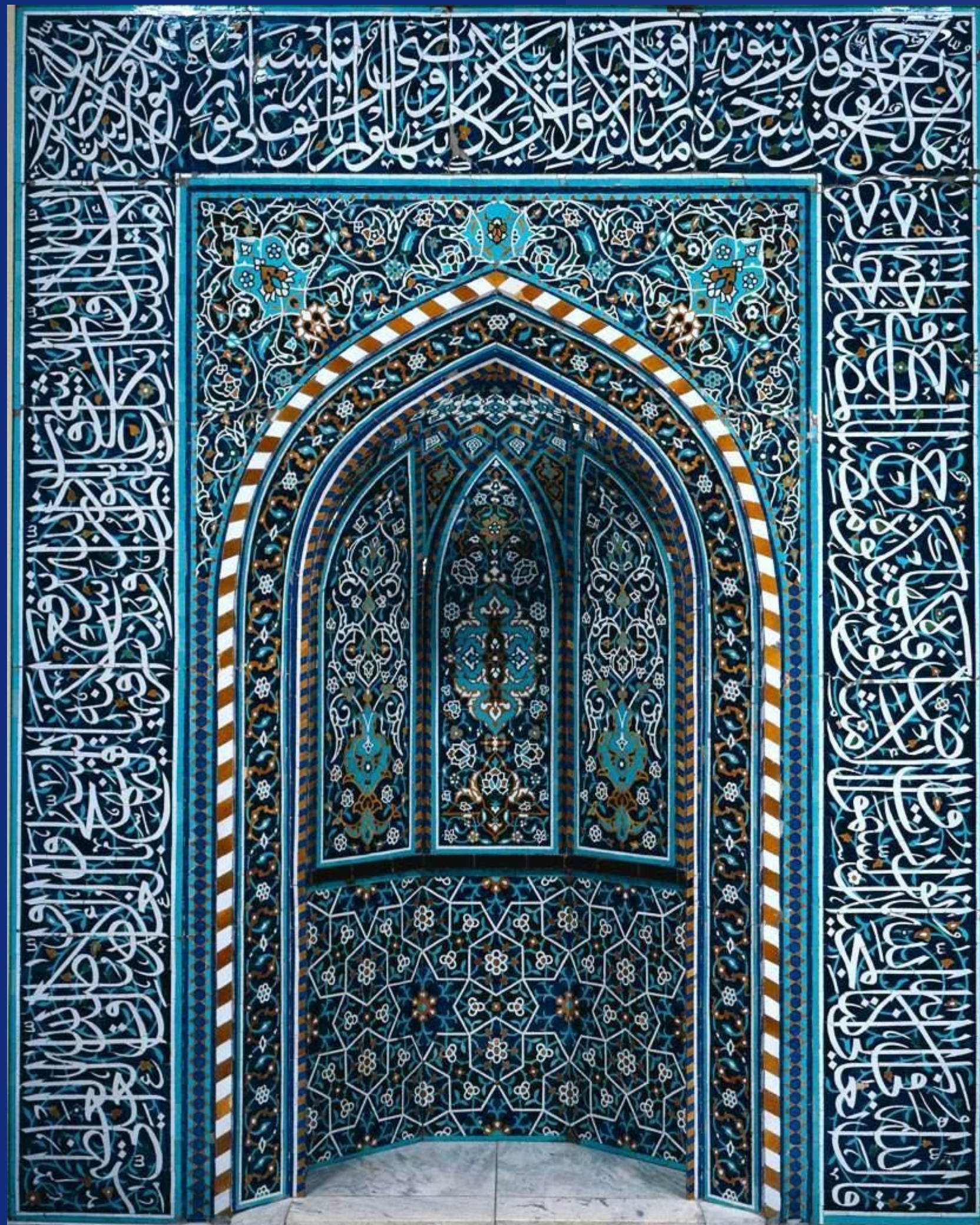


Los Angeles Civil + Human Rights and Equity Department

ARAB AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH



COMMON STEREOTYPES ABOUT ARABS?

https://youtu.be/Ko_N4BcaIPY



BACKGROUND: WHO ARE ARABS?

The Arab World

- Arabs are an ethnic majority of peoples who derive from North Africa and portions of Southwest Asia
- Arabs are bound by a shared history, culture & language (الأمّة العَرَبِيَّةُ *al-ummah al-'arabiyyah*)
- 464,684,914 as of 2022 (The World Bank)
- Arab World includes ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples who are not Arab including but not limited to Armenians, Kurds, Copts, Assyrians, Circassians, Nubians, and Druze
- Majority of Arab World are Muslims, followed by Christians then Jews.
- About ¼ of the world's Muslims are Arab



THE ARAB WORLD

The Arab League – est. in March 1945 in Cairo, starting with 6 members: Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Syria.

