracy was a problem for other European countries, they had established defenses against the attacks. As soon as the British stopped protecting the Americans, pirates from North Africa began to harass American ships and take captives. Sailors and passengers wrote narratives of their capture by the “barbaric” North Africans. The fear of being sold into white slavery to the mysterious and treacherous Middle Easterners crept into the popular consciousness of this newly emerging state (Oren 37). Indeed, the North African pirates in the Mediterranean were the first real international threat to the United States, and were one of the reasons for assembling the first constitutional convention. Thus, from the beginning of United States history, the Arab world was seen as a hostile threat (Oren 28).

Just as Said points to a European consciousness created out of its relationship to the ‘Orient,’ the United States also used myths and rumors about the Orient in the creation of its own ideology. In his work, Power Faith and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present, Michael Oren observes this relationship as one between “the youngest republic and the oldest existing empire in the world.” Ambivalence about empire, assertion of power, and Orientalist myths about the region dictated much of the relationship that was fostered between the Ottoman Empire and the United States. Abolitionist movements in the United States often found their vocabulary in a comparison with “white slavery” in the Middle East. Especially after the independence of the United States, and the capture of American sailors by Algerian pirates, abolitionists pointed to the double standard set by those

who sympathized with the American sailors. Oren quotes a correspondent from the New Jersey Gazette who “observed in September 1786, ‘Masters [of black slaves] doubtless shudder at the idea of slavery among the Algerines, and execrate them as barbarous tyrants, but are they less barbarous than the followers of Mahomet?’” (Oren 179) Early American literature also discussed the perils of white slavery in the Middle East, and told tales of captives escaping the “perils of Mohamedan slavery.” In these ways, the Middle East became a source of hostility, aggression, and mystery as the United States worked to create itself. The Orient became, for the United States, a place of both similarity and difference: a comparison could be drawn between the two but their difference remained clear. Moreover, the abolitionist’s discourse invokes the first use of the American racial system imposed on the Orient. The Orient becomes a landscape to play out US racial discourses which did not apply to the Orient at all.

As Said writes, the Orient did not simply invoke fear, but also excitement and intoxication. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, world fairs were a way for ordinary Americans to learn and experience different and “exotic” parts of the world. At these fairs and exhibitions, Moroccan and Egyptian Pavilions would entice their audiences with the smell of incense, “belly dancers, glass-eaters, and scorpion-swallowers” (Oren 299). At the World’s Fair and Exhibition of 1893 in Chicago, the Orient became a commodity designed to titillate young American consumers. As one tourist to the fair noted, “with a little stretch of the imagination our dream of the Orient was realized” (Oren 301). In this way, the Orient became tantalizing romanticized erotica used in fairs and displays to entice American audiences. These pavilions used some

people from the region; however, the purpose was not to create a real depiction of the region, but rather an imagined frontier for the American imagination. These two starkly different conceptions of the Orient, a place of both terror and wonder, existed together and fed each other to produce the 19th century American perception of the region.

My point in explaining this early history is not to give a detailed account of American perceptions of the Middle East throughout US history; nor is it my goal to document all the different encounters between the two regions of the world. My point here is rather to explain that, despite what Said asserts in the opening pages of Orientalism, the United States fostered its own relationship with the ‘Orient’ that has worked to better define and create the United States. However, deviating from Said’s thesis, there was a period in U.S. history where perceptions of Islam did not conform to Orientalist ideals. American missionaries, who went to the Orient to spread Christianity and serve as anti-imperial antidote to European powers, did not come with preconceived mistrust and hatred towards Islam. However, when put into a stressful situation in the Levant region, the missionaries reverted to Orientalist ideals and the anti-Islamic sentiment became again a fundamental part of U.S. discourse.

Manifest Destiny and the Middle East: “Converting the Heathens”

In 1819, the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM) sent their first mission to the Middle East. Recent graduates of Middlebury College and Andover Seminary, Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons were ready to spread the Gospel and convert the people of the Orient to Protestantism. This was hardly a novel

idea; Americans' desire to spread Christianity to the 'heathen' world was well established among most American ideologues. The ideological and narrative background for the need to spread civilization penetrates even further back in history. As Richard Waswo writes in his work The Founding Myth of Western Civilization: from Virgil to Vietnam, Western Civilization, founded on the myth of the fall of Troy, has worked to spread its empire across the world, trying to redeem its fallen home. That civilization is something that must be implemented is a central concept in this ideology. Unlike other cultures, in which the history of their own society and cultural practices originate from within, Western Civilization must be imposed. "We have not *produced* civilization; we have *been* civilized" (Waswo 3). It was this need for expansion and need for civilizing, coupled with the fear of damnation, which drove the expansionist ideology to fruition.

Spreading the Gospel became one of the central themes of U.S. cultural imperialism. As the United States entered the world and worked to define itself as an emerging colonial power, spreading the gospel became a primary way in which the country could fulfill its burden as the caretaker of the true Gospel. The expansion of the United States was not simply a military and territorial concept: Americans wanted to spread American culture and religion throughout the world through Protestantism. In his article, "A Great Racial Commission," Daniel Lee points to what the American philosopher John Fiske asserted in his article entitled "Manifest Destiny (1885):"

I believe that the time will come when such a state of things will exist on the earth, when it will be possible to speak of the United States as

stretching from pole to pole...indeed, only when such a state of things has begun to be realized can civilizations, as sharply demarcated from barbarism, be said to have fairly begun. Only then can the world be said to have become truly Christian. (Lee 90)

While Fisk's belief was certainly not held by all Americans, those who did believe in the expansion of the United States envisioned it primarily through the spread of American Protestant ideals. As Samuel Worcester, one of the founding members of the American Board of Commissioners on Foreign Missions explained, "my brethren, the heathen do need the Gospel. There is no other remedy for them...." According to Khalaf, these missionaries felt that "all other world religions were utterly worthless and their adherents were without hope, salvation or eternal light" (Khalaf 109). With this mentality, young Pliny Fisk and Levi Parsons set out naively to save the Orient by converting its people to Christianity.

The American Board of Commissioners on Foreign Missions (ABCFM) sent out missions to many different country and regions across the world, but for both the Board and the missionaries themselves the Levant region was special. While they were supposed to treat it as any other place within the ABCFM's jurisdiction, it clearly held a special place within the missionaries' hearts and consciousnesses. The Levant region was the Holy Land, and the Christian Americans who traveled there felt they were returning to their imagined homeland. As Makdisi asserts, "their return brought full circle a cycle of knowledge that had spread Christianity from the Holy Land to Europe" (Makdisi, 'Reclaiming the Bible' 683). This imagined historical relationship was felt by Americans other than the missionaries. Individual Americans

settled in the Holy Land to feel closer and more connected with Christianity. Anna and Horatio Spafford, for example, moved to Jerusalem to “emulate the life of Jesus,” and rented a house which later became known as the American Colony. Other religious folk, like Selah Merrill, a chaplain during the Civil War, also went to the Palestine to gain a better understanding of Christianity. They, however, were not missionaries, and were more content to “climb each day up the Mount of Olives, equipped only with tea and cake, ‘hoping,’ they professed, ‘to be the first to offer refreshment to the Messiah” (Oren 281).

While the missionaries shared this reverence for the Holy Land, they were not there to merely bask in its sacredness, but rather to convert its people back to the ‘true Christianity,’ which they believed was Protestantism. As Makdisi writes, the “sense of isolation from urban civilization where a New Jerusalem could be built was not of concern to the American Missionaries [in the Levant Region]. What historic Jerusalem symbolized for them was ‘not a pure Christian space in the midst of an imagined African or Indian barbarism’ but an enduring reference guide....they were constantly reminded of their proximity to the cradle of civilization” (Makdisi “Reclaiming the Bible” 688). According to Makdisi, missionaries felt that their task in the Levant differed from other missions: whereas missions in China or Hawaii spread Christianity to people who had never been exposed to the religion, the Mission in the Levant region *revived* Christianity in place that was once holy, but now in disrepair. As Jessup, an original missionary to the Levant region, wrote, they came to “lay again the old foundations, or to clear away the debris and rubbish of ages which had covered out of sight and out of mind the Rock, Jesus Christ” (Makdisi

“Reclaiming the Bible” 689). This goal set a different tone to the dynamic between the missionaries and the indigenous people.

The dynamic between the missionaries and the indigenous people living in the Levant was only intensified because Christianity was an already active and fairly popular religion in the region. Communities of Catholics, Maronites, and Eastern Orthodox Christians already inhabited the region, and initially they paid little attention to the missionaries. Thus the missionaries were up against a hard battle: converting Christians to a different form of Christianity. The missionaries unrelentingly criticized and slandered the Christians already living in the region, because of their connection with the Eastern, and not the Western Church. As Jessup wrote, the mission to this region replicated the original struggle of Protestantism against the Catholic Church. The Reformation was on the minds of these early missionaries, and they treated their interaction with those Christians as another wave of the Reformation that their ancestors had been part of in England and Northern Europe. As Samuel Bartlett writes in his “Sketches of the American Missions in Turkey, “If the whole movement shall ever be suitably recorded, the history of *this* reformation will be second in interest to no other that has ever been written” (Bartlett 14). The missionaries were excited to be part of another reformation that could again change the course of world history.

With this history in mind, the missionaries treated the existing Christians in the Levant region with nothing but disdain. Calling them “nominal Christians,” they depicted them as bigoted, stupid, and out of touch with Christianity. Their version of Christianity was no better than Islam: it was the same “sing-song mumble” (Makdisi

“Reclaiming the Bible” 691). The Oriental Christian’s “nominal Christianity” was blamed for the pervasiveness of Islam in the Holy Land; if the Christian inhabitants embraced the “true” Christianity of the missionaries, then Christianity would again be returned to its holy and sacred original site, and naturally Islamic rule would deteriorate (Makdisi “Reclaiming the Bible” 693). Thus, although already active in the region, Eastern Christianity was coupled with Islam as a deleterious, fake, and heretic religion that needed to be struck down. From these early beginnings, Americans’ hostility toward Islam, and distrust of Christianity in the Levant emerges, and people who live in the Levant region begin to be organized and classified in the missionaries’ minds.

That Europe was a colonial military presence in the Orient also had an effect on the way the missionaries lived and worked there. There existed a tension between American presence and European colonial presence because Americans wanted to assert themselves as non-imperial and non-colonial in contrast to the way they understood Europe to be. Unlike Europeans, who invaded and occupied Egypt, the missionaries had a disdain for military occupation and did not want their presence in the Levant region to be militarily based. This opposition to militarism would inform an American presence in that region that was based mostly on education, medicine, and social activities. Missionaries focused on teaching English and establishing hospitals and schools. Missionaries opened a total of 400 schools and 25 hospitals during their time in the region (Khalaf 108), making their presence there one based on social as opposed to military weight.

The most pervasive difference the Christian missionaries encountered in the Middle East was Islam. As discussed earlier, tensions between Christianity and Islam were historically fixed and not easily broken. These American missionaries, however, had an even more backwards notion of Islam than many of their European counterparts, who, by the mere fact of proximity, had developed more complicated though still problematic perceptions of Islam. As Khalaf's research on American perceptions of the Middle East suggests, American missionaries were fixed on a medieval representation of Islam that they largely stuck with throughout their time in the region. This (mis)understanding of Islam affected the way the missionaries would depict the Muslims, Christians, and Druze with whom they came in contact. Islam was thought of, by many of the missionaries, as a dead religion "bereft of any talent for rationale science and philosophy, [that] was hostile to fine arts, and that whatever spirituality it acquired was derived from other sources" (Khalaf 112). As the Missionary Review of the World wrote,

No Christian missionary is sent to the Moslem World to establish a treaty of peace with Islam...he is an ambassador of the Cross, not an apologist for the crescent...The Moslem world shall be open to the gracious entrance of the Saviour and the triumphs of the Gospel. The spell of twelve centuries shall be broken. (Khalaf 120-21)

Bringing intense bias and misunderstanding of the Middle East and its cultures, the missionaries entered a world organized completely differently from their own. The Ottoman Empire's social and political structure differed radically from that of the United States, and the way it was organized greatly affected the fashion in

which these missionaries would live, and also the way the people living in the Levant region would understand and interact with the missionaries.

Organization of the Ottoman Empire: Separate and Unequal

The Ottoman Turks had conquered Constantinople in 1453, and by 1516 had conquered the whole Arab Empire, ending the reign of the Mamluks. By the 19th century, the Ottoman Empire had come to organize itself religiously, practicing a tolerance of religions other than Islam on a “separate and unequal” premise (Makdisi “Artillery of Heaven” 33). The Ottomans recognized the Christian and Jewish citizens as *al-kitab*, or “People of the Book,” and thus tolerated their religious practices; however, they were denied certain privileges which demarcated them as different from the Muslims. The Ottomans had no interest in converting the Christians or the Jews; they focused instead on creating a clear demarcation between them and the rest of the community. Christians and Jews were not permitted to carry swords, could not hold certain titles, and could not build houses higher than the Muslims (Makdisi “Artillery of Heaven” 104).

Within this cultural framework, Mount Lebanon (where the missionaries would eventually build their central mission in the Levant region) grew as a community of mostly Christians and Druze. It was an affluent area in which the Christians and Druze lived relatively unbothered by the Ottoman government. Their historical narrative was largely defined by survival within a world in which they had always been a minority. The Maronite Church, for example, prided itself on its relative stability and long duration within the Islamic Empire. Contrasting with the

Protestants, who wanted to convert as many people to Christianity as they could in order to cleanse the world and redeem themselves in the eyes of their God, the Maronites wanted to keep their community as tight-knit and rigidly static as it had always been. In its history the Maronite Church had dealt with heresy and a reformation, much like the Protestant Church; but, unlike the Protestants, the Maronite reformation made them even more guarded and insular within their religious community. Makdisi lays out the Maronite story in Artillery of Heaven, and writes that their narrative provides “an idealized Maronite orthodoxy of heresy, tribulation, and redemption” (48). This story allowed the Maronite community to flourish under a foreign government without feeling it as a threat against the Maronites; in fact, existing within a foreign world made the Maronites feel stronger and they “began to thrive at the edge of the Muslim Empire” (Makdisi 50). This sense of difference would largely affect the way in which the Maronite community, as well as other existing sects of Christianity, would act in relation to the missionaries, and the way they would eventually act when they immigrated to the United States.

A Collision of Cultures

Two cultures, both valuing starkly different organizational systems and ways of life, came together through the American missionary presence. As soon as these missionaries arrived, their presence was felt by the surrounding communities. The Americans developed a different relationship with each group that lived in the region. While the mission was first set on settling in Jerusalem, to them the center of the Holy Land, for complicated reasons they actually settled close by in Beirut, and in the

mountains of Lebanon. They came knowing no Arabic, and with a very rough understanding of organization in the Ottoman Empire. However, even with the problems they faced, the missionaries were delighted by the Middle East. As one missionary wrote, “I think it would be a surprise to many of you at home in America to see what a gay and busy time it is here...in the interior of Turkey” (Holbrook 17). As they made their way through this new world, the missionaries developed distinct opinions about each group with which they were confronted.

At the risk of deviating slightly from the Levant region, it is important to note the remarkably favorable depiction of the Armenian people by the American missionaries. Possibly because of their direct contrast with the Turks, the Armenian population was depicted in very favorable terms by the Americans. Missionaries called them the “Anglo-Saxons of the East.” “They are a noble race,” observed one missionary in his report from Turkey to the American Board of Commissioners on Foreign Missions, “They are industrious, and persevering, they are the bankers of Constantinople, the artisans of Turkey, and the merchants Western and Central Asia” (Bartlett 3). This missionary then discusses the history of oppression and persecution that the Armenians had undergone throughout their time under the Ottoman Empire. Thus, a narrative of Christian oppression was emphasized in order to gain sympathy and favor from Western Christians. The missionaries’ task was simple: to work with the Armenians to convert them to Protestantism, and save them from the persecution of the “Satanic Mohemeddans [sic]” (Bartlett 14). Throughout the voluminous literature put out by the missionaries in the 19th century, Armenians are unchangingly depicted as the most superior people in the Middle East. This would become

extremely significant during the Armenian genocide by the Turks at the turn of the twentieth century.