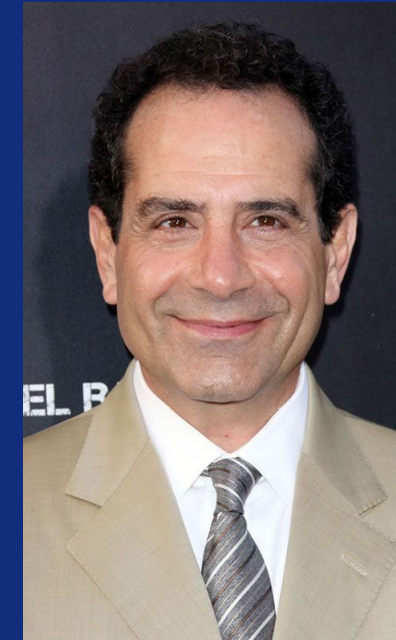
Today, 22 countries: Algeria, Bahrain, the Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Syria, Tunisia, the UAE, & Yemen.

The League's main goal is to "draw closer the relations between member states and coordinate collaboration between them, to safeguard their independence and sovereignty, and to consider in a general way the affairs and interests of the Arab countries". The organization has received a relatively low level of cooperation throughout its history.



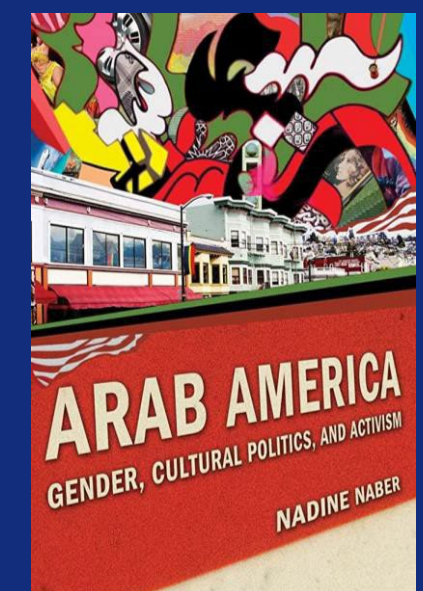
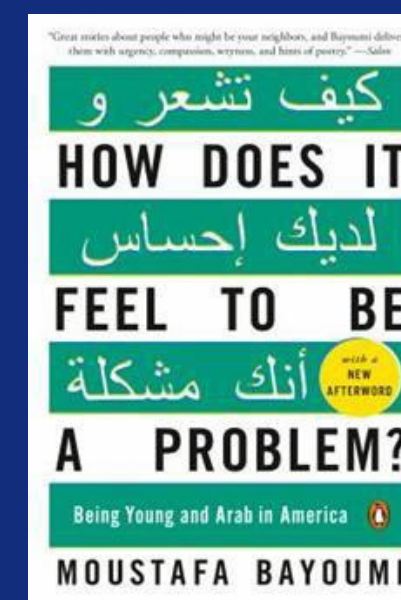
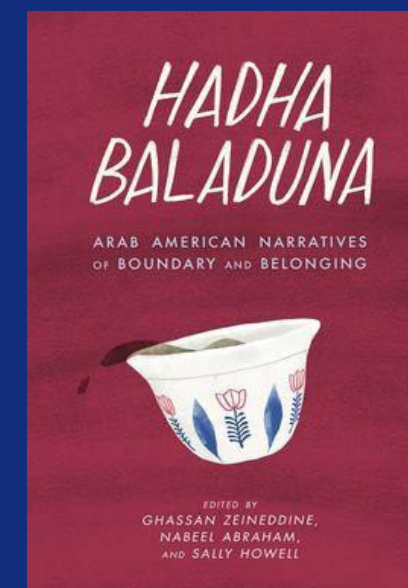
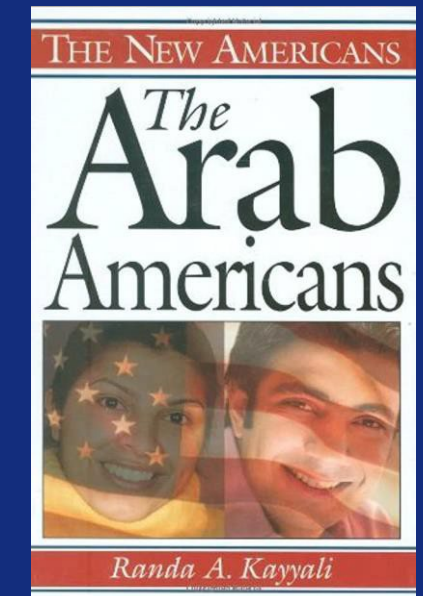
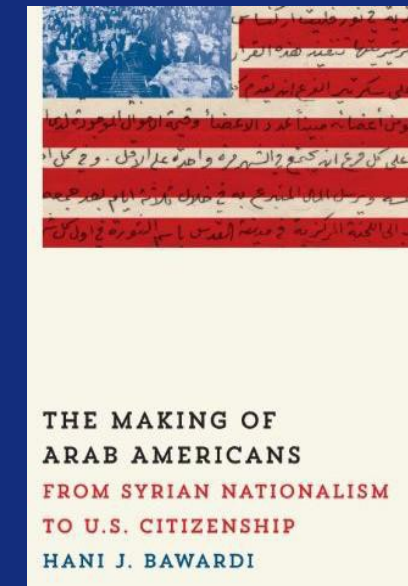
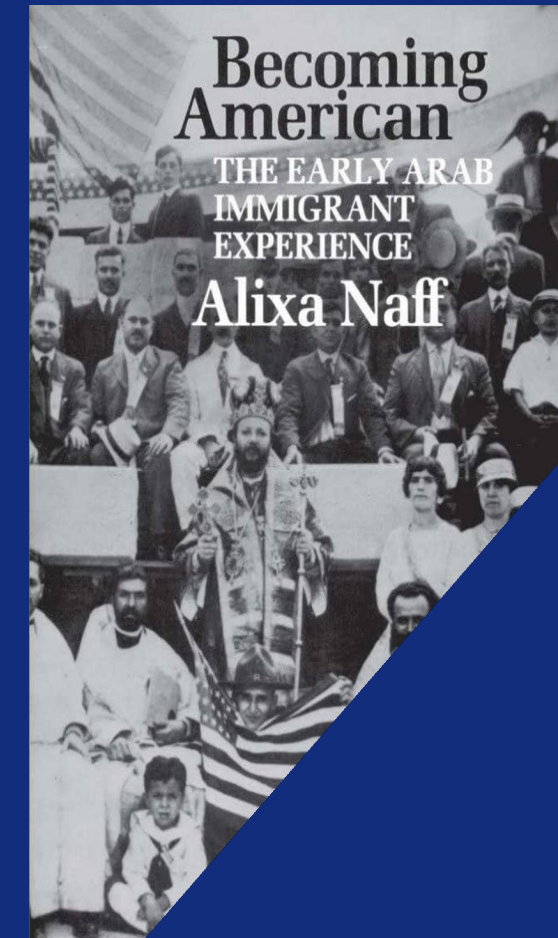
ARABS IN THE UNITED STATES

- There are appx. 3.7 Million Arabs in the U.S. (2020)
- 93% of Arab Americans live in metropolitan cities with the largest communities residing in Detroit, NYC, LA, SF-Bay Area, Chicago, & Washington D.C.
- Appx. 82% of Arabs in the U.S. are citizens
- There are appx. 308,295 Arabs in Los Angeles (2011)
- The majority of Arabs in the U.S. come from Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Iraq
- Arab Americans hold diverse religious, national, racial, class, & social backgrounds
- Sources: The Arab American Institute and American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee



BACKGROUND: ARAB IMMIGRATION

- **First Wave: 1891-1924: Appx 95,000 Arrivals**
 - Curtailed by the 1917 Barred Zone Act
 - Ended by the 1924 Johnson-Reed Act
- **Second Wave: 1945-1953 Appx 50,000 Arrivals**
 - Immigration granted primarily to Arab professional class and students
 - Immigration granted to 2000 Palestinian Refugee Families in accordance with the 1953 Refugee Relief Act
- **Third Wave: 1966-1990: Appx 400,000 Arrivals**
 - Opened immigration quotas to non-European peoples expands Arab arrivals to the U.S.
- **Fourth Wave: 1991-2017:**
 - Primarily refugees and immigrants fleeing war, economic uncertainty, and authoritarian regimes
 - Curtailed by Trumps 2017 Executive Order 13769 (“The Muslim Ban”)



Sources: Becky Little, “Arab Immigration to the United States Timeline.” The History Channel.