The missionaries were less kind in their depiction of the Christians living amongst them in the Mount Lebanon community. Largely blamed for the proliferation of Muslims in the Holy Land, and looked at as only “nominal” Christians, the American missionaries were extremely critical of the Syrian Christian population. The main resentment against the Maronites came from their punishment of those who converted to Protestantism. Any Maronite Christian who left the faith was excommunicated and exiled from the rest of the community. The Missionary Herald, the periodical that published missionary reports in the United States, with articles sometimes distributed to other major newspapers, discusses the hardships faced by members of the oppressive Maronite communities. It tells an anecdote about a Priest within the Maronite community blasting a member for associating with the American Christians:

“Priest George met Asaad Jacob today, in the street, and cried upon him in a loud angry voice: ‘How dare you go and stay with those protestants?...Don’t you know that you are on the road to perdition?’”

(“Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Bird” 19)

The Christian community presented a problem for these missionaries that other communities did not. The Maronites, Greek Orthodox, and Catholic Syrians, whose existence was based on survival within a world of difference, would not easily be converted to Protestantism. Their hostility toward the American Christian community affected the way these Americans viewed the Maronites. In newspaper articles

Christians were depicted as problems for the missionaries. In a New York Times article entitled “Missionary Trials in Turkey,” the author depicts the life of missionaries in the Mount Lebanon region living with the hostility of the “nominal Christian” community:

Taking lodgings at a little inn, in the village of Zahleh, [the missionaries] at once attracted the interest and regard of the population; and, as a consequence, secured the animosity of a convent of Greek Catholics, and of certain Jesuit Fathers of the Romish Church who had...resolved to expel the Protestant apostle of another hemisphere. After sundry vague threats, and acts of covert hostility, they had at last proceeded in a body to the quarters of Mr. Dodd [the head of the mission], threw his little property...into the streets.

(“Missionary Trials in Turkey” par. 4)

After this anecdote, the writer concludes that it is not “‘Musselman bigotry’ but rather the animosity that is a result of Christian rivalry in the work of proselytism...it is certain that it is almost impossible to preserve order among the lawless population of Mount Lebanon...” (par. 5) In this way, other Christians were seen as a main threat to the missionaries’ success in the region. Interestingly, the missionaries began to look towards the Ottoman government for help in controlling the Christians of the region. Another writer in a similar article concludes with the hope that “no time will be lost in instructing the Minister of Constantinople to use the most cogent remonstrances [against the Christians of Mount Lebanon].” (“The Syrian Outbreak” par. 2).

In the depictions of these “nominal Christians,” a few important distinctions were made. These Christians were never referred to as part of an ethnicity that connected them with the larger community. In fact, although these Maronite and Catholic Christians lived well inside the Mount Lebanon area, most newspaper articles conflate them with Greeks. Indeed, in five New York Times articles, the Christians are referred to as Greek Christians. They are never associated with the Muslims in their community, and are seen as a completely different ethnic group and race. This distinction is important because the missionaries, from their first perception of the Christians, conflated them with the European Greeks rather than the Muslims living in their own geographic space. This is extremely revealing of the way the US Christians privileged categories. To these US Christians, religion connected people in a racial way that even trumped geography and genealogy. As we try to imagine and piece together both the missionaries’ understanding of the communities surrounding them, and the way in which these communities understood themselves, it is important to decipher the significance of these constructed categories for the way people from the Levant would later be racialized when they came to the United States.

While the Maronite and Catholic Christians were treated with animosity, the American Christians found most solidarity and comfort among the Druze population. The missionaries viewed the Druze religion as a mixture of Christianity, Islam and Judaism, and saw them as the community most amenable to conversion. Druze were consistently depicted as the most favorable group in the Levant region. As Makdisi describes in “Reclaiming the Land of the Bible,” the Druze were “something of a curiosity.” Makdisi quotes Charles Benton writing a letter to another missionary,

depicting the Druze as “brave and their sheikhs are patterns of *gentleman* in manners and courtesy” (692). The American Christians tried to establish allies among the Druze elite, and cultivated relationships with them that almost seemed respectful. The Druze were by far the highest population in attendance at the missionary schools, and it was in the missionaries' interest to ally with the elite, whom they even referred to as “men and women of rank.” Indeed, Benton concludes that

The Druzes appear to have the most entire confidence in our mission, and say that if they were not Druzes they would be *English protestants*. We are often confounded with the English, and known as Americans, often do not attempt to disabuse the minds of these mountaineers of this mistake. Many of them have no conception of geography. (Makdisi “Reclaiming the Bible” 695).

This conclusion suggests the Americans were not exactly respectful towards these Druze; however, the verbal and ideological relationship with Protestantism that missionaries draw from the Druze displays their favor towards this sect for their association with Protestantism.

Lebanese Civil War: A Shift in Perspective for the Missionaries

All of these relationships drastically changed, however, during the first Lebanese civil war. In 1859, tensions between the different groups on Mount Lebanon overflowed, and civil war ravaged Mount Lebanon. The Maronite community began an aggressive campaign against the Druze, only to be massacred by a combination of Druze and Muslims. The war had a profound impact on the way the

American missionaries viewed the different groups within the region. Interestingly, the events during this civil war completely shifted the Americans' opinion and depiction of the Druze and the Christians within the region. As opposed to the hostility with which the American Christians met the Maronite, Catholic, and Greek Orthodox Christians already inhabiting the Levant, the Americans began to sympathize with the Oriental Christians, and almost allowed them into their own social world. Of equal importance, the American Christian population remained resentful and suspicious of the Muslim population in the region. But if their relationship had been categorized as suspicious co-existence before the war, it changed to outright hostility and terror at the "ineptitude of the Ottomans." Rather than fully blaming either the Druze or the Maronites for the devastating war, the Americans blamed the Ottomans, and concluded that the social and political structure of the Empire was the true problem with that region.

At first, as the tensions of civil war grew throughout the region, the American missionaries seemed to be universally biased towards the Druze. In the Missionary Herald of 1859, the missionaries record that

all the Christian sects unite against the Druzes...it threatens to take the ugly shape of a war of extermination. The Christians declare they will make a clean work of it, and leave not a Druze in Lebanon. They will find themselves woefully disappointed ("The Disturbances in Lebanon 380).

This ominously threatening final remark clearly displays the missionaries' hostility and dislike of the Christians. This may stem from the fact that, according to the missionaries,

it is nearly certain that the main object which native clergy have at heart, in encouraging this mad and ruinous war, is the hope of thereby exterminating Protestantism in Lebanon. ("Solicitude for Native Protestants" 381)

The initial tensions between the existing Christian sects in Mount Lebanon and the missionaries manifested themselves again in the context of the civil war between the Druze and Christians in Lebanon. While arguably the Protestants' presence on Mount Lebanon had an effect on the two populations that perhaps could have pushed them towards violence, the fact that the Protestants could only view the war as a threat towards their own mission in the Middle East reveals their self-importance, and their incapacity to view the world in an impersonal way. As the American missionaries began to feel the tensions in the region, they observed that "such a disaster may be averted by the resolute interference of the Turkish army. Unfortunately, there are but few soldiers in the country, and the government has sent to recall most of them" ("Disturbances in Lebanon" 380). The missing Turkish soldiers would continue to be a source of anxiety for the American missionaries, and would ultimately affect their opinions about the Ottoman government.

The actual events of the civil war radically changed the way that the missionaries perceived the peoples of the Levant. The missionaries wrote, when the violence commenced, "the Druze have driven all before them, like a tornado" ("Later

Intelligence-the War Commenced” 382). Mr. Jessup, an American missionary, describes

The country laid waste, men, women and children butchered, with a degree of coolness and barbarity worthy of the Tamerlane...The Druzes, who are a race of warriors, have driven the Maronites before them...and their track is marked by smoking villages and desolation in every form. (“Letter from Mr. Jessup” 384)

For the missionaries, then, the outcome of the war was a disheartening shock. The Druze, whom the missionaries admired and also allied with, were not only massacring Christians (mostly Maronite Christians; very few Protestant Christians were killed), but, adding “barbarity and fury.” Jessup reports that

The Pasha of Beirut is now in the mountains, with about one thousand Turkish soldiers, but thus far has done nothing to arrest the bloody strife. It is even said that his men have joined with the Druzes against the Christians. (“Letter from Mr. Jessup” 385)

Thus the problem with the Druze was quickly becoming a problem with the Muslims as well. Historical animosity towards Islam began to be conflated with the new animosity towards the Druze. Jessup calls the Druze warriors, a description in total contrast from the “patterns of gentlemen in manner and courtesy” phrase with which the Americans first depicted the Druze (Makdisi “Reclaiming the Bible” 692). The connection with the Muslims, while historically accurate, serves to ideologically reinforce the villainy of the Druze. By pressing the point that the Druze and the Muslims are in cahoots, the missionaries are placing the Druze within the same

category as the Muslims, and seeing Christians as the victims. In his five page report, Jessup verbally ties the Druze and the Muslims together in forceful ways that do more than simply unite them militarily: “The Turkish officers seem to have been in league with the Druzes, and the moral perverseness, heartlessness, and cruelty which have characterized the Moslems, sicken the heart” (“Letter from Mr. Jessup” 386). While Jessup is strictly discussing Islam, his syntax allows for a connection to be made between the horrible characteristics of the Muslims and the Druze. Jessup concludes that

So many priests have been butchered, convents and churches plundered, and innocent people massacred, that it would not be surprising should a new crusade against Druze and Mahammedan despotism be awakened in Europe. (“Letter from Mr. Jessup” 387)

In his final phrase, Jessup locates the Druze people in the ideological battle between European Christianity and Middle Eastern Islam. In this way, the Druze are put on the guilty side with the Muslims, and the Christians are left with nothing but sympathy.

Newspaper articles in the United States echo the way in which perception of Druze change among Americans. In newspaper articles, the Druze were always depicted as aggressors, and the Christians were not only depicted as the victims, but as fellow Christians. One journalist writes:

The murders by the Druze of the Christians who had disarmed, or were unresisting...excite in our minds a feeling of detestation towards them, and of commiseration towards their suffering victims. This is

increased by the fact that not only are the Maronites of the church of Rome, and the Greek Christians made to suffer, but also that the native Protestant Church at Hasbeiya has been exterminated. (“Losses of Maronites” par. 3)

Thus the Middle Eastern Christians were not only seen as the victims, but the journalist also emphasizes their connection with Protestant Christianity, thus separating the Maronites from the Druze and Muslims even further. Letters in the newspapers appeal to Americans to send money and relief to the victims of the war:

The Turkish government combined with the Druze and made common havoc with them in the work of blood... “Why not [send food and money] to the miserable people who wear Christ’s name, and suffer solely because they wear it. (“Christians or no Christians: Should We Help Them?” par. 2)

An article first appearing in France, was later published in an American newspaper, in order to provoke Americans into giving money to the “Christian Syrian cause.” The author writes that “40,000 francs” were already given to the Syrians, and he hopes that “God grant these gifts, made to our unhappy co-religionists...may come to save them from despair” (“Losses of Maronites” par. 10). Thus the Maronites and Catholics are explicitly adopted as brethren of France, because of their religion, and France, as a fellow Western country, turns to American sympathies for empathy.

Other appeals were made in order to procure help from the American people for the suffering Maronites. Missionaries published a leaflet entitled “The Syrian

Massacres: A Second Appeal for Syrian Sufferers.” The text of the leaflet informed readers that their contributions were needed by

more than ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND of the CHRISTIAN population of SYRIA, who had suddenly been overwhelmed by a calamity, alike atrocious and appalling—the terror-stricken and helpless victims of its work of desolating cruelty by long-cherished hate, and the unrelenting frenzy of Mohammedan fanaticism. (Makdisi “Reclaiming the Bible” 688).

This appeal is extremely revealing because it does not lay any blame on the Druze people. While all the articles I have discussed do perceive the Druze as problematic and sometimes coupled with Muslims, their conclusions always inevitably blame the Muslims. In the end, the two warring tribes of Maronites and Druze were seen as only part of the problem that was the Ottoman Empire. As one of the missionaries writes, “[the war] makes one almost willing to accept anything that may be possible in the way of governance, rather than endure this imbecile and wicked Turkish rule any longer” (“Letter from Mr. Jessup” 386). Indeed, anti-Muslim sentiment overshadows any other problems within the Levant community. Before one can conclude that Americans were becoming clearer about drawing distinctions between the Maronite and Druze sects in the Levant region, one New York Times article quickly puts us back into reality, by stating that “I am sorry to say it, but there is little difference between the Maronite and the Druzes...the Turks are to be made responsible for this thing...” (“Damascus and the July Massacres” par. 11). This blunt and off-handed remark seems to sum up the perceptions of Americans, and takes us back to the same

conclusions that were drawn by Edward Said. Just as Said asserts in Orientalism, the West is unable to look true novelty in the face, and thus ascribes past conclusions to new situations, and repeats old stereotypes ad infinitum. Neither the American missionaries nor the American newspapers can accurately assess the situation in Mount Lebanon, and thus conclude that it is in fact the fault of the Muslims, instead of addressing the intricate histories that gave rise to the Civil War between the Druze and the Maronites.

The obvious question that must be addressed about these findings is what was their significance? Even if missionaries felt this way, and newspapers reported on these issues, did the broader public really feel any of these sentiments? Khalaf and Oren answer these questions in their works. Oren points to one of the missionaries, Samuel Zwemmer, who founded Princeton's Department of Near Eastern Studies. Students trained in this program would later go on to work at the State Department, and be known as the leading experts on the Middle East (Oren 287). Most missionaries, on their return to the United States, went into academia and founded many of the University departments which are revered as the best Middle Eastern Studies programs today (Khalaf 208). Travel writers, who could not withstand the hazardous conditions of the Middle East, often relied on the missionaries for shelter and stories. In this way, popular travel writing was fundamentally affected by missionaries' outlook and perspective. Khalaf points to a quotation by Edward Earle, who asserts, in 1927 that

For almost a century American public opinion concerning the
Near East was formed by missionaries. If American opinion had

been uninformed, misinformed and prejudiced, the missionaries are largely to blame. Interpreting history in terms of the advance of Christianity, they have given an inadequate, distorted, and occasionally grotesque picture of Moslems and Islam. While consciously preaching good-will, they sometimes have unconsciously sewed the seeds of misunderstanding. (105)

In these ways, the opinions and writings that have been referenced did actually fundamentally matter to the way that public opinion about the Middle East was shaped in the United States.

Conclusion

The United States' first impressions of the Levant region were defined by tensions between religion and empire. The United States, trying to negotiate its place next to imperial Europe, used Christianity to make its footprint in the Orient. The interactions between the indigenous people living in the region and the Americans were centered on Christianity and cultural imperialism. At first, the missionaries who arrived in the Orient had no especially negative feelings toward the Ottomans or toward Islam in general. Contradicting Said's statement that all Western interaction with the Orient has been predetermined by Islamaphobia, it seems that these early missionaries did not share this sentiment. It seems that Orientalism was not a force of total control over these missionaries. However, in a crisis situation, the structures of Orientalism reassert themselves and this disruption of Said's Orientalist paradigm is ended. The beginnings of aggression against the Ottoman Empire and increased US

military tensions with the Ottoman Empire will only become more relevant when people from the Levant begin to migrate to the United States.