BACKGROUND: WHITENESS BY LAW

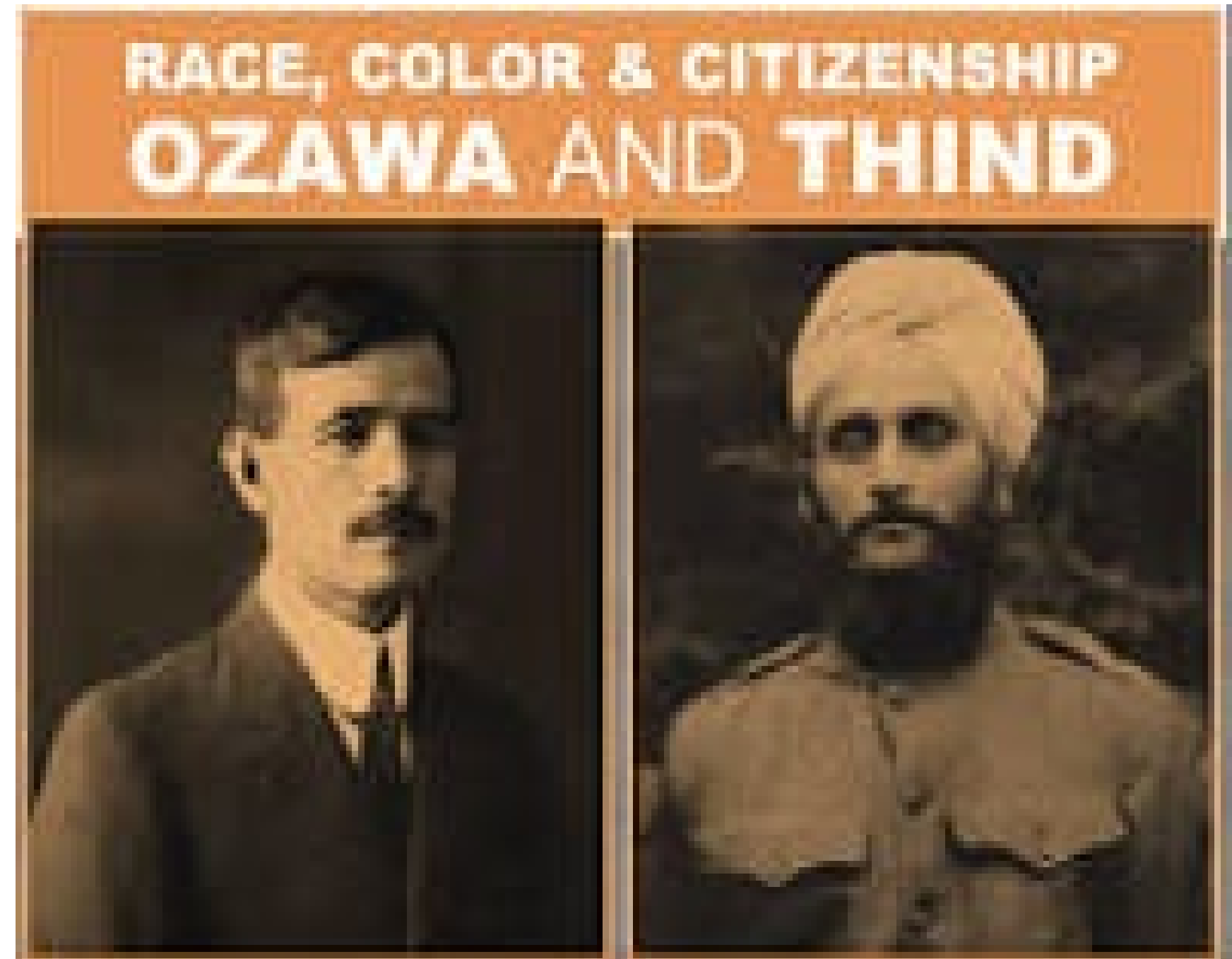
In the early 1900's Arab immigrants, like other non-European newcomers, appealed to the U.S. courts for white-legal classification to circumvent racialized exclusion from citizenship, political disenfranchisement, and denial of freedoms and rights. **At the time rights-bearing citizenship was tied to whiteness by law.**

- **Naturalization Act of 1790** defined eligibility for citizenship as confined to "any alien, being a free white person who shall have resided within the limits . . . of the United States for a term of two years"
- 1865 – 13th Am abolished slavery in US
- 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act – restricted citizenship for those defined as "Asians"
- 1885 Alien Contract Labor Law – restricted citizenship for "Asians"
- 1906 Naturalization Act – only "free white persons" and "persons of African nativity or persons of African descent" were eligible to naturalize

- **Ozawa v. United States** (1922) 260 U.S. 178 – Ozawa born in Japan but lived in US for 20 yrs was found ineligible to naturalize under Naturalization Act
- "the words 'white person' was only to indicate a person of what is popularly known as the Caucasian race."
- S Ct in unanimous opinion upheld lower courts' conclusion that the Japanese were not "free white persons" for purposes of naturalization had "become so well established by judicial and executive concurrence and legislative acquiescence that we should not at this late day feel at liberty to disturb it, in the absence of reasons far more cogent than any that have been suggested."
- Notably, the Court declined to review the ethnological authorities relied on by the lower courts to support their conclusion or those advanced by the parties. (Christianity, spoke English fluently, focused on Am culture more than ... but not from the Caucus mountains)

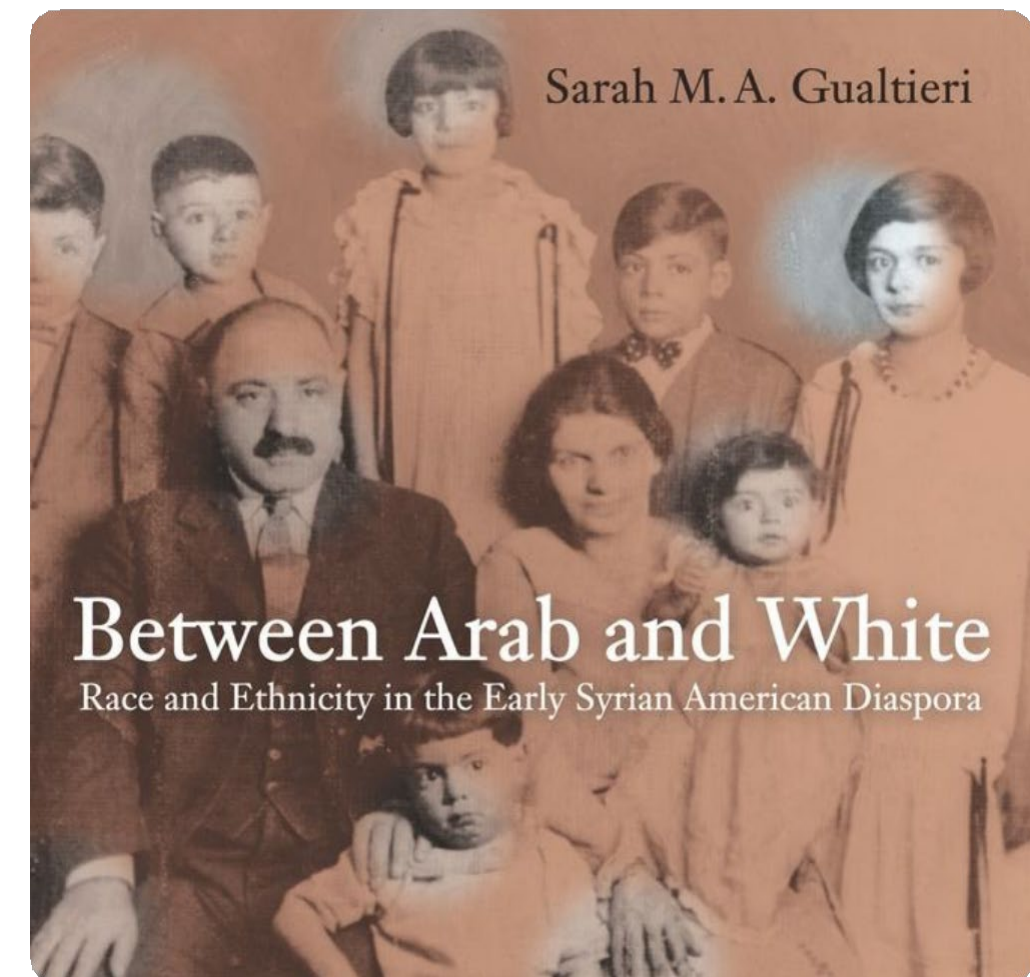
- 3 months later...