CHAPTER II

Racial Formation of the First Wave of Syrian Immigrants to the United States

The first wave of Syrian immigration to the United States began in the 1880s, and continued steadily until the immigrant restriction quota system of 1924. While immigrants from Syria came to the United States in much smaller numbers in these years than other immigrant groups from Europe and Russia, their presence in the United States fueled debates about citizenship, race, and most significantly, whiteness. Until the Syrians' arrival, people in the United States could easily be grouped into four distinct racial categories: White, Native American, Black or African descent, and Asian. The influx of Syrians, along with Southeast Asians, Armenians, and Turks, presented a new problem for the "racial experts," who used and defended these categories. Not easily fitting within socially accepted and rigid racial lines, Syrian immigrants' presence in the United States made obvious the constructed nature of the racial classifications so sturdily upheld by the public. Because race did not exist as an organizational category in the Ottoman Empire, Syrian immigrants had to learn to navigate the complex racial hierarchy in the United States in ways that would most benefit them. The legal cases, newspaper editorials, and social activism that ensued showed the importance Syrians placed on claiming whiteness; they also reveal the systems of white supremacy both in the law and in popular discourse. The ambiguity of the judges, as well as the mixed results of the prerequisite cases that decided naturalization questions, reveal that Syrians, while legally placed in the white category, were never entirely socially placed within it. Thus, the attitudes of the general public and the purposeful assimilation of the Syrians

highlight the social effects of whiteness, and the lingering effects of being ambiguously classified racially.

Overview of Syrian Immigration to the United States

While there are some accounts of emigration from Syria to the United States starting as early as the 18th century, the first significant wave of Syrian immigration occurred in the 1880s. These immigrants came mostly from the Syrian province of the Ottoman Empire, which is present day Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. Ninety percent were Christian, and most of those Christians were Maronite, although people from the Melkite, Catholic, and Orthodox sects also emigrated (Kayyali 28). Those who were not Christian were primarily Sunni Muslim or Druze.

Reasons for Syrian emigration have been debated by many different historians, and no real consensus appears in the many books written on the subject. While some scholars contend that there were no significant push factors, others point to famine, fear of conscription by the Ottoman Army, and war (Kayyali 30). Regardless of the different and contested push factors, the pull factors that most authors discuss seem to be the same. American missionaries (See Chapter 1) made the United States into an accepting and promising land for Syrian Christians (Orfalea 50). As Kayyali writes, “[The missionaries] showed that the United States was friendly to Christians, and it must have been an easier decision for Christians to move to a land where they could be assured that they would not be persecuted for their religious beliefs” (29). The many different American schools and hospitals that the missionaries established no doubt presented the country as a palatable alternative for

the Christians of the region. Moreover, Syrians who returned after a sojourn in the United States would display their wealth, and talk about the opportunity, and lack of religious persecution, that existed in the United States. These stories inspired many young Syrians, mostly men, to leave their home to pursue their fortune in the United States. Like many other immigrants groups, most of these men and women thought they would come to the United States, and eventually move back to Syria. Indeed, many did return to Syria with accumulated wealth, but, like all other immigrant groups, many in fact stayed and settled in the United States.

The main occupation of these immigrants was pack peddling. Little Syria, or the area around Washington Street in lower Manhattan, became the center for pack peddlers before they went out to the suburbs. Once an immigrant arrived in Little Syria, he or she would be trained by a store owner, and then sent out to peddle (Orfalea 38). Peddling became the main source of income for both male and female Syrians (according to Kayyali 1/3 of the peddlers were in fact women) and was a main reason for the dispersion of the Syrian immigrants (Kayyali 38). Although peddling began in and around New York, Syrians moved, in a relatively short amount of time, to the Midwest and the South, where they often permanently stayed. People who began as peddlers usually evolved into store owners, and most Syrians eventually became some sort of small business owners (Orfalea 75). Pack peddling provided opportunities for Syrian dispersion and incorporation in the United States, an advantage Syrians would later use to gain acceptance to the white race.

While this narrative situates Syrians within US immigrant history, it hardly provides the complete picture of how Syrians fit into the United States' racial scheme.

Syrians immigrated at arguably the height of nativism and race-based science, an obstacle hardly discussed by any leading scholars on Arab American history. The popular narrative does not touch upon this fact at all. Most scholarly works concerning early Arab American history utilize the paradigm of incorporation, and offer a narrative of success through entrepreneurship and allegiance to American culture. Alexa Naff, one of the foundational authors on early Arab American history, uses this narrative as the basis for her work, Becoming American: the Early Arab American Experience (1993). Naff's main thesis, that Syrian immigrants were the "best assimilated" immigrants to the United States, is based on experiences that presuppose White American acceptance of Syrians. She writes that "all too commonly immigrants...have been portrayed as poor, landless, and oppressed peasants...this was not the case for Syrians" (106) She is focused on Syrian exceptionalism, spending most of her book discussing their mercantilist skills, and their educated backgrounds. Pack-peddling is her focus throughout the book, and her main explanation for Syrians' successful assimilation into American society at the turn of the twentieth century. She argues that pack peddling allowed Syrians to learn English, experience the country and its culture on a first-hand basis, and "spared the Syrians a ghetto mentality," all leading toward their assimilation into US society (Naff 29). When these immigrants did want to settle down, she argues, they did so by operating stores and "adhered to the cherished cultural ideal of being in business for oneself...failure was common but not daunting. They simply kept trying until they succeeded" (Naff 30-31). This eagerness to achieve, Naff argues, was an impetus to "neglect their cultural heritage" (35). The absence of a national pride, Naff asserts,

“was filled from the well of American myth and history...references to Arab or Syrian culture were as remote as their parents’ homeland” (35). She concludes that,

If the political events in the post-World War II Arab World had not reactivated Arab immigration and provoked the descendants of the first wave into an Arab identity, they might have assimilated themselves out of existence. (35)

While Naff certainly presents a historically accurate account of the Syrian immigrants’ experience, her presupposition of Syrian acceptance makes her argument dangerously congratulatory, and neglectful of the important racial construction that allowed for Syrian success. After reading Naff’s work, one might conclude that these Syrians simply worked hard and were frugal, and thus “almost assimilated out of existence.” However, this would not have been the case if Syrians were not legally and culturally accepted as white in the racial hierarchy of the United States. Indeed, if classified as Asian, Syrians would not have been allowed to own stores or property in California. The possibility of such a classification is not far-fetched, considering that even at the turn of the 20th century this region was considered within Asia. Although classified as culturally distinctive from East Asians, geographically they were viewed in a way that placed them in a category similar to those Asians who were excluded from citizenship. On the other hand, if Syrians were racially construed as black, which is conceivable considering the one-drop rule and Syria’s proximity to Africa and long histories of trade between the areas, these immigrants would not have been given the opportunity to intermarry with the white community. Intermarriage is one pattern that fostered Syrians to “assimilate out of existence.” Because Naff does not

mention any of these facts, she implicitly assumes that there is something expected or natural in their legal acceptance into whiteness and thus their assimilation to the dominant white society. Her neglect of whiteness speaks to its transparency: because Syrians were accepted as white, race subsequently lost its relevance and scholars were privileged not to deal with its legal consequences for the Syrian experience in the United States.

Naff's work laid the foundation for many other similar works about Syrian immigration to the United States which also largely ignore the issue of race. Gregory Orfalea, author of the critically acclaimed book The Arab Americans (2006), seems to fall into a similar line of argument. Orfalea writes a long and in depth narrative of the Arab American experience, beginning with theories of Phoenician inscriptions found in a cave in New Hampshire (43), through the different waves of immigration from the Middle East, and ending with the present situation of Arab Americans. In dealing with early Syrian immigrant experience in the United States, Orfalea only mentions Syrian racial classification on one page of his 464 page work. He cites one newspaper article questioning Syrians' racial classification, while also mentioning briefly an incident in 1923, when "a candidate for local office in Birmingham, Alabama, not only eschewed the Negro vote, but spat out 'The Greek and the Syrian should also be disqualified'" (Orfalea 77). Because of his neglect, Orfalea falls within the same intellectual paradigm as Naff: both authors write a history that is largely premised on the acceptance of Syrians into the white racial categorization.

The problem with this assumption is that it allows for the continuation of racial categories as somehow "natural." It also continues whiteness' transparency in

scholarship: in each case, assimilating into the United States is a notion coded with a racial meaning that is not directly addressed. Clearly, to these authors assimilation has meant assimilating to white American culture. However, because they do not address this, it leaves current Arab American racial ambiguities decontextualized. It also places blame on recent Arab or Middle Eastern immigrants. If these older immigrants were able to climb the social ladder and assimilate easily into U.S. culture, why can't the new ones? Ignoring race and how it was and is perceived overlooks a large part of identity formation in the United States. It is essential, then, to address the politics of whiteness and white racial superiority in the United States to fully understand the Arab American experience, and their process of Americanization. Further, Arab Americans' experience with whiteness reveals a good deal about whiteness as a category of inclusion and exclusion. While these works are beneficial in that they bring forth a history of Arab Americans long neglected by mainstream immigrant histories, their efforts to be included in the larger immigrant narrative allow them to neglect a perhaps more important part of American history, that is the plague of legal racial categorization and the social construction of whiteness.

Prerequisite Cases

Until 1952, American naturalization was only granted to immigrants who fit into the category of "free white persons" under the Naturalization Act of 1790, and later "free white persons and people of African descent," according to an 1873 resolution. As Suad Joseph argues, "citizenship entails sameness...full citizenship is that one is shaped to conform with a social unity" (Joseph 259). Thus in granting

citizenship to certain newly arrived groups, the United States government was accepting these groups as the “same” as the ideal citizen, the “free white person.” Because whiteness held legal, financial, and social benefits denied other racial categories, becoming a citizen under the white category was obviously important for any new immigrant to this country to achieve the wealth and status for which they had hoped when emigrating. However, the turn of the 20th century brought a wave of immigrants who did not fit neatly into predetermined categories. Grouping these immigrants not only brought up questions about their race, but about the fixedness and universality of racial categories in general. Being unable to transcend the concepts of race that had been put into place, the judges wrestled with the different definitions of race in order to fit these new immigrants into a category. The racial status of immigrants from Syria, India, and other non-European countries became a matter of public debate about race and national belonging. Syrians were no exception to these cases. In fact, five Syrian prerequisite cases went to court during this time. Three conclude that Syrians are white, and two conclude they are not, although one was later appealed and the opinion reversed. In these cases, the conclusions are as varied as the logic the judges use to decide them. These cases are important in that they give us a glimpse into how whiteness can be achieved by an immigrant group, and how whiteness works as a legal category.

The Syrian cases are especially interesting because of a strange pattern that emerges from the judges’ logic. In each case where the judge cites scientific evidence as his main reference and reason for his ruling, the Syrian candidate is ruled to be white. However, when the judge exclusively cites common knowledge, the candidate

is pronounced not white. In his work, White By Law, Haney-López argues that the contradictions between these two rationales, common knowledge and scientific evidence, created the debate over race as a biological reality or a social construct. He asserts that

In these terms, the Supreme Court's elevation of common knowledge as a legal meter of race convincingly demonstrates that racial categorization finds its origins in social patterns...Science's inability to confirm through empirical evidence the popular racial belief that held Syrians and Asian Indians to be non-whites should have led the courts to question whether race was a natural phenomenon. So deeply held was this belief, however, that instead of re-examining the nature of race, the courts began to disparage science. (Haney-López 6-7)

This assertion, which Haney-López goes on to build upon throughout his book, is critically important when it is applied to Syrian racialization in the United States. If, as Haney-López clearly shows, common knowledge rationales prevail, then Syrians found and find themselves in a structural limbo. While Syrians may have been given white privilege legally, they were not necessarily given it socially. From the beginning, then, there is a disconnect between Syrians' classification in the court room and in the larger public. In this way, legal whiteness did not become the marker of absolute inclusion, but rather a venue in which Syrians could work to socially include themselves in white society, and receive those social and legal benefits.

John Tehranian uses Haney-López's insight to suggest another important point about Middle Eastern racial categorization. In his work, "Compulsory

Whiteness: Towards a Middle Eastern Legal Scholarship,” John Tehranian argues that while racial testing was mainly done through competing theories of scientific evidence or common knowledge rationales,

courts often used a third, distinct test-performativity. Under this dramaturgical standard, courts determine race based on an applicant’s capacity to adopt the hallmarks...of whiteness. Thus, the courts’ racial determination cases frequently placed the potential for immigrants to assimilate within mainstream Anglo-American culture...on trial.

(Tehranian 8)

Tehranian’s point is remarkable because it displays performance as an important part of achieving whiteness. In this way, whiteness becomes a social construct that is not entirely transparent, as Haney-López argues, but that is a conscious choice made by those trying to assimilate, and a constant reason for exclusion by those with whom the others are trying to assimilate. Thus “passing” or “covering” becomes an action not simply for people of color, but for white people as well; understanding this changes the way we can perceive whiteness. And, because of Arabs’ precarious position within the white category, whiteness can be taken away as easily as it is granted. The cases below display the logic of the judges and the evolution of feeling towards the “appropriate” racial category of Syrians, which has a huge effect on their continued presence in the United States.

The first Syrian prerequisite case, *In Re Najour*, was brought to the court on December 1, 1909, in Georgia. From this first case, tensions and contradictions over the definition of whiteness surface and highlight the liminal state within which

Syrians find themselves. While the judge is unfaltering in his decision to grant naturalization to Najour, he does so solely on the ground of scientific evidence. He asserts that “this expression [white person] refers to race rather than to color, and fair and dark complexion should not be allowed to control, provided that the person seeking naturalization comes within the classification of the Caucasian race, and [he] considers the Syrians as belonging to what we recognize, and what the world recognizes as the white race” (“In re Najour” 1). This focus on scientific classification, and the notion of whiteness as race rather than skin tone, directly relates to the anti-Asian exclusionary patterns of whiteness. Indeed, drawing from *In re Ah Yup*, in which whiteness was defined as race and not skin, ‘scientific’ racial classifications were used to affirm that Asian people, although sharing the feature of pale skin with the Europeans, were not white. Inclusion of Syrians becomes a necessary step towards the larger exclusion of East Asians. However, even while basing its decision on scientific evidence, the court is not totally comfortable with including Syrians within the category of the white race. The prosecution’s main argument against granting Najour citizenship is “the fact that the applicant was born within the dominions of Turkey, and heretofore a subject of the Sultan of Turkey” (*In re Najour* 1). This argument is intriguing because it functions under a completely different rationale than the judge’s argument. That Najour’s political status would affect his racial classification leans towards a rationale that centers on ease of assimilation, and political ideology. This paradigm is completely different from that within which the judge functions. The judge uses science as a determinant, and places whiteness in stark contrast with “Asian, African, and Mongolian.” The prosecutor, in

contrast, views whiteness as a concept rather than a science, one that can have exclusionary powers much more complex and nuanced than those the judge presents. This is the beginning of the trend that we will see within the racial classification cases of Syrians: while they are repeatedly included in the “Caucasian race,” they are not always included in whiteness.

On January 10, 1910, in Lowell, Massachusetts, *In re Mudarri*, the next Syrian naturalization case, reached a circuit court. Although the judge to whom Mudarri petitioned for naturalization did grant him citizenship, the judge’s remarks are anything but generous, and illustrate the court’s hesitancy about granting whiteness to Mr. Mudarri. First, the judge’s decision focuses on the legality and ethics of the proceedings, rather than the outcome granted to Mudarri. This neglect of the main issue emphasizes his frustration with the inadequacy of the laws written to deal with these racial prerequisite cases. In his written opinion the judge begins with a discussion of the Naturalization Act of 1906:

Provides that the United States shall have the right to appear to cross-examine the petitioner and the witnesses produced in support of his naturalization petition concerning any matter affecting his right admission to citizenship, and may call witnesses, produce evidence, and be heard in opposition by the United States. *Held* that the court will ordinarily admit a petitioner to citizenship in the absence of declared opposition by the United States attorney to specify his objections and to support the same by argument. (“*In re Mudarri*” 2)

The judge goes on to say that because “the court is informed and understands that, by virtue of this section just quoted and of the instructions thereupon issued by the Bureau of Naturalization, the United States attorney has made careful inquiry concerning the admissibility of the petitioner in the case at bar...” (“In re Mudarri” 1). The judge’s recognition and announcement of this act serves two roles. First, the judge rules that the issue is not in whether the applicant is white or not, but whether the state chooses to rebuke this petition for naturalization. That “the court ordinarily admit[s] a petitioner to citizenship in the absence of declared opposition,” highlights that whiteness is not created through inclusion, but rather through exclusion. After implicitly stating this point, the judge then makes it known to the court. In his decision, the judge writes that “when this position [the recognition of Naturalization Act of 1906] had been explained to the United States attorney, he promptly and properly announced that the United States opposed the naturalization of the petitioner on the ground that he was not a free white person....” The judge then explicitly told the attorney that he needed to argue against the petitioner, or else he would be granted citizenship. The judge writes that “no more than any other litigant can the United States be permitted to put the court to an independent investigation of law or fact, without announcing its own contention in the matter” (“In re Mudarri” 2) Thus, whiteness, or lack-thereof becomes something which is not concrete or “scientific,” but which needs an attorney to display to the judge the common perception and knowledge about it. In the judge’s request for the full use of a U.S. attorney, it seems he calls for the use of common knowledge to decide the case.