- **United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind** (1923) 261 U.S. 204 – an Indian Sikk man who identified himself as Aryan – Caucasus mountains – was deemed ineligible for citizenship
- Thind came to US for higher studies after obtaining BA in India. He was granted citizenship after enlisting in the Army & serving in WWI, but it was rescinded in 4 days
- The Court unanimously rejected Thind's argument, adding that Thind did not meet a "common sense" definition of **white**, ruling that Thind could not become a naturalized citizen. The Court concluded that "the term 'Aryan' has to do with linguistic, and not at all with physical characteristics, and it would seem reasonably clear that mere resemblance in language, indicating a common linguistic root buried in remotely ancient soil, is altogether inadequate to prove common racial origin."



ARABS BECAME "WHITE" BY LAW

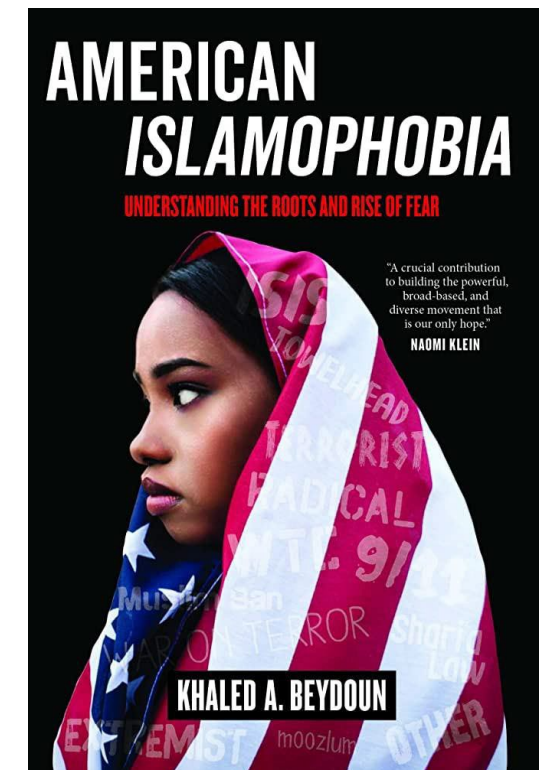
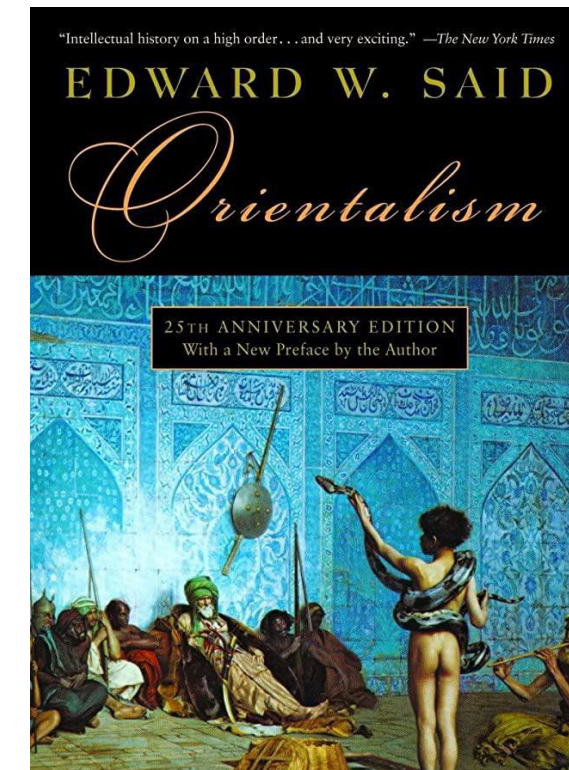
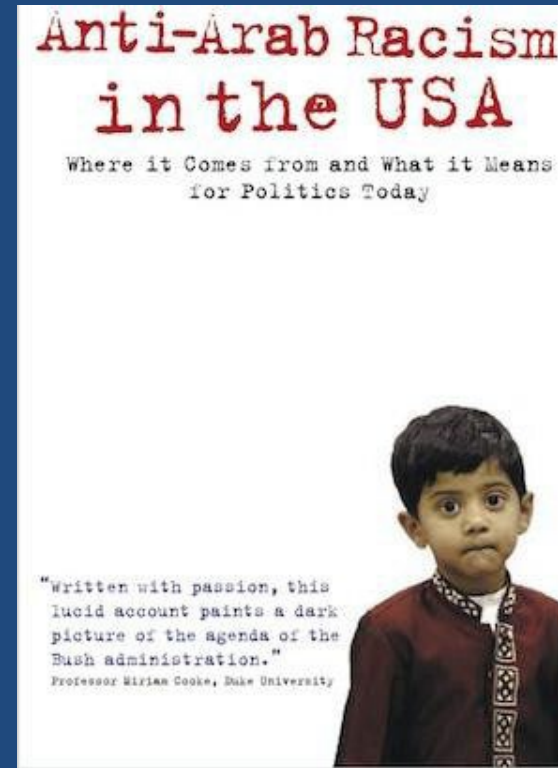
- Based on a 1915 and 1944 court ruling, Syrian Arabs became legally classified as white.
- **Dow v. United States**, 226 F.145 (4th Cir., 1915) US Crt of Appeals overturned lower court ruling and concluded Syrian George Dow was determined to be of the "Caucasian" race and thus eligible to naturalize.
- Crt relied on scientific evidence, congressional intent and legal precedent
- Decision did NOT apply to North Africans or non-Levantine Arabs, and some courts claimed that only Syrians (and not other Arab persons) were white.
- **This decision divided Arab immigrants along the lines of religion, as the first Arab Muslim would not gain the legal right to be naturalized until the 1940's,**
- * **1942 In re Ahmed Hassan**, 48 F. Supp. 843 (E.D. Mich. 1942) – judge noted that a Yemenite immigrant was dark-skinned and found him ineligible for naturalization b/c the Arabian Peninsula was far from Europe and part of the "Mohammadan World"
- 1943 Ex Parte Mohriez, 54 F. Supp. 941 (D. Mass. 1944) - all Arabs and North Africans were deemed white by the federal government - Court relied on common knowledge + legal precedent
- and the 1977 OMB Directive 15 include Middle Eastern and North African in the definition of white.^[91]
-
- Since the 1980's Arab American organizations including ADC, AAI, and the National Network of Arab American Communities (NNAAC) have been advocating for census reclassification which is still yet to be realized.
- **The absence of a census category disenfranchises Arab communities and Community-Based-Organizations (CBO's) economically, politically, socially and culturally by making invisible community needs, data, and aspirations**