The judge's decision, however, is made according to the scientific rationale of his time. He writes that

The older writers on ethnology are substantially agreed that Syrians are to be classified as of the Caucasian or white race. Modern writers on ethnology, who have departed from the ancient classifications, are not agreed in substituting any other which can be applied under section 2169 [the Naturalization Act which prohibited citizenship to all except free white people or people of African descent]. ("In re Mudarri" 2)

In writing this, the judge implies that the old scientific classifications may not apply in this case, but because new science lacks cohesive and universal classification, he must use the old science. The judge does so begrudgingly. He writes that "to make naturalization depend on this classification is to make an important result depend upon the application of an abandoned theory..." ("In re Mudarri" 2) Moreover, he asserts that "hardly anyone classifies any human race as white, and none can be applied under section 2169 without making distinctions which congress certainly did not intend to draw; e.g., a distinction between the inhabitants of different parts of France" ("In re Mudarri" 2). Thus, modern theories are also useless because they differentiate people in ways that were not useful for the court. Here, we see the emerging frustrations between theory and common knowledge. While the judge does grant Mudarri naturalization, because of an "abandoned theory," he is nevertheless implicitly writing that he does not think that Mudarri does classify as white. He hopes

that “an amendment of the statutes will make quite clear the meaning of the word ‘white’ in section 2169” (“In Re Mudarri” 2).

The judge’s opinion is significant because of his clear frustration with his own decision. Through cajoling the attorney to prepare a proper prosecution and his statements about the “old abandoned theories,” the judge displays his dissatisfaction with the laws that he is confined to work within, and yearns for other ones. This seems to fall in line with Haney-López’s analysis of the transition from scientific evidence to a common knowledge rationale. It seems from an analysis of his decision, that although the judge grants Mudarri citizenship, he doesn’t think he fits under common understandings of whiteness.

The next racial prerequisite case involving a Syrian appears in the courts in July 1910 in Oregon. The applicant, Tom Ellis, was granted citizenship by the court, but the judge’s opinion again clearly displays ambivalence in his own understanding of “whiteness.” As in In re Mudarri, this judge questions the definition of a white person and, although he acknowledges the ambiguous racial status of Syrians, ultimately the judge relies on scientific evidence to support his ruling.

Judge Wolverton first comments that Ellis is a “Turkish subject...is a Syrian, a native of the province of Palestine and Maronite” (“In re Ellis” 1). His Christianity is made explicit in the first sentence. After stating where Ellis originates geographically, Wolverton asserts that “ethnologically, he is of Semitic Stock, a markedly white type of race.” He cites Brinton’s Races and Peoples, Keane’s World’s People, and Deniker’s Races of Man, and asserts that “from these references, it is admitted by the United States Attorney that the applicant “is a member of what is

known as the white or Caucasian race” (“In re Ellis” 1) In this way, the judge easily asserts that Ellis falls in line with the scientific classification of “white,” and thus would be admitted to citizenship with “no contention...made by the naturalization officers” (“In re Ellis” 1) This would be the end of the judge’s opinion, were the case simply about scientific racial classification. Like the judge presiding over Mudarri’s case, Wolverton spends the next half of his decision discussing the different definitions of whiteness and the tensions between whiteness as a scientific category, and the definition of whiteness as a social construct.

The argument used against Ellis is centered on the concept of ease of assimilation as being the way toward a racial classification of whiteness. Indeed, the attorney representing the United States argued that

free white person’ as used in section 2169...were intended to include only those peoples of the white race who, at the time of the formation of the government, lived in Europe and were inured to European governmental institutions, or upon the American continent, and comprehended such only of the whites races who, from tradition, teaching, and environment would be predisposed toward our form of government and thus readily assimilate with people of the United States. (“In re Ellis” 1)

This argument presents again the tensions between their reliance on racial classification as a social construct, and racial classification as a scientific reality. The attorney clearly argues that “teaching, tradition, and environment,” all socially constructed, are the way in which race was meant to be seen in the US context.

Because Ellis is an Ottoman subject, and thus not “inured to European governmental institutions,” Ellis is not white and thus should not be considered for citizenship. The attorney cites two cases with legal precedent for this logic, *In re Camille* and *In re Balsara*. In the case of *Camille*, the judge rules against his petition for naturalization because his mother is Indian. The judge asserts that “free white person” was meant for Europeans, and not simply Aryans (“*In Re Camille*” 1). The judge’s opinion in *In re Balsara*, although ultimately ruling for his admission, expresses serious problems with granting whiteness to non-Europeans. Although he does so in the case of *Balsara* because “he is a gentleman of high character and exceptional intelligence,” the judge worries that the acceptance of *Balsara*, a South Asian man, may lead to the acceptance of “Afghans, Hindoos, Arabs, and Berbers” (“*In Re Balsara*” 1).¹

Wolverton refutes this argument by claiming that the “word ‘white’ was employed to distinguish between the white, the African, and the Mongolian races (and shows legal precedent through *In re Ah Yup*.) Thus, the judge reaffirms the continuing tensions between different ways to define whiteness. Because whiteness, and, as many scholars argue, the prerequisite cases in general, functioned as an exclusionary method aimed at Asian people, relating “whiteness” to being “Caucasian” was essential. If whiteness could be defined through means other than the classification of the Caucasian race, then the argument for Asian inclusion could be made. Indeed, whiteness could not be based on skin tone, but rather on antiquated

¹ The judge’s use of the term Arab in *Balsara*’s case is the first and last time I have seen it used in prerequisite cases until the 1940s. The use of the word Arab is incredibly significant because the word never appears in the cases concerning the early Syrians. It may be posited, then, that in the judge’s minds these early Syrians were not Arab, and the term “Arab” may have been a religious indicator. I would like to further investigate this use of terms at a different time.

ethnic classifications. Thus, Judge Wolverton asserts that Syrians are indeed white because they are classified within the Caucasian race.

The judge ends his opinion with the assertion that “if there be ambiguity and doubt, it is better to resolve that doubt in favor of the Caucasian possessed of the highest qualities which go to make an excellent citizen...” He also writes that “[Ellis] was reared a Catholic, and is still of faith” (“In re Ellis” 1). With this phrase, the judge displays his system of priorities in regard to whiteness. While whiteness seems to be predominantly based on the scientific classifications of the day, the judge’s decision is legitimized by his assertion that the applicant has “good morals, [is] sober and industrious...and is well disposed toward the government” and is “still of faith” (“In re Ellis” 1). This double rationale for granting Mr. Ellis citizenship again puts Syrians in a precarious racial state, and highlights the complex exclusionary patterns of whiteness.

The next case presented to courts, *Ex Parte Shahid* (1913) involves the first Syrian to be denied naturalization by the courts, and also the first Syrian naturalization case to employ common knowledge as the rationale that the judge primarily uses. The case, brought to court in South Carolina, is fascinating because of the judge’s total disregard for all legal precedent, and his absolute contradiction of previous judicial opinion on any naturalization case. This judge uses a logic that is explicitly refuted by previous judges in order to deny Shahid citizenship: he asserts that “white” does not refer to Caucasian, but rather to European.

The judge openly acknowledges that “the language of the statute is about as open to many constructions as it could possibly be” (“*Ex Parte Shahid*” 1). By stating

this, the judge legitimizes his disregard for legal precedent, and confidently begins to contemplate the meaning of whiteness as written in the statute. He begins by posing simple questions:

would the children of Chinese parents, for instance... because born in Africa, be of African nativity?...If the son of an African man by a Chinese woman is entitled to admission by reason of African descent, would the great-great-grandson of an African, although one whose immediate ancestors were Chinese, and who had lived in China, be entitled to admission by reason of the infinitesimal portion of negro blood in him? Then, what is white? (“Ex Parte Shahid” 2)

The order of his questions presents the interesting paradigm within which he understands whiteness. First, he questions geography. Then, he questions the one-drop rule as a reason for a formerly excluded race to gain citizenship in the United States. Again, we see Chinese identification functioning as the “other” to citizenship, and blackness functioning as the “other” to whiteness. However, like African nativity, whiteness cannot be constructed using seemingly steadfast rules. Thus by problematizing the seemingly easier concept of African nativity, the judge allows space for a redefinition of whiteness.

The judge asserts that past cases on race are “as unsatisfactory as they are varying” (“Ex Parte Shahid” 2). Through this generalization, the judge allows himself to ignore legal precedent and argues that

the meaning of a free white person is to be such as would naturally have been given to it when used in the first naturalization act of

1790...it would mean by the term free white person' all persons belonging to the European races. It would not mean a "Caucasian" race; a term generally employed only after the date of the statute and in most loose and indefinite ways. ("Ex parte Shahid" 3)

Using this definition, the judge may discount Syrians as white, because they are "Caucasian," not white. This is the first prerequisite case which makes this distinction. This shift in rationale is extremely significant. By no longer pretending to be scientific, the judge focuses on thinking about how the people who created the statute would have historically looked at the concept of whiteness. Thus whiteness becomes a historical phenomenon. In this way, no scientific evidence would prove or disprove whiteness because it is not scientific, but historical. And its historical significance is not site-specific, but rather the existence of a common understanding or common knowledge within a defined group of people. Thus, whiteness becomes a set of rules, laid out by people in 1790, which must be applied at the time of this hearing. And unlike science, these rules cannot be explained, only abided by. As the judge writes, "this may not, ethnologically or physiologically speaking, be a very clear and logical construction...at that date all Europeans were commonly classed as the white race, and the term 'white person' in the statute then enacted must be construed accordingly" ("Ex Parte Shahid" 3). What is important is not what *is* white, but what society *believed to be* white. Because the importance is placed on collective perception, whiteness becomes explicitly a construction of society and history, and loses any scientific validity. And without the "science," Syrians are unmistakably non-white.

Another critical aspect of this judge's decision is his emphasis on the applicant's poor qualities. Drawing from the judge's remarks, Faras Shahid is far from the ideal citizen:

[He is a] Syrian who could neither read nor write English, and spoke and understood English very imperfectly, had no understanding of the manner and methods of the government in America, or the responsibilities of the citizen...he desires to be naturalized so as to bring [his wife and kids] over to this country. ("Ex parte Shahid" 1)

This description seems like the classic nightmare of most turn-of-the-century nativists. It seems too, that this perception of Shahid colors the judge's decision of how to look at his race. While he contends that the first question is whether a citizen is eligible for citizenship ("Ex parte Shahid" 1), he later reveals that

in the present case the applicant is not one the admission of whom to citizenship is likely to be for the benefit of the country and in favor of whom the court should exercise its power of discretion given under the statute and in view of the great uncertainties resulting from the language of the statute, and the unsatisfactory reasoning of most of the decisions, the court, without determining the general question of admissibility, will rest its conclusion that the present applicant should not be admitted upon his own personal is qualifications. ("Ex Parte Shahid" 4)

From this paragraph, it seems evident that the judge is basing his classification rationale on the fact that Shahid's personal qualities are not suitable for citizenship.

Because Shahid would not make a good citizen, the court “uses its discretion” to rationalize why he is not white. Leaving whiteness so open to interpretation by the law allows these judges to use their own discretion, and thus define whiteness in a way that is suitable for that moment. This case reveals the way whiteness functions as a commodity: it can be given and taken away freely and with no real explanation. In other cases, Syrians were always granted citizenship, and as an addendum recognized as people who would be good citizens. However, Shahid is first recognized as a bad potential citizen, and then is identified as non-white. This reversed order, although seemingly insignificant, enforces a larger theme throughout these cases: the whiteness that is being rationalized is made manifest by other evidence. Whiteness exists as a source of inclusion or exclusion, and the tensions that are built around the fragile inclusion and exclusion cause Syrians to be perpetually in a state of limbo.

The next case concerning Syrian naturalization heard by a court is the controversial Dow case. Brought to court originally in 1914, this case was appealed twice until Dow was finally naturalized. This case is important because of the way it united the Syrian community, and created open dialogue in public arenas about Syrian racial classification. After Dow was first denied citizenship, the Syrian community began a formal letter-writing and petitioning campaign that was centered on their claim to whiteness (Naff 47). While this will be discussed in greater detail later, it is important to remember that the Dow case would never have been seen in a court again were it not for the mobilization efforts of the Syrian community, and their fear that if Dow was not granted citizenship, they all might lose their favorable status in the United States.

When first presented to the courts, Dow was not granted citizenship, on the basis that he was not white, and thus did not fit within the legal category of citizenship. The judge uses an argument similar to the one employed in Shahid's case, and argues that while Syrians may be placed in the Caucasian category, this alone does not grant them the status of white. Although the judge writes that "apparently from his intelligence and degree of information of a general character be entitled to naturalization," he still refuses to allow Dow to be naturalized. The rationale behind this refusal is similar to that of the Shahid case; however, Dow's better qualifications make the denial of citizenship to him even more shocking. While the judge in Shahid's case asserts that Shahid was denied because of educational disqualifications and not solely racial disqualifications, the judge in the Dow case still uses the logic which the judge in the Shahid case employed to bar Shahid from citizenship. Thus, while Shahid would have been denied citizenship on bases other than race, racial logic was still shifted in his case to prove that he was not white. Judge Smith, the judge in the Dow case, may have written that the Shahid case would not become legal precedent but he certainly seems to follow that Smith's opinion closely ("Ex Parte Dow" 1). The judicial reasoning by the judge in the Shahid case seemingly had enough of an effect on the judge in the Dow case to aid him in creating his own reasons for denying Dow citizenship, despite his fitness.

Because Dow is fit for citizenship in all other categories, Judge Smith asserts that the case is exclusively about his fit for legal classification as white. After this statement, the judge poses three questions about the facets of classifying whiteness: color, language, and geography. Like many judges before him, Smith easily

concludes that race is not color. As he moves on to the next question, he makes some interesting assertions about race not previously discussed by other judges. When he asks “if white is racial,” he supposes that, “If racial, is any one entitled to be admitted who belongs to a nation that speaks one of the languages spoken by the peoples heretofore denominated Caucasian, whether or not his color be the very reverse of white?” (“Ex Parte Dow” 2). Thus race becomes an insufficient category because it can be defined culturally, as with language. According to this judge, to be defined as Caucasian means speaking an Indo-European language. This rationale,

would mean the admission of all the mixed Asiatic races which speak a tongue the descendant of one of the so-called Indo-European tongues... The dark colored, in fact, almost black, inhabitants of Ceylon, speak the Sinhalese language, which is one of the dialects of that branch of the ancient Indo-European language known as Sanscrit... (“Ex Parte Dow” 2)

In the judge’s opinion, then, using Caucasian to signify whiteness would lead to the inclusion of peoples increasingly closer to Asian, a people explicitly excluded from the white category. The judge’s logic points out his racial anxiety. Instead of focusing on Syrians and their racial classification, this judge ponders the larger consequences of any rationale he uses. Thus, this classification case does not solely concern Dow, or even Syrians, but focuses its concerns on the larger ramifications of Syrian racial classification. Thus, for fear of inclusion, the judge decides that scientific category does not determine whiteness.