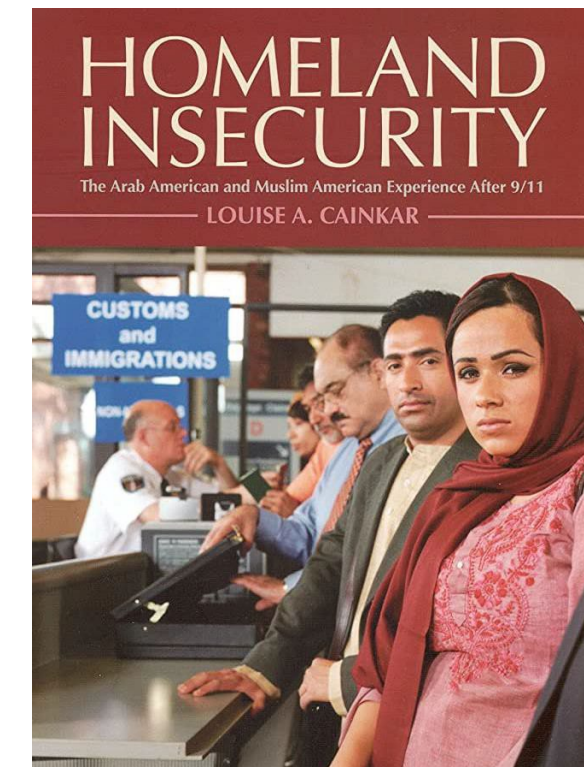
ANTI-ARAB OPPRESSION

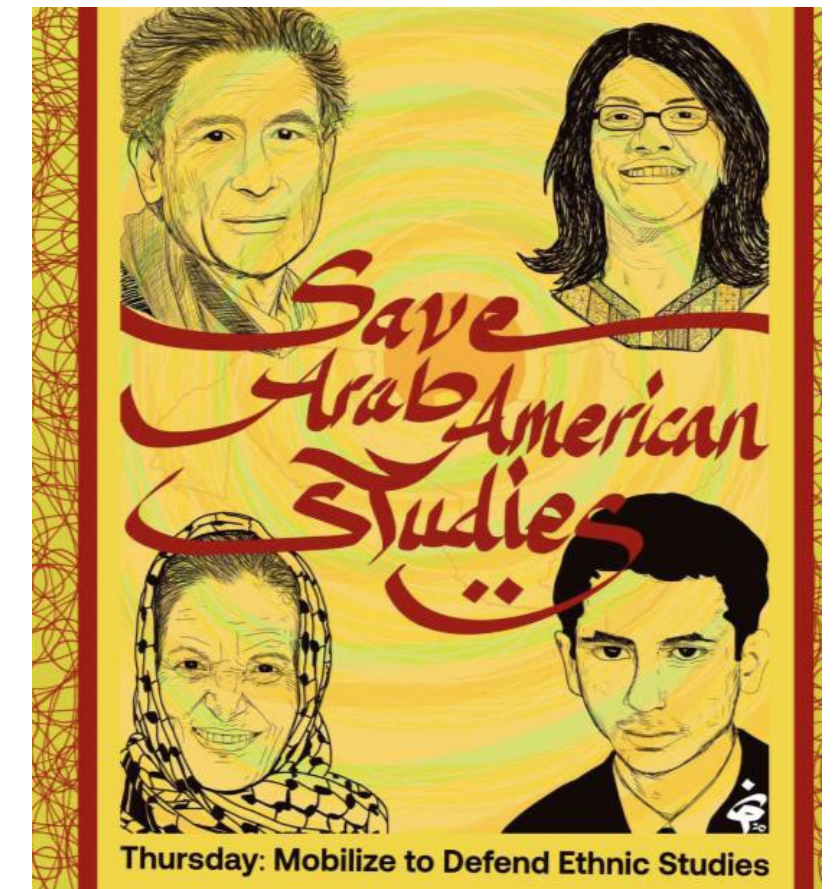
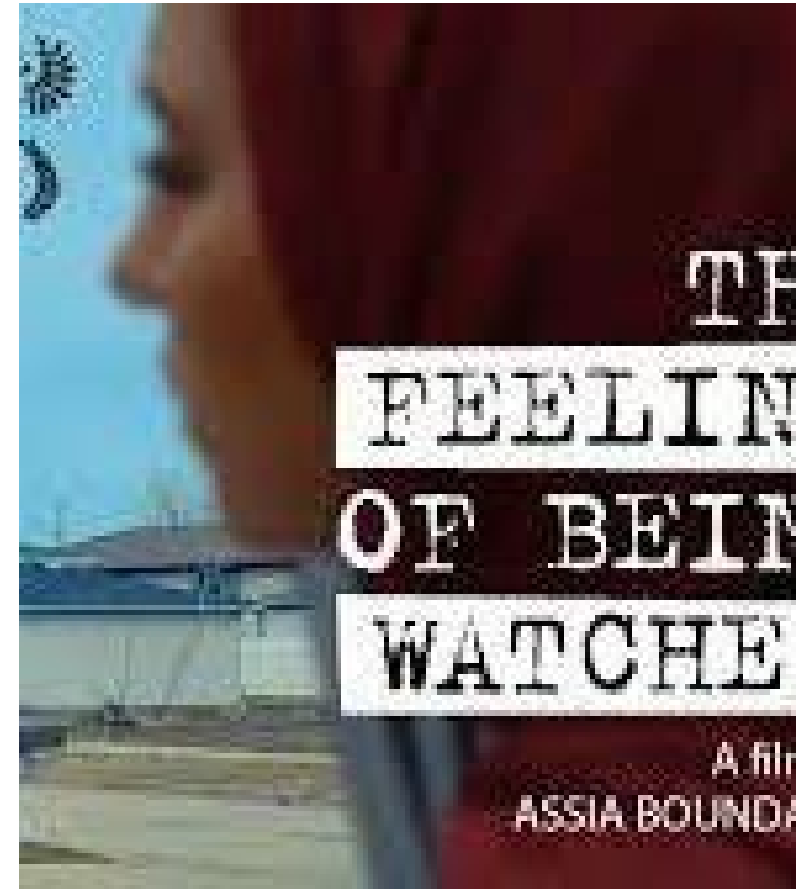
Ideological

- Orientalism
- Anti-Arab Racism
- Islamophobia



- *Every empire, however, tells itself and the world that it is unlike all other empires, that its mission is not to plunder and control but to educate and liberate. - Edward Said*