The assertion that Caucasian does not signify whiteness diverges from most of the preceding cases, especially the cases concerning Syrians. Significantly, the judge, in defense of his decision to discredit Caucasian as an appropriate legal category, states that

Such a racial definition is very difficult, to say the least, of enforcement; for, as I have stated above, it is based upon a construction which would exclude some people generally known and termed as white, and include those who have been always considered as not forming a part of the white race. (“Ex Parte Dow” 7)

In this statement, the judge asserts that the category of Caucasian is a construction. While previously held as scientific fact, Caucasian becomes a construction that is no longer relevant to the judge; and, because he is in a position of authority, the judge is able to discard the merit of the term Caucasian, and exchange it for a different construction of whiteness which fits more appropriately into his understanding of the category. Thus, Caucasian no longer means white.

With Caucasian no longer a legitimate category of analysis, the judge begins to think about geography as a more appropriate category to define whiteness. The judge argues that, at the time the statute was written, white was used to classify exclusively people from Europe. If this method is to be used for classification, then “the statute becomes one judicially speaking plain, understandable by the multitude as well as by the learned, and not difficult of enforcement.” (“Ex Parte Dow” 3). Thus shifting classification of whiteness from the “scientific” category of Caucasian to the geographic category of European, makes whiteness more accessible, and thus more

precise. That the preciseness of whiteness, and the legitimacy of the category, should depend on its accessibility is clear indication of the category's shift from scientific to common knowledge.

This was not the last time the courts heard from Dow. On April 15 of the same year, after a great deal of organizing and petitioning by the Syrian community living in the United States, Dow was reheard at the District Court in South Carolina. The rehearing is incredibly interesting not only because of the racial logic that is employed, but also because of the response by the Syrian community after the initial ruling in the Dow case. "At the insistence of the applicant and other Syrians interested," the judge writes, "a rehearing was granted in this case" ("In re Dow" 1). Moreover, the Syrian community actually presented at the case an argument in addition to Dow's argument. It is clear from the case that Dow's denial of naturalization deeply troubled the Syrian community. Foreseeing that this ruling could possibly change Syrians' place within the white category, the community organized and presented their case for Dow's whiteness.

The reaction of the Syrian community to the verdict in Dow's first case clearly reveals the social importance placed on whiteness. "The humiliation inflicted upon, and mortification suffered by, Syrians in America by the previous decree in this matter which they construe as deciding they do not...belong to the 'white race'" was the main reaction from the Syrians which prompted them to organize and get the trial reheard in court ("In re Dow" 1). That being labeled "not white" caused the Syrians "humiliation" and "mortification" displays that the Syrians were very much in tune with the racial politics in the United States at the time, and knew that whiteness was a

privileged position. In her doctoral dissertation, Making the Mahjar Home: The Construction of Syrian Ethnicity in the United States, 1870-1930, Sarah Gualtieri explains that “there was something compelling, even alluring about whiteness that was beyond the strategic and the practical...” (Gualtieri “Making the Mahjar Home” 135-136) She evokes W.E.B Dubois and calls this the “‘wages of whiteness’—the psychological compensation of being “not black” in a racist, exploitative society” (136). That this hearing even took place is an indication of the profound effect that granting whiteness, and conversely, withholding whiteness, had on a community.

At the hearing, representatives of the Syrian community presented five points, on which the judge bases his argument surrounding Dow’s eligibility for naturalization. They argue for the Dow case to be reversed on the following grounds:

- (1) That the term “white persons” in the statute means persons of the “Caucasian race” and not persons white in color.
- (2) That he is a Semite or a member of one of the Semitic nations.
- (3) That the Semitic nations are all members of the “Caucasian” or white races.
- (4) That the matter has been settled in their favor as the European Jews have been adopted without question since the passage of the statute and that the Jews are one of the Semitic peoples.
- (5) That the history and position of the Syrians, their connection through all time with the peoples to whom the Jewish and Christian peoples owe their religion, make it inconceivable that the statute could

have intended to exclude them. (Gualtieri “Making the Mahjar Home”
52)

In these five points, the Syrians use a number of different tactics to try to justify their place in the white racial category. First, they use the scientific category of Caucasian to prove their fit within the white race. They go into further detail by asserting that Syrians are Semitic, and thus a subset of Caucasian. In citing the example of European Jews, the Syrian representatives are using the triumph of another marginalized group to aid their request. They are trying to organize rules about this game of racial politics. The fifth point, however, is possibly the most revealing facet of Syrians’ advocacy for inclusion in the white racial category. Christianity becomes a form of inclusion. The inclusion of Christianity is particularly interesting when compared to the preceding cases. In the case *In re Najour*, Christianity is not mentioned at all. It is only mentioned in passing in *In re Mudarri* and *Ex parte Shahid*. In *Ellis*’ case, however, Christianity is a central part of the discussion. Viewing the cases chronologically, Christianity evolves to be considered part of the discussion of race by both the judges and the applicants. It seems that as judges start to employ common knowledge rationales in their decisions, religion becomes a more compelling argument for naturalization. Syrians’ consciousness about the racial significance of their own Christianity is a subject I will discuss later; nevertheless, it is essential not to disregard this point as a crucial argument for the Syrians in that court.

Considering the points the Syrian representatives present, the Judge begins again to discuss what exactly defines “white person.” Like almost all other cases, he first concludes that race is not, and cannot be defined by color. After this assessment,

he goes on to discuss the idea of whiteness as a racial category synonymous with Caucasian. He refutes this notion, and goes on for three pages deconstructing the category “Caucasian.” The judge makes it clear that the category of Caucasian is not scientific fact, but rather, “of all old myths that have arisen in the scientific world, the ‘Caucasian mystery’ invented quite innocently by Blumenbach is the oldest...a strange intellectual hocus-pocus” (“In re Dow” 3). He asserts that Caucasian only became a popular means of categorizing individuals when “a large number of persons of a black complexioned race were held as slaves, and one of the justifications advanced was that they did not belong to the superior race which was styled Caucasian supposing that the term referred to white” (“In re Dow” 3). In his argument, Judge Smith makes an incredibly important point about the growing dissatisfaction with the term “Caucasian.” While it proved useful in justifying slavery when black and white were two easily distinguishable categories in the United States, it does not prove useful in justifying exclusion at a time when the United States sees a proliferation of people who do not fit within its previously clearly defined racial paradigm. Thus “Caucasian” is disregarded because it lost its use as an exclusionary category.

After the judge critiques the category of Caucasian, he goes on to use racial science to further illustrate that the peoples of Syrians are not necessarily Caucasian. Even though it is part of “scientific myth,” the Judge asserts that Syrians “are generally supposed to have been a non-Semitic, possibly Mongolian race” (“In re Dow” 5). He then exhaustively accounts for the many different tribes and histories of people who have at some point inhabited greater Syria. This is significant because his

description goes so radically against white southern sensibilities about race mixing. It seems that his description serves as a tactic to subtextually underline the foreignness and mixed-ness of the people of Syria. Unlike the “pure white” people of the South, people in Syria had gone through so many different years of conquest and empire that one cannot even tell from which race they come.

In addressing Christianity, the judge asserts that the court is secular. However, after this remark, the judge goes on to point out that even if they were not secular, there is no evidence that the people who live in modern-day Syria are of the same race as those who lived there 2000 years ago (“In re Dow” 7). That he mentions this fact seems to imply that religion and race are still connected in the judge’s mind. With this assertion, the judge conflates religion and race. In the same breath, he disconnects religion and race by stating that the court is secular, yet connects them by clarifying the race of the first Christians. Although the judge may say they are different, his train of thought implies otherwise.

The final argument of the judge utilizes the shift from scientific evidence to a common knowledge rationale. The judge again construes “congressional intent,” and argues that

The United States has been settled by European peoples. They were in 1790 a busy, occupied, hardworking people with very few libraries, few colleges, and not many schools...All the world was foreign, unknown, and black to him except the American Indian (who he counted as almost a vermin) and the inhabitants of Europe, from

whence he or his fathers came. He neither expected nor desired immigrants from any other quarter. (“In re Dow” 8)

Thus, whiteness becomes a category fixed with the parameters of ignorance. Unlike earlier cases, where the white racial category was to be investigated, this judge asserts that it is a category which should be understood through what we don’t know. Thus common knowledge becomes the *modus operandi*, and Syrians are excluded.

The Dow case appears in front of the court one more time. This time, a year later on September 14, 1915, the case is reversed. The court opinion is remarkably short (only 3 pages) and goes against everything that was said in the other cases. This judge concludes that “in not mentioning the people of Europe, and in extending the privilege of naturalization to any “free white person,” it seems reasonable to think that the Congress must have believed that there were white persons natives of countries outside of Europe. The writers on the subject of that day...were not agreed in the view that Europeans were the only white people” (“Dow vs. United States” 3). He then asserts that “[the Syrians] belong to the Semitic branch of the Caucasian race...” (“Dow vs. United States 3) Thus in one fell swoop, this judge reverts back to scientific evidence to understand racial classification for naturalization. Indeed, the battle between scientific evidence and common knowledge was being fought out over the body of the Syrian.

These racial prerequisite cases clearly display that Syrians’ acceptance into the white racial classification was not by accident, nor was it implicit or seemingly obvious. In a period of intense nativism, and competing ideologies about race and racial classification, Syrians were put into the white category using ideas that were

not widely accepted as fact. Thus, while Syrians were put into the white racial category, they were not guaranteed to be socially accepted as white. As John Tehranian writes in “Compulsory Whiteness: Towards a Middle Eastern Legal Scholarship,” “the court acknowledged a clear rift between popular understanding and technical definitions—a tension that continues to survive in our modern treatment of Middle Easterners today” (Tehranian 11). He argues that this rift forced judges to focus their analysis “almost exclusively on assimilability, tacitly conflating (as the government position did) the performance of whiteness with the privilege of whiteness” (9). Using Tehranian’s notion of the conflation of white performance with the privilege of whiteness, I examine the different organizations and newspapers that advocated Syrians’ place within the white racial category. If the whiteness of Middle Easterners is and was a performance, then it is critical to look at the elements that were in place at the turn of the century that perhaps enabled a more convincing performance than Middle Easterners give now. Christianity, their own organizing/advocacy groups, and also their place within the Ottoman Empire allowed for Syrians of that time period to perform whiteness in a way that facilitated their assimilation into the white mainstream as they are not able to today.

Syrian Advocacy for Whiteness

Syrians in the United States were extremely self-conscious about their Americanization and assimilation. The Syrian community was very active in publishing periodicals, and put out no less than twenty different Arabic-language newspapers. These newspapers played a critical role in the Syrian community, and

were full of articles about assimilation to the United States; they kept a close account of the racial prerequisite proceedings (Gualtieri “Making the Mahjar Home” 163). Moreover, newspapers were a place of lively debate about Syrians’ place within the United States racial scheme.

During the Dow case, articles were published in the popular Arabic-language newspaper Al-Hoda which appealed to the larger Syrian community to continue a letter writing campaign on behalf of Dow. Drawing from Sarah Gualtieri’s translation, the article states that “We [the Syrian community] have found ourselves at the center of an attack on the Syrian honor...” and concludes that Syrians could become “no better than blacks and Mongolians. Rather, blacks will have rights that the Syrian does not have” (Gualtieri “Making the Mahjar Home” 165). Thus, newspapers became a key place for Syrians to communicate about their place within the U.S. racial scheme, and also a place to organize around the racial classification cases. Also published by Al-Hoda was a book written by Kalil Bishara, The Origin of the Modern Syrian. The book, written in both English and Arabic, was written with the goal to “set forth with a fairly high degree of precision, the evidence conducive to the determination of the racial identity of the modern Syrian” (Bishara 1).

Newspapers were not only used within the Syrian community, but also as a means for the Syrian community to address the larger American public. Many different people wrote articles and letters-to-the-editors commenting on the Syrian prerequisite cases. An editorial written in the New York Times, entitled “Is the Turk a White Man?” garnered two letters-to-the-editor written by S. A. Mokarzel, editor of the Syrian World, and brother of Noam Mokarzel, editor of Al-Hoda. The article

addressed the racial composition of Turks. The editorial writer assumes that all those under Ottoman rule are Turks, a presumption vigorously refuted by the Mokarzel brothers. S.A. Mokarzel writes that the assumption that all people under Ottoman rule are Turks is hurtful to Syrians because Syrians, unlike Turks, are actually white. In the other editorial, Naom Mokarzel advocates for white racial classification for Syrians. He uses the argument of Caucasian classification, but also writes about the oppression of the Ottoman Empire. He writes that

those who do migrate and settle [in the United States] are none other than Turkish subjects of different nationalities who have, through a succession of many centuries and in the face of the severest oppression clung to and kept alive their national characteristics, religion, and languages, and who, driven by that same oppression, have sought refuge in a free and hospitable country. (“Turkish Subjects feel Discrimination” par. 5)

Mokarzel utilizes two key points to win over readers. Less important are the specifics of Syrian racial categorization, and more important is the indulgence in the narrative of Turks, and Muslims, oppressing the Christian Syrian minority. These two themes will become important in the way that Syrians would be understood in US society, and would ultimately help them gain their acceptance, however precarious, into the white racial classification.

That these Syrians were Christian cannot be overstated or overestimated as a huge factor in their later acceptance into the white racial category. While early cases did not emphasize religion as a large factor in the judge’s decision, it was largely at

play in both the Dow and the Ellis cases. As Syrian naturalization was repeatedly litigated, the larger Syrian community used Christianity as one of its basic tactics to gain legitimacy as part of the “white race.” In an article written for the Birmingham Herald in 1907 by H.A. El-khourie (literally meaning “the priest” in Arabic) argues for Syrian inclusion into the white race on the basis of religion. Syrians were from the land of Jesus, and they were also Christian, thus they should be included in the white race (Orfalea 157). Furthermore, the Ottoman Empire’s organizational system was based on religion, not race. Syrians then understood the paradigm of race through their experience with the strict religious categorization of the Ottoman Empire. Because they, like white America, were Christian, they should be included in the white racial category. In The Arab Americans (2006), Randa Kayyalli points to another legal case involving Syrians which directly addresses religion as a key factor in their inclusion in the white race. In the court hearings, the defendant explained that, “If I am Mongolian, then so is Jesus, because we came from the same land” (Kayyalli 49). In this way, association with Christianity was clearly used as a way to include themselves in the white mainstream community.

Anti-Ottoman sentiment was also a way in which Syrians were able to assimilate into the United States, and a way to distance themselves from their Turkish, and thus non-white, “oppressors.” Sarah Gualtieri’s work broadly explores the way in which Syrian nationalism developed among émigrés in the United States. Her central argument is that debates over Syrian identity in the United States helped develop the Syrian national movement which would erupt twenty years later in the Middle East. She argues that “Syrian immigrants posed and answered questions in

newspapers, coffee shops, courtrooms, and kitchens in an effort to understand how their lives were at once similar and different in America. Syrian immigrants thus became involved in a process of selection, adaptation, and acculturation and, in each case, new self-understanding developed out of the interplay of homeland and migratory identities” (Gualtieri 21). Nowhere is this more evident than in the newspapers of the time. The Arabic language newspapers were a place of contentious debates over citizenship and belonging. But the common sentiment expressed in the newspapers was a growing anti-Ottoman sentiment, and Syrian sense of exceptionalism. During this period, people in Mount Lebanon began putting forth ideologies of difference-stressing their Phoenician roots and claiming separate identity from the other people residing in Syria, Jordan and Palestine. Al-Hoda, the most popular Arabic language newspaper of the time, was published by Naom Mokarzel, a vehement Lebanese nationalist (as some started to be called) who opposed the Ottoman Empire, and identified Lebanese as distinct from other Arab groups (Suleiman 3). He was actively involved in the Americanization process, publishing articles in his newspaper that linked Americanization to success, while also involved in a strong critique of the Ottoman Empire (Naff 33). He wrote that “Al-Hoda remains a loyal servant to the Maronite sect and nation,” and worked to create a strong Maronite voice within the Syrian community in the United States (Suleiman 2). In this way, feelings of Syrian Nationalism and Americanization complemented each other, and allowed for the Syrian community to use their new “Syrianness” to aid in their Americanization. And Americanization, in their eyes, meant inclusion in the white race. While certainly these sentiments were not shared

across the entire Syrian community, and while there is documented much debate between different sects about their role within America and the Ottoman Empire, the amount of anti-Ottoman sentiment voiced in the larger newspapers is significant in understanding how American identities, and whiteness, began to manifest themselves in the Syrian community.

The anti-Ottoman sentiment was something on which both Syrian immigrants and the larger U.S. community could agree. Indeed, as the United States approached World War I, the Ottoman Empire became more and more vilified, and Turks were seen as a threat to the world, and to their own subjects. Again, newspaper articles paint a clear picture of the type of hatred and distrust that was growing towards Turks in the United States. An article published in 1909, “After the Great Massacre: Why European Governments have viewed Moslem Barbarity without Protest and why America may Speak for Christendom” in the New York Times, the same themes of American exceptionalism and Christian identity become apparent. As with the United States’ role during the missionary presence in the Middle East, the United States viewed Europe as ineffective, and viewed themselves as the allies and helpers of the oppressed Christians who live under the “oppressive Moslem Empire.” Interestingly, the article also differentiates the “wild Arabs” of the region from the “educated Christians of Mount Lebanon.” This article, and the language of oppressed Christians as being distinct from Arabs, was part of the standard discourse of newspapers writing about the Ottoman Empire at the time (Creelman 1). In general, the articles don’t conflate the Ottomans and their subjects, but rather clearly differentiate between them, and in fact largely sympathize with the subjects. The Ottomans, because they

are Muslims, are despised: “Mohammed’s religion is militant: the Ottoman Empire is reared on Mohhamed’s code; a code that postulates the existence of subjugated nations of unbelievers who pay tribute.” These, unbelievers, or Christians, “with a genius in trade will be protected in their trade, the warlike Moslems will be forced to abandon their government by massacres.” Thus a clear distinction is being drawn by the press between the “warlike” Muslim rulers, and the “genius” Christian subjects. Especially with the onset of the Armenian genocide, the New York Times seems to have increasingly separated Turks from their subjects, and sympathized with their Christian subjects.² In a very interesting and bizarre editorial written December 21st, 1914, entitled “Culture by the Sword,” the editor conflates Islam with villainy and violence, and after drawing this conclusion, remarks how historically Islamic theories of “culture by the sword” migrated to Europe, specifically to the Rhine Valley. Of Germany’s aggressive behavior they write that “it is our humble judgment and verdict, that upon showing the facts thus far submitted, Germany has reverted to the theory and practice of Islam and is attempting to spread her “culture” by the sword” (“Culture by the Sword” par. 5-12). The newspaper found a way to find Muslims guilty of German aggression in World War I! This manipulation of facts displays nothing more than the constant distrust and vilification of Islam and the Ottomans by the American public.

This hatred was only intensified during the Armenian genocide, when Americans witnessed Christians being massacred under the Ottomans. Again,

² There are some interesting articles that go outside the paradigm of Muslim oppression of Christians. Indeed, some articles argue that the Ottoman government was not *that* bad (“Mullahs not Mad in the Turkey of Today” par. 2) or sympathize with Arab Muslims (“England bent on Ousting Turkey from Mecca” par. 4). I think that the representation of the Ottoman in American newspapers calls for more research in general, because it cannot be fully documented in this thesis.

newspapers reported on these massacres and the blame fell on Muslims. The conflation seen earlier between ruler and the ruled clearly disappeared, and the Ottomans were treated as an oppressor toward those Christians who were living in the region.

Conclusion

The early 20th century was a time of intense nativism and anti-immigrant sentiment. It was also a time of racial classification debates that were directly related to the growing diversity of immigrants arriving in the United States. A country that was legally entrenched in racial classification of the people within that society had to deal with and sort out a new group of immigrants who clearly did not fit into the existing model. The racial classification cases illuminate the legal and social construction of whiteness, and the ways in which whiteness was tested and understood by the defendants, the prosecutors, the judges, as well as the larger public. They also point out the intense desire to be classified as white in the United States, and thus the clear legal and social privilege allotted to people who were classified as white.

As Haney-López documents, the rationale of racial classification went from scientific evidence to common knowledge. The Syrian cases displays this dynamic more than any other cases involved, and their cases clearly reveal a tension that was never really addressed. As the naturalization cases in the early 20th century moved away from classification based on scientific evidence, Syrians were still being classified in accordance with scientific evidence. Although the theories were not

totally trusted by that point, they were still used by the judges to identify the racial category of the Syrians. In this way, Syrians were put in a precarious position where they were accepted legally, but perhaps not accepted socially. As Tehranian points out, they were granted whiteness because of their convincing performance of it. But, their position was always precarious and based on factors that could and would change over time. Unlike other groups that immigrated to the United States, Syrian immigrants would see a clear shift in demographics, religious as well as economic, and also a clear shift in American foreign policy, that would undermine their performance (and perhaps they would also willingly allow their performance to change) and effectively push this group out of the social privileges of the white category, while retaining the legal privileges.

Chapter III

Present Day Arab American Racial Formations

The legal prerequisite cases allowed Syrians the privilege of legal whiteness, but not necessarily social acceptance within white sensibilities. Despite their ambiguous social positioning, Syrians were aware of their precarious state as “white” citizens, and were able to navigate their place in the United States in a way that benefited their status. The community had a relatively high rate of marrying-out (Kayyali 70). Because religion was their primary form of identification, marriage within religious boundaries was acceptable to Syrian families. Although not universally endorsed, this prioritization of religious bond over national bond created certain situations which enabled Syrians, through intermarriage, to incorporate more easily into the wider white American society.

Dispersal throughout the United States also aided in Syrian incorporation. As discussed earlier, peddling was a major occupation for Syrians. At first, Syrians would live within their own peddling communities outside the towns within which they would peddle. However, as they accumulated more money through peddling, they made the gradual shift from peddling to shop-ownership, and settled permanently in different towns throughout the country. Their legal status as white allowed them to gain access to business opportunities to which they would have otherwise not been privy. Thus, Syrians became businessmen and landowners, and made their way towards achieving social whiteness.

It is important to note that for these Syrians, becoming American and becoming white were the same goal. As Sawsan Abdulrahim notes in her article “‘Whiteness’ and the Arab American Experience,”

Eager to become American and have access to all the opportunities America offers, this immigrant is required to interact with the structure that rewards whiteness. And he does. He internalizes whiteness in his quest for being accepted as an American. (Abdulrahim 131)

Discussing Syrians' incorporation into the United States and their incorporation into whiteness becomes the same conversation. Fixing themselves within the parameters of whiteness gave them access to Americanization, the ultimate goal of those immigrants who wished to settle in the United States. Thus in the Americanization process of these early immigrants, claiming whiteness becomes inextricably part of that process. Well after the "closing of the gates," in the immigration restriction quotas implemented in 1924, the descendants of those first Syrian immigrants seemed to be incorporated into American society. Those who did not incorporate effectively were racialized as nonwhite; those who did learn to navigate within the parameters and hierarchies of the white race were rewarded socially and economically.

In "Strange Fruit," Sarah Gualtieri points to a provocative example of punishment for a Syrian who challenged the boundaries of his white privilege. She cites a peculiar case in 1929 of the lynching of a Syrian shop-owner named Romey in Florida. The lynching occurred because of a seemingly harmless dispute over a vegetable display. According to reports by the Syrian World, the leading English-language Syrian newspaper, Fannie Romey, Romey's wife and business partner, was ordered by a policeman to remove her vegetable display. She refused and was harassed by the police. Romey was infuriated by the event and called the police department to inform them that he would keep his vegetable display outside. After

this provocation, police returned to Romey's store. While different reports vary on the details, it is generally understood that the police hit Romey over the head with a gun, and when Mrs. Romey retaliated against the police, she was shot dead. Romey was then brought to jail, where he was subsequently kidnapped and lynched. According to Sarah Gualtieri, *The Syrian World* reported "that an examination of Romey's cell in the city jail failed to show any marks of an instrument having been used to pry off the lock" (Gualtieri "Strange Fruit" 158). It can easily be construed, then, that the police were most probably involved in the lynching Mr. Romey.

From this bizarre incident, Gualtieri argues important points on the different ways in which race and Americanization of Syrians worked together to balance pre-existing racial tensions in areas in the United States. She, along with many different scholars, points to the precarious racial position which Syrians occupied. Syrians were able to gain the economic niche of shop-ownership largely because of the disenfranchisement of blacks (Cainkar 47). As Gualtieri writes, Syrians "contributed to a culture of segregation in which their economic success did not greatly threaten the livelihood of native whites" (Gualtieri "Strange Fruit" 156). In this way, Syrians were not threatening because they could function under and reproduce the strict racial laws of the Jim Crow South. However, when Syrians did stand up to white authority, they received the racially charged punishment of a lynching. As Gualtieri asserts, "any challenge to white authority in Lake City [where the lynching took place] could be interpreted as a threat to the system of privilege and domination over a more populous nonwhite segment of the community (Gualtieri 159). However, when the main town newspaper reported the incident, the headline nevertheless read: "White

Man Lynched” (Gualtieri 155). Even when subjected to a racially charged punishment, because of his legal status Romey remained white. Legal racialization trumped social racialization, no matter how explicit the racialization seemed to be.

While this act of violence against Romey was certainly not a normal occurrence, it reveals an important point about Syrian whiteness. Syrian whiteness was useful and acceptable insofar as it did not affect the existing white hegemonic systems of power. Syrians were given the opportunity to own stores because they were not black. Syrians could intermarry with whites because they were not black. They could gain citizenship because they were not Asian. As Haney-López asserts in White By Law, “whites exist as a category of people subject to a double negative: they are those who are not non-white” (Haney-López 27). With this paradigm in play, it seems that Syrians are only whites insofar as they are aligned with white authority. Syrians are white because they are not non-white, not because they are white. This differentiation is important because, while Syrians may feel protected by their legal status as white, since their status is created on a double negative, any resistance to this double negative could result in their systematic exclusion from the category.

For Syrians who did not challenge white authority, which indeed was most Syrians, legal acceptance into whiteness came with the benefits of Americanization that led to their incorporation and further ethnicization. Syrian became an ethnic, not a racial category, which allowed them certain advantages. While still remaining a group distinct from United States citizens of European descent, these Syrians were nevertheless talked about in an “ethnic” way, and not in racialized terms. A series of “Historical and Business Brochures” for cities around West Virginia, printed in 1931,

highlights the businessmen of different ethnicities living in these towns. In the brochure about the “Greek and Syrian Colonies,” a discourse about these Syrians serves to incorporate them into the American mainstream.

These brochures work to incorporate Greek and Syrians living in the West Virginia into a definition of citizenship. Beginning with a letter from the mayor, who asserts that “as a private citizen and mayor...I have made a number of friends among the Syrian population. My association has been a happy one” (Adollis “West Virginia” 28), the pamphlet moves on to give a short history of the town, Matoaka, West Virginia. In this way, the pamphlet literally incorporates Syrian history into the history of Mataoka. The author writes of the first Syrian in the community as a “peaceful man, trying to do his level best while he was at it” (Adollis “West Virginia” 29). Writing about the different Syrian merchants who make up the community, he avows that “[the Syrian] enjoys the respect and admiration of all those who know him—as a patriot, a merchant, and a property holder, and a man of the highest integrity” (Adollis “West Virginia” 30). Syrians’ advancements in business and their acceptance of U.S. governmental institutions allowed them to successfully be incorporated into communities across the country without much question of their race.

The short biographies of the Syrian men profiled in the pamphlet display their desire for Americanization. Almost all the men changed their names from their original Arabic surnames, to more easily pronounceable American ones: Suleiman to Sam, Rasheed to Richard, Jamiel to Jimmy (Adollis “West Virginia” 30-31). Indeed, this was a common phenomenon among Syrian immigrants, as it was with most other

contemporary immigrants. Furthermore, all their children (who are mentioned in each man's biography) have quintessential American names such as Peggie, Richard, Jr., Betty Lou, and Norman, to cite a few examples. Thus these Syrian immigrants are property owning businessmen with families who are all citizens—a clear indication of their incorporation into white identity in the United States.

In a different pamphlet written in 1945, again by Dio Adollis, the question is asked, "What is a Syrian?" Adollis answers that "A Syrian is a person born in Syria, but distinguished by his religion. Religion comes first and then his native land...they love their church and are proud of it" (Adollis "North Carolina" 14-16). Thus religion is presented as their primary source of identification, leaving nationality changeable and unimportant. Because they are mostly Christian, their religion is not threatening to the dominant community. Again in this pamphlet, they are characterized as industrious, hardworking, shrewd, and intelligent (Adollis "North Carolina" 15). They were also reported to have the lowest crime rate among immigrant groups in the country. Syrians were accepted and incorporated into American society through their 'honorable' aptitudes and attitudes. And Syrians who stepped out of the clear race/class divisions of the society were punished, as was seen with the lynching of Syrian businessman Romey. However, as long as Syrians accepted their place within the American scheme, their position as white socially could be maintained. It is only when Arab identity is created, the Middle East is created, and United States nationalism articulates itself against these two identities that Syrian changes to Arab and Arab to Muslim and both of the latter terms become racialized.

Ethnicity vs. Race

The difference between race and ethnicity is critical in understanding Arab and Middle Easterners' shift in their categorization and self-identification in the United States. While public institutions, such as the United States census, make no differentiation between the two terms, scholars have looked at each type of categorization as a different social phenomenon, and the mechanisms that go into producing either social construction are completely different. Gualtieri asserts that "they are trickily related terms: one often hides behind another" (Gualtieri "Strange Fruit" 155). Despite their relation, the terms have radically different manifestations and social consequences. While race is argued to be a social construct that is based on exclusion, biology and permanence, ethnicity is seen as an optional and malleable identity that works simultaneously as a point of inclusion and differentiation from the norm. The differences between these two terms, and the implications behind the processes that give meaning to the two terms, are critical in understanding the movement of Arab Americans from an ethnic group to a separate race.

Ethnicity is largely regarded by scholars as an option that people use to navigate American social life. As Kathleen Niels Conzen argues, "ethnicity is a process which incorporates, adapts, and amplifies pre-existing communal solidarities, cultural attributes and historical memories" (Niels Conzen 72). In this way, ethnicity is explicitly regarded as changeable by the actor, environmentally specific, and relational. It is not based on inherent attributes but rather is learned through existing social situations. Indeed, Mary Waters asserts that "far from being an automatic labeling of a primordial characteristic, ethnic identification is in fact, a dynamic and

complex social phenomenon” (Waters 132) Moreover, ethnicity can be seen as an “add-on,” or an addendum to a person’s primary identification. In “What Does it Mean to be an American,” Mark Walzer asserts that as Americans, we consent to existing and functioning together in the same nation-state, and we add an ethnicity to our hyphen because being only “American” is not enough in a “multicultural state.” Thus, in order to gain culture, citizens must cultivate an ethnicity, often imagined, that incorporates that citizen into a smaller group within American society.

That everyone wants to belong to an ethnicity also reveals the social function of ethnicity. Werner Sollors, a prominent ethnicity theorist, writes that “in ethnicity the double sense of general peoplehood (shared by all Americans) and of otherness (different from the mainstream culture) lives on” (Sollors 260). Ethnicity is then both a differentiation from the norm and a reaffirmation of it. As Walzer argues in his article, this sense of cultural disunity actually works to create political unity in the United States, furthering the nation state. Ethnicity is not only harmless but actually advantageous as an organizational method for citizens. Because it is not based on any primordial characteristics, but rather on social relationships and identifications, ethnicity cannot produce a negative consequence for a person because they can use it dynamically in different situations. As Sollors writes, “to regard a person as, say, ‘Polish American,’ is to regard him primarily as a cultural performer rather than someone involved in a system of power (264). Thus ethnicity becomes a tool of organization that adds to pre-existing organizational structures, that is choice-driven, and that can have the power of flux and change over time or even in different situations.

Race is conceived and understood in totally different terms by academics. Although race is also a social construct, and based on social relations, race is real in that it is perceived to be real by those who are experiencing it. No conversation about race can begin without calling upon Omi and Winant, authors of Racial Formation in the United States. Omi and Winant define race as “a concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies,” (Omi and Winant 55) thus setting up the discourse about race as socially created and yet deeply rooted in institutions, historical experiences, and daily life. The creation of these racial groups, or “racial formation,” is the “socio-historical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed.” (Omi and Winant 56) In the process of racial formation, racial projects are set up to guard and distribute resources along certain racial lines. Thus race plays a fundamental and central role in who gets what in the United States. Omi and Winant assert that these paradigms “serve as guides for research and have implicit and explicit policy and political action orientations” (Omi and Winant 57). Unlike ethnicity, then, race is perceived as biologically hereditary, and a universally accepted reality. Furthermore, unlike ethnicity, race is based on power relations that have very real consequences. As Haney-López asserts in White by Law, “races are relationally constructed not in a vacuum, but...in the social context of domination and subordination” (Haney-López 181) Steve Martinot elaborates when he writes that “race is a social structure, a system of social categorizations and exclusions, a system of identities responding to those imposed categorizations, and a structure of social administration” (Martinot 130). Race’s inextricable relationship with institutions

within the United States renders it completely different from ethnicity. Whereas ethnicity may be used as a tool to actually unify all citizens through differentiation, race is used as a tool to create citizens, and differentiate civic and cultural power between those already made into citizens. The articulation and creation of different races, racialization,

delineates the modes of social inclusion within an encompassing system of categorization and in which whites are hegemonic and exclusive. The structure of racialization constitutes the process when the meaning and valuation of whiteness are derived from the demeaning and devaluation of others. (Martinot 129)

In race there is a clear hierarchy and hegemony that does not exist within the bounds of ethnicity. While this may seem basic, it is important to stress the clear differences between ethnicity and race, as it relates to the Arab American experience.

The consequences of race are seen clearly in the prerequisite cases discussed earlier; Syrians' inclusion in the white race allowed them the legal and institutional means to develop socially and economically within the white race. While Syrians always remained in a precarious position, most were able to navigate into an *ethnic* category, not a racial category. While they were still seen as different, their difference did not manifest itself in institutional exclusion. The ethnicization of Syrians in the 1930s and 40s is clearly seen through the acceptance of Syrians into white social institutions such as certain professions, certain residential areas, and intermarriage; however, the current systematic exclusions of Arabs and Arab Americans from national, legal, and social institutions clearly shows a movement of

Arab Americans from a hyphenated ethnicity to a racialized group within the United States context.

Changing Syrian to Arab to Middle Eastern:

Changing categories and identification is at the heart of Arab racialization. The Pan-Arabist movement, beginning in the 1950s, worked to change the way most people of that region identified themselves. A reemphasis on history, language, and secular solidarity emerged in the Arabic-speaking world and the term “Arab” was used to refer to those people who spoke the Arabic language. This movement affected descendants of those people referred to as Syrian, and awakened a sense of pan-Arabism within that population. Indeed, Arab replaces Syrian in most written documents, and this term unites that population with the newer Arab immigrants of different religions. Because of the universality and importance of this term, I will now refer to the people of the region, and their descendants within the United States as Arabs and Arab-Americans. Although I may be talking about people who come from Syria, or the former Syrian region of the Ottoman Empire (modern day Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine) I will still use the term Arab to label them. I do this to not only identify them as perhaps they would identify themselves, but also to reemphasize that the shift in language and articulation of identity has had a serious effect on the way in which these people and their descendants have articulated their experience in the United States, and also how their presence in the United States is articulated by other citizens. While Syrians could emphasize their religion, education, and experience with North American missionaries as a starting point for incorporation in the United

States, the modern usage of “Arab” as a post colonial term which de-emphasizes religion and re-emphasizes politics and third world unity articulates an experience which cannot fit into white hegemonic structures. Arabs then are racialized in a way that Syrians were never, largely because of the drastically different relationship that developed between the United States and the Middle East, and the emerging new identities taking form in the Middle East.

The term “Middle Eastern” also plays a part in the changing racialization of this group of people. Introduced by American naval strategist Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, the term “Middle East” first gained popular recognition at the turn of the 20th century, (Tehranian 5). The term Middle East was coined as the region developed importance within the ongoing struggles between Russia and Germany against the United States and Britain. The region was constructed through the West’s articulation of its military interests, not in response to particular cultural or historical narratives. This artificial construction of the Middle East is made pernicious by the popularization of the term “Middle Eastern” to describe the people of the region. In the US imagination, Middle Eastern connotes a specific group of persons who are distinguishable because of this common regional origin. Thus people of many different backgrounds, cultures, and languages are grouped together within this overarching category. In the US imagination the Middle East is a region that is defined by its political aggression towards the United States, and as the United States’ cultural and moral opposite. In this way, defining a people in the same terms that are used to define this geographic region politicizes their bodies and forces people from that region to embody the ideologies that the United States projects on them. Unlike

the prerequisite cases, which classified the people from this region as “Syrian,” the classification “Middle Eastern” does not have real cultural connotations and reinforces the politicization of Middle Eastern bodies today. While Syrians could be racialized as white because of their removal from Ottoman politics (which was also intrinsically related to Ottoman religion) and through emphasizing their (Christian) “Syrianness,” Middle Eastern-ness is nothing *but* politics and the myth of religious unity, thus “Middle Eastern Americans” become the unfortunate target of American ideologies against the “Middle East.”

Islamaphobia

The main way in which the Arab body is being politicized and racialized is through Islam. Comparing the modern United States’ relationship with the Middle East and the missionaries’ relationship, Islamaphobia seems to be the common thread and starting point. In their work Islamaphobia: Making Muslims the Enemy, Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg discuss the ways in which Islamaphobia has manifested itself in racialized depictions of Arabs. While it is a common fact that actually the most Muslims in the world come from Indonesia, Arabs still consistently become the otherized face of Islam. Gottschalk and Greenberg’s book, which analyzes political cartoons that deal with Islam, points out the way in which Islam is caricatured to reinforce American norms and American sensibilities (Gottschalk and Greenberg 3). The symbolic use of the scimitar, the veil, and the mosque in political cartoons all work to clearly differentiate between Muslims and Americans. While Muslims are clearly otherized because of their religion, they are consistently

caricatured as marked by similar phenotypical characteristics. Religion cannot be depicted phenotypically. Race, however, is frequently articulated through certain significant phenotypical indicators. Cartoonists draw caricatures that consistently display stereotypical Arab features. Even though most Muslims are in fact Southeast Asian, Arab stereotypes become crucial in their depiction. As Gottschalk and Greenberg assert, “cartoonists routinely use the *bodies* of Arabs as symbols to caricature Muslims.” In this way, the negative characteristics given to Muslims, such as hypocritical, misogynist, and violent, are forced onto the bodies of Arabs, thus endowing this particular group with these stereotypes. As I have discussed earlier, Islam was historically used as a foil for Christianity, and Christianity has otherized Islam in an exclusionary and negative way. By endowing Arab bodies with the negative and violent stereotypes that are given to Islam, cartoonists conflate these two images in a way that is racial, not simply religious. Thus Arab bodies become the canvas on which religious tensions are depicted. As we saw in the missionaries’ depiction of the Levant region, Islam was always—except for a very brief period—vilified; however, it was done so through the bodies of the Sultan and his army. Christian Syrians were not put in the same category. Now, however, Islam is vilified through the simple imaging of nameless Arabs. Thus Islam becomes a reason for racializing Arabs and excluding them from national symbols of freedom, equality, and righteousness.

The proliferation of anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States post-September 11th has been widely discussed by both scholars and the media. One of the most provocative controversies involves the practice of “racial profiling.” The

permissibility to “racially profile” Arabs in airports and in customs offices became a question of safety and security in the United States. The ethical dilemma it presented reached the surface of national rhetoric. As Amaney Jamal asserts in his work “Civil Liberties and the Otherization of Arab and Muslim Americans,”

Expanded secret evidence procedures are used to keep Muslims under arrest, and other provisions for the intelligence community resulted in FBI interrogations at Muslim and Arab community and religious centers across the United States. (Jamal 115)

According to Jamal, after September 11th, hate crimes against Muslim Americans increased 300 percent (Jamal 115). In these statistics alone, Islam, Arab, and Middle Eastern become conflated terms which are used to imply the same identity. All the national memory, starting with the missionaries’ negative depiction of Muslims, America’s growing resentment of the Ottoman Empire, the US’s allegiance to Israel, and the aggressive response to September 11th is now embodied in the Arab. In this way, national, political, and racial exclusion become a reality for the newly racialized body of the Arab and Arab American.

Anti-Arab Sentiment in the United States

Many Arab Americans note that September 11th was not the beginning of racialization or discrimination towards Arabs, but rather it authorized the first publicly recognized and publicly permissible forms of exclusion against Arabs and Arab Americans. Historians point to America’s shifting relationship with the Middle East as the start of anti-Arab sentiment. In 1967, when the United States publicly and

unabashedly displayed unwavering support for Israel, Arabs living in the United States “began forming social and political solidarities based on the shared condition of being labeled a security threat in a country steeped in a history of white supremacy” (Feldman 35). As Orfalea writes, after “Israel’s lightening six-day war in 1967, the community in the United States was galvanized by fits and starts to be sure, to political action” (213). In June of that same year, some Arab Americans, feeling “exceedingly depressed over the events in the Middle East and asking what [they] could do,” formed the Association of Arab American University Graduates (Orfalea 215). The period shortly after 1967 also brought about the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA), The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC) and the Arab American Institute (AAI) (Orfalea 215). By inciting the formation of these various associations, this act by the United States against Arab countries clearly had an alienating and organizing effect on the Arab community living in the United States. Firstly, the war solidified the United States’ relationship with Israel, and verified Israel as the United States’ most important ally in the Middle East. Moreover, the war displayed the United States’ increasing military interest in the Middle East. Arabs in the United States began to feel the injustice against their relatives and compatriots in the Arab World, and also felt the repercussions of the growing anti-Arab sentiment within the United States. This latter sentiment manifested in what Louis Cainkar refers to as “tactical” exclusionary practices: “persistent negative media representations, denial of political voice, governmental and nongovernmental policies targeting activism; distortions of Arab and Muslim values, ways of life, and homelands” (Cainkar 49). These different exclusionary

methods, organized as national, political, and cultural exclusion, manifest themselves in very real and dynamic racialized violence experienced by Arab Americans.

Some scholars view the treatment of Arab Americans as primarily political exclusion and not racism. In “Politics of Exclusion: The Arab American Experience,” Helen Samhan asserts that “in the present period, Anti-Arab attitudes and behaviors have their roots, not in the traditional motives of structurally excluding a group perceived as inferior, but in politics” (Samhan 11). She argues that these politics are rooted in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the United States’ firm stance as a unilateral supporter of Israel. She argues that traditional paradigms of racism do not apply because Arab immigrants have experienced upwards mobility and job accessibility within many different fields. However, discrimination manifests itself in lack of “civil rights, access to public information, and inclusion in public policy (Samhan 17). She points to “Operation Boulder,” an initiative administered by Nixon after the 1972 deaths of Israeli athletes at the Olympics. This project involved the CIA and state department, and took “special measures” against Arabs, including denial of visas, intimidation of students, and deportation policies (Samhan 17). Other scholars document a similar political exclusion phenomenon. Arabs are frequently harassed for their political beliefs, many are detained illegally for an undetermined amount of time, and Arabs are “racially profiled” and monitored by phone tapping and searches (Naber 1-20). American politicians who are sympathetic towards Arabs, or specifically the Palestinian cause, are harassed by other organizations. Samhan cites a pre-election fundraising campaign headed by Joan Rivers through the pro-Israel organization NetPAC, which urged Congress “to help fight the resurgence of

the Arab lobby and the growing power of anti-Semitism in American politics” (19). A number of politicians have returned money funded through Arab-American organizations, simply because it is “Arab” money (19).

Most notable, however, is the example Samhan gives of the 1986 race of Grotland Johnson for Sacramento city council. The African American politician had, in 1984, attended a memorial service for the victims of the massacres in Sabra and Shatila, two Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Letters soon circulated in the community that Grotland was pro-PLO, and an ad was taken out in the Sacramento Bee which detailed the “threat” to the community. Through such campaigns, systematically, Arab-Americans and their supporters become excluded from the political scene in the United States. This form of political exclusion based on ancestry can be clearly seen as a way of grouping Arabs as separate from the American political process. The Arab body becomes a site for political contention. When Grotland went to the memorial service for Palestinians killed in the Sabra and Shatila Massacres, his intention was to pay respects to those people who were slaughtered in their refugee camps, and pay his respects to his constituents who were affected by the horrible massacres. However, because the Arab body has been politicized as the “other,” representing bigotry, anti-Semitism, and corruption, Grotland’s actions were understood through this political lens. By going to this memorial service, Grotland was engaging in a political act, not a social or emotional one. The bodies of those who died, and the bodies of those who were commemorating those who died, were politicized in a way which would hamper Grotland’s career. Grotland did not realize that going to a memorial for Arabs was a political, not a social act. Sentencing Arab

bodies to the political realm and at the same time discrediting and silencing their political stances works to exclude Arab Americans from having a real political voice in the United States, and dehumanizes them and their opinions.

The U.S. public projects its comprehension of U.S. foreign policy onto Arab American bodies. Like Japanese during World War II internment, Arab Americans are systematically excluded (and sometimes physically transferred) from the country in an attempt to ideologically protect the homeland from what is happening abroad. Although Samhan effectively argues that anti-Arab sentiment is a product of political exclusion, her hypothesis only furthers the misunderstanding of anti-Arab racism. While contemporary politics are the immediate source of aggression towards Arabs, the politicization of Arab bodies can be seen as an extension of the mistrust and aggression against Muslims seen throughout America's history with the Middle East. As I have documented, Islam has always been politicized in the US imagination. During the missionary period, it was the main way in which Americans understood the factionalism and complex cultural interactions in the Levant region. During the turn of the century, the politicization and vilification of Islam was a way in which Syrian immigrants within the US could bargain for and defend their whiteness. And now, the politicization of Islam has conflated all Arab American people with "terrorist Muslim organizations" and acted out American foreign policy on Arab American bodies. Therefore the politicized racism that Arabs face today is still based on demonizing Islam, and asserting Islam as the foil to Christianity. Although the discourse manifests itself today in political jargon, it is still based on the same

paradigm of inferiority and moral ineptitude that has always been seen in US representations of Islam.

Nationalist discourse has also been implemented to exclude Arabs from being full United States citizens. Although made most obvious by Bush's speeches after the attacks on September 11th, this exclusionary discourse has been pervasive since the oil embargo of the 1970s. Caricatures of rich Arab sheiks became the main representation of Arabs during that time. In 1978, the United States Energy Council commissioned bumper stickers which asked people to conserve their gas by reminding them that "The Faster You Drive The Richer They Get: Driving 75 is Sheik, driving 55 is Chic" (Naber 35).

This ad campaign clearly displays larger issues surrounding Arab exclusion in American discourse. First, it was a nationally distributed bumper sticker created by a government organization. In this way, its message is understood as a part of national culture and discourse. That it was distributed on a bumper sticker is an indication of the national consensus intrinsic to this ad. A nationally distributed bumper sticker implies identification on both a public and private level. Placing a bumper sticker on a car implies not only agreement with a concept, but advocacy of this concept to a stranger. In this way, the bumper sticker works not to affirm a concept, but *reaffirm* it. This phrase in particular is about the clear distinction between American bodies and Arab bodies. Americans must use gas frugally so that Americans will not have to spend more money on oil in the Middle East, consequently filling the pockets of imagined Arab sheiks. The Arab body becomes a politicized symbol and a tool for

national solidarity during the Oil Embargo. Arab Americans, however, are excluded from this national solidarity.

Today's "War on Terror" is another even clearer example of the racialization and politicization of Arabs and Arab Americans in the United States. As Cainkar writes in "Thinking Outside the Box: Arabs and Race in the United States," discourse after September 11th managed to achieve two disparate goals: it unified different groups within America while alienating Arabs. The United States embraced its diversity and reaffirmed its national "we," while at the same time creating a clear Middle Eastern Muslim enemy. As Carlos Mencia, a controversial Mexican comedian said in one of his shows, "I may make fun of blacks, Mexicans, and Jews, but with those Arab terrorists, we can all come together to hate you." Thus in one phrase, Arab is inextricably linked with terrorist and erased as an ingredient in the diversity within the United States. As one scholar wrote, "How can Arabs be American and be America's enemy at the same time" (Cainkar 48)? This national discourse is used to exclude Arab Americans from nationalism and national culture, and identifies them as *not* within American identity.

These forms of exclusion are not necessarily racial in the way that the United States traditionally understands race, and thus present problems in fitting Arab American exclusion within the U.S. racial paradigm. In his article, "Compulsory Whiteness: Towards a Legal Middle Eastern Scholarship," John Tehranian presents an interesting alternative to the standard racialization paradigm. He argues that Middle Eastern bodies practice "passing" and "covering," similar to the paradigm utilized in queer studies. Arabs do not have the same public, visual recognition as

black people or East Asian people, and to the extent that they practice “covering,” they may be exempt from discrimination. As discussed earlier, Tehranian writes that Syrians were so successful during the prerequisite cases because they were able to perform whiteness and assimilatory patterns, but now, Arabs are not able or willing to keep up this performance. This argument is compelling on a number of levels. First, its explanation of the prerequisite trials is accurate: early Syrians understood how to lobby and work systems existing in the United States to make gains in the courts. In their eyes, Americanization meant attaining whiteness, and to the extent that they performed their place within American society, they performed their whiteness. The present day situation is more complicated. Being American does not necessarily mean being white. As the United States began to claim itself as a multicultural and diverse society in the 1970s, and as different racial power movements occurred, being “American” lost its synonymy with whiteness.

As Andrew Shyrock contends in an article titled “The Moral Analogies of Race: Arab American Identity, Color Politics, and the Limits of Racialized Citizen,” Arab Americans now view Americanization as asserting one’s own minority status, and gaining lobbying power through racialization. Feeling that Arabs are discriminated against, Arabs try to include themselves within the paradigm of disadvantaged racial categories within the United States (Shyrock 86). Using Shyrock’s analysis, it seems that Arabs are actively choosing not to perform whiteness anymore. In a country in which organizing under a racial category can give a group leverage against discrimination, Arabs no longer want to be in the white category. The problem is that this tactic does not fit because the racialized treatment

that Arabs receive does not fit within the same paradigm as groups historically discriminated against in the United States. The difference is not with performance, but with the way that racial category manifested in Arabs. The United States had no major problem with Syrians one hundred years ago that would hinder their acceptance in to white race legally, and science only aided Syrians in achieving white status. The discourse has now shifted to national security. Using “national security” as an excuse, the government has passed laws requiring Arab students studying in the United States to renew their visa yearly (whereas all students from other countries must renew their visa every five years). As the Arab American Institute writes,

Many of these [national security] initiatives have targeted Arab Americans and continue to be of particular concern, such as the greatly increased powers of search and seizure, enhanced by provisions in the PATRIOT Act and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act... prosecutorial discretion; the use of secret evidence; indefinite detention; lack of due process; and refusal of the right of habeas corpus. (AAI website April 3 2009)

Arab-Americans lose their civil liberties because they are perceived as a security threat. The denial of these liberties end the “performance of whiteness” to which Tehranian refers, and instead clearly point out Arab-Americans are not part of the national body that needs to be protected, but rather an obstacle to national security.

Because the “inferiority” that has been inscribed unto Arab bodies is based on religion, discrimination against Arab Americans has not manifested itself in the way

similar to other disadvantaged racial/ethnic groups. African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans have had to fight to prove their intellectual, moral and physical equality with whites; this has not been the plight of Arabs. When missionaries discussed people from the Levant region, they did not use the kind of scientific language that many used to categorize other races. During the prerequisite cases of the early 20th century, Syrians were able to rely on scientific evidence to prove their whiteness. Now, however, to be Arab is to be a national security threat. It is a model not based on racial inferiority but rather based on perceived religion and nationalism. One cannot be part of a nation and also a national threat. One cannot be fighting for American freedom and still identify with the religious group that is trying to take it away.

Whether or not the paradigms within which Arabs are racialized are the same as other historical models is still not the point: that they are racialized is the point. If, as John Tehranian and Hanan Samhan argue, Arab exclusion is based on politics or performance, then it does not fall under the category of racialization. However, there are many instances in which discrimination against Arabs does not fall under this category. Recently, an Arab American family was not allowed on an Airtran Airways flight because another guest overheard them talking about safety issues. Despite the CIA clearing their name, they were still not admitted onto the flight (Colson par. 1). In this case, the family was not performing anything, nor were they expressing political opinions. They were presumed a threat because of their appearance, and denied their rights as passengers and patrons of the airline. While this act is not based on assumptions of inferiority, the premise on which other racism is ordinarily

predicated, it still manifested itself in the denial of equal rights based on origin. Their bodies were under suspicion as a threat to national safety. Since the nation is a body politic, their physical presence was threatening national political security. Thus, as Samhan argues, they were discriminated against politically. But while she contends that Arabs must express their political beliefs, in this situation it was projected onto them by the other passengers. Thus the family's bodies were politicized and deemed too threatening to be on the Airtran flight. They were discriminated against through a "concept which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies," Omi and Winant's definition of race.

Arabs' conflation with other ethnic groups may also be an indication of their racial formation. After September 11th, many people were the targets of hate crimes who were not associated at all with the events of September 11th. In fact, victims of these hate crimes were mostly Sikh, a religious group originating in India. Many Pakistani Muslims and Indians were publicly targeted, while wire-tapping and governmental profiling targeted exclusively Arab Muslims. The public projected its own assumptions about race, and attacked people who were not actually Arabs. The public was articulating hatred in the only paradigm it understood: race; however, this is not the paradigm into which Arabs fit. But in their conflation of Indians, Pakistanis, and Arabs, the general public lumped Arabs into a category in which they had not previously found themselves: non-white. These actions after September 11th can clearly show that Arabs are now racialized in the US imagination.

Conclusion

The twentieth century has dramatically changed the way the United States imagines and understands the Middle East. World War I, the destruction of the Ottoman Empire, the creation of Israel, Arab Nationalism, the increased interest in Middle Eastern oil, and the events of September 11th all came together to create Arabs as a threat against the United States on a global level, and a threat against national security within the United States. While previously the region had been of interest primarily among the religious, the Middle East has begun to symbolize the political “other” to the United States. Islam has always been politicized, as seen in US discourse on the Ottomans and missionaries’ understanding of the Levant region; however, as Islam became a domestic threat, it was translated onto the bodies of Arabs in the US imagination.

After the prerequisite trials, Syrians were almost able to incorporate fully into US society. They used scientific evidence to allow them access to incorporation, and as long as they understood their place within the complex US racial hierarchy, they could use their resources to the fullest unharmed. However, these circumstances radically shifted after the 1967 war, and the ensuing events in the Middle East and in the United States. With this new shift, Arabs are now being racialized in a way that they cannot fight against. Arab Americans cannot prove they are not a national threat in the way that they “proved” they were white. The changing perception of “Arab” and the prevalence of Islam among newer migrants have brought about issues not relevant for the first wave of mostly Christian immigrants from Syria. Because of these completely different paradigms, Arabs are being racialized in a way they never

were before, and in a way that cannot necessarily fit within the classic understanding of racialization and racism. Political and national exclusion of a certain group, although not the traditional form of racism, is still a process of racializing the other, and excluding Arab Americans from full citizenship rights.

Conclusion

Reconsidering the anecdotes concerning Ali Jawad and Ralph Nader, the disparate treatment of the two men does not seem so surprising after all. The proximity of their geographic heritage does not offset the importance of the different categories into which these men fall. Jawad is a Muslim Arab; Nader is a Christian of Lebanese heritage: the meanings that are infused into these words hold more weight than the similarities the men share. The connotations and implications of the different categories shape the way other Americans have chosen to judge and interact with Jawad and Nader. Nader had a national reputation long before recent waves of anti-Arab prejudice; Jawad, however, gained recognition during a period of distrust of Arabs and Arab Americans. Ultimately their religious heritage plays the biggest role in their identity within the United States. Jawad, a Muslim, is treated as a political threat, whereas Nader, a Christian, is an established part of the current political system. It seems that the Islamophobia present in the United States' perception of people from the Middle East since the first Lebanese Civil War has been the only consistent characteristic in the ever-changing depiction and understanding of the Orient, Levant, and Middle East.

Having more fully considered the interactions of the United States and the Arab people from the Middle East, I would like to return to the question I asked at the beginning of this thesis. Should "Middle Eastern" be a category in the U.S. census? To me, this question can be thought of on two levels. Would a new racial category benefit people who identify as Middle Eastern? What are the general implications for introducing a new racial category in the U.S. census? After reexamining the

racialization of Arabs (or Syrians) in the United States, and discovering their precarious position within the United States' racial scheme, I have discovered that there is no easy answer to this question. Ideologically, creating a new category does more harm than good by re-inscribing racial paradigms, and it is not a solution that will end necessarily anti-Arab sentiment in the United States. However, pragmatically, creating this category may serve to help the community in the immediate future by giving legitimacy to their claim of minority status and creating a space for "Middle Easterners" within the discussion of US racial formations.

The creation of a "Middle Eastern" category, while beneficial for Arabs and others who would identify as "Middle Eastern," has serious problems that must be addressed before concluding that this category ought to be created. First, doing so would evoke an eerie reminder of the prerequisite cases discussed earlier. Trying to create a cohesive category within which people from this region can fit would reinforce and legitimize the concreteness of racial categories. Throughout the United States' relationship with this region, imagined categories have been at the center of the problems of identification. The terms Oriental, Syrian, Arab, and Middle Eastern all indicate different modes of identification, and signal different values. The people do not necessarily change, but the values we inscribe on those people by the category we put them in do change. The heavy burden of legalizing a category which will inscribe meaning onto a person's body, simply because the United States functions ontologically through a paradigm of race, seems excessively violent.

The history of people from this region in the United States reveals that categorical permanency is not inscribed in their experience. One rationale for the

creation of the Middle Eastern category is a sense that they “got it wrong” the first time: although those original Syrians were not white, their set of circumstances allowed them to fake whiteness, and only now do they admit that they are in fact, non-white. This model is flawed because it assumes that race is a fixed category: people can “really” be non-white, or “really” be white. Instead, Arab American history has shown that categories can never be fixed. Indeed, if a Middle Eastern category were made today, would we run into the same problem of instability in categorical identification in the future? I question the impulse to box “Middle Easterners” in when their history has shown us so clearly the arbitrary nature of these boxes.

Religion also continues to be a silent participant in the conversation about the racialization of Arabs in the United States. Islamophobia has become racialized in the Arab body in a way that did not happen when the majority of Arabs (or Syrians, as they were then called) who lived in the United States were Christian. What should possibly be addressed as religious ignorance or bigotry is being inscribed with racial meanings because that is the only way that the United States understands minority groups. The Arab/Syrian experience in the United States only highlights the complex relationship between race and religion, and the way in which religion plays a fundamental part in racial formation. To ignore this obvious source of disparity within the category is to miss an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which religion has complicated notions of race in the United States.

The largest problem I see in the creation of a new racial category for Middle Eastern people is the way in which the logic plays into the paradigm of white

supremacy. The urge to create a category comes from the feeling that Arabs and Middle Easterners are being discriminated against. That a group which is discriminated against should be forced out or remove themselves from the category of white emphasizes white racial supremacy. In this logic, whites are not discriminated against; if you are discriminated against, it means that your status within the category comes under question, not the category itself. This logic is deeply troubling.

While standing on a moral high ground may feel comfortable from a distance, the Arab community in the United States still faces profound discrimination. So, although it seems ideologically problematic, creating such a category would have the beneficial effect of forcing Americans to start thinking about the Middle East in a different way. If the category were created, it would inspire scholars to look at Middle Eastern American immigrant history in a more nuanced way. It would also include the Middle East in a more broad discussion of race in this country. Most importantly, the creation of such a category would allow Arab/Middle Eastern Americans to start to identify as a group and lobby for equal treatment in the United States. Politically, it is a sound way to achieve the kind of inclusion Middle Easterners need in a world after the creation of Israel, September 11th, and the current War in Iraq.

Creating a new “Middle Eastern” category on the census might be helpful for both the government and lobbying groups who want to monitor civil rights for that demographic. Acquiring legal minority status can be helpful for a group as they advocate for their rights. As Girardeau Spann argues in “Pure Politics,” minorities can most effectively lobby for themselves through the political rather than the judicial

branch. He writes that because judges make decisions that reflect their own biases regardless of the supposed impartiality of the courts, it is more effective for minority groups to lobby politicians, who are explicitly biased:

In an overtly political process, minority interests will receive whatever degree of deference their innate strength can command, subject only to limitations in the bargaining and organizational skills of minority politicians. (Spann 27)

Recalling Spann's article on the political exclusion of Arab Americans, it seems that Spann offers an alternative. If Arab Americans are legally treated as a minority group, then perhaps their needs will be treated as "minority issues" and not political threats. Arabs will be able to organize not politically, but racially, and thus groups trying to silence Arab American voices may not be able to do it so under the guise of politics. A census category for Middle Easterners might also aid in the Americanization process for Middle Easterners. Race has always been a way for people from the Levant region to negotiate their status in the United States. As seen in the legal prerequisite cases from the turn of the 20th century, becoming white was a large part of the Americanization process that these early Syrians underwent. Now, some scholars regret this placement, and argue that Middle Easterners feel "invisible" in the United States because they are not a recognized minority. As Shyrock writes, minoritization is also part of the Americanization process (129). Not being allowed their own category, Middle Easterners feel left out of the American organizational system. Moreover, the category would encourage national recognition of Middle Eastern heritage as an important unit of analysis. A recognized category could allow

scholars to rethink the importance of the Middle Eastern perspective and rectify the deficiency in academic considerations. Forcing recognition of “Middle Eastern” as a category allows it take up both physical and intellectual space within institutions.

There are compelling arguments for and against the inclusion of a “Middle Eastern” category. In a sense, I feel that I am mirroring the prerequisite cases that occurred one hundred years ago, a thought I find deeply troubling. Moreover, I am tackling the same issue as the judges: trying to fit people from the Middle East into the racial model that was developed in the United States. Just as the judges could not come up with a solution, I am unable to decide if they should or should not have their own racial category. Unlike the judges, however, I refuse to let racial logic and the powers of racially structured knowledge in the United States overtake my own conclusions and thinking process. As discussed in the introduction, the census maintains racial categories for monitoring civil rights. However, civil rights are not synonymous with race. The problem with a “Middle Eastern” category highlights the problem with US race-based thinking, and so the solution to a “Middle Eastern” category must be to deviate from this structured knowledge, and start thinking about categories in different ways. People from the “Middle East” should use this opportunity to point out the ridiculousness of the fixedness of the racial system, rather than demanding to be part of it. Perhaps advocating for other questions on the census, such as religion or ethnic background would serve to point out the many factors that play into the concepts of “race.” More importantly, Arabs should advocate for the actual recording of what people write in the “other” category, and not simply the

designation by a federal agent.³ Perhaps the real solution lies in complete self-identification with no boxes to check. If we give federal agents that much work, perhaps they will realize that racial classification is not as simple as a check-marked box. People from this region feel that the only way they will get nationally recognized and acknowledged as a legitimate group is by fitting into the racial paradigm; however, truly addressing the complex nature of the discrimination they face as a group may encourage a broader discussion of the way discriminatory practices can be addressed, thus actually ending the discrimination. The frustration that Middle Easterners feel in not being recognized as a minority indicates a continued reliance on race as a way to articulate social inclusion and exclusion. However, public acknowledgement and contemplation of Arab Americans' place in the United States will create the visibility that Arabs crave, no matter what box they check.

³ If a person records "other" on the census, and writes "Arab American," for example, then the person is automatically placed in the white category.

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