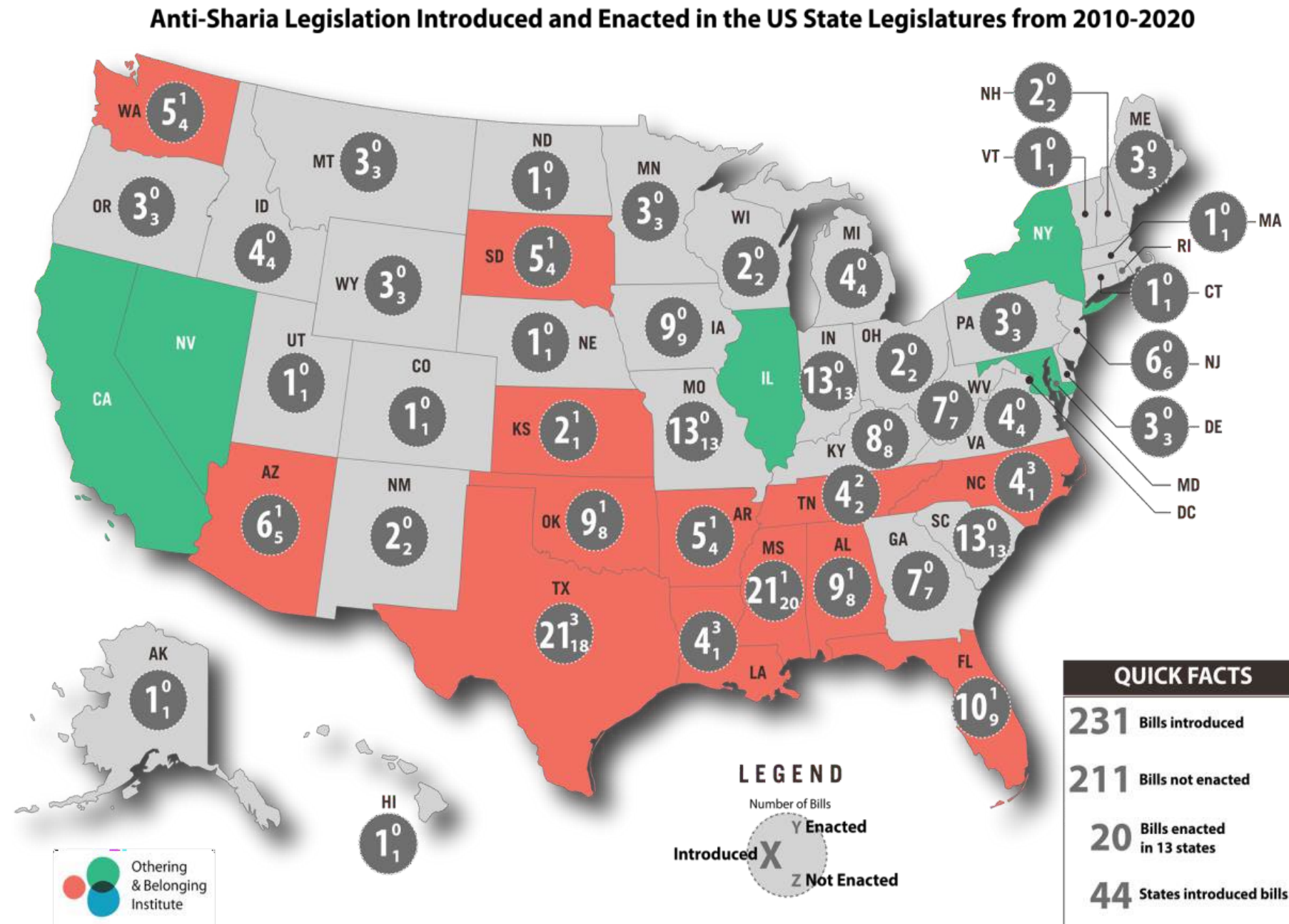


INSTITUTIONAL ANTI- ARAB OPPRESSION

- U.S. imperialism and war in the Arab World
- State-sanctioned surveillance, deportation, detention, and criminalization of Arabs and Arab Americans
- Racialized bans and restrictions on Arab immigration and refugee resettlement
- Denial of of cultural and political representation and resources for Arab and Arab American communities

Source: Elsadig Elsheikh and Basima Sisemore.

[“Legalizing Xenophobia and Islamophobia in the United States.” Othering and Belonging Institute. 2019.](#)



INSTITUTIONAL ANTI-ARAB OPPRESSION CONT.

- 2001: **USA Patriot Act** - Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism
 - NSL issued by FBI agents w/o a judge’s approval to obtain personal info (phone records, computer records, credit hstry, banking history, etc)
 - Of 192,499 NSL’s issued; 1 terror related conviction (per ACLU)
- 2002: National Security Entry Exit Registration System (**NSEERS**) – 24 out of 25 countries were predominantly Muslim majority
 - Per ACLU – of 93,000 cases created; 0 convictions
- No fly list / watch list / hate crimes /immigration /etc
- 2011: Countering Violent Extremism (**CVE**)
- 2017: Executive Order 13769 (**Muslim Ban**)
- 2010-2020: **231 “Anti-Sharia” Bills** Introduced in 44 U.S. State Legislatures

**LIVING LEGACIES OF
ARAB AMERICAN SOCIAL
MOVEMENTS**

Arab American Cultural Movements

1915: *Al-Mahjar*: An Arab literary movement dedicated to the cultural revitalization of Arabic literature as part of a broader commitment to the sovereignty of Arab peoples and lands from both Ottoman and European colonial rule.

1967: Association of Arab American University Graduates (AAUG): A group of intellectuals and cultural workers formed in the wake of 1967 war to create and disseminated knowledge that countered demonized cultural representations of Arabs, Muslims and Palestinians.

1980's-Present: Arab American feminist literature, poetry, art, and theory grows to be an intellectual and cultural movement demonstrating the personal and political are inseparable.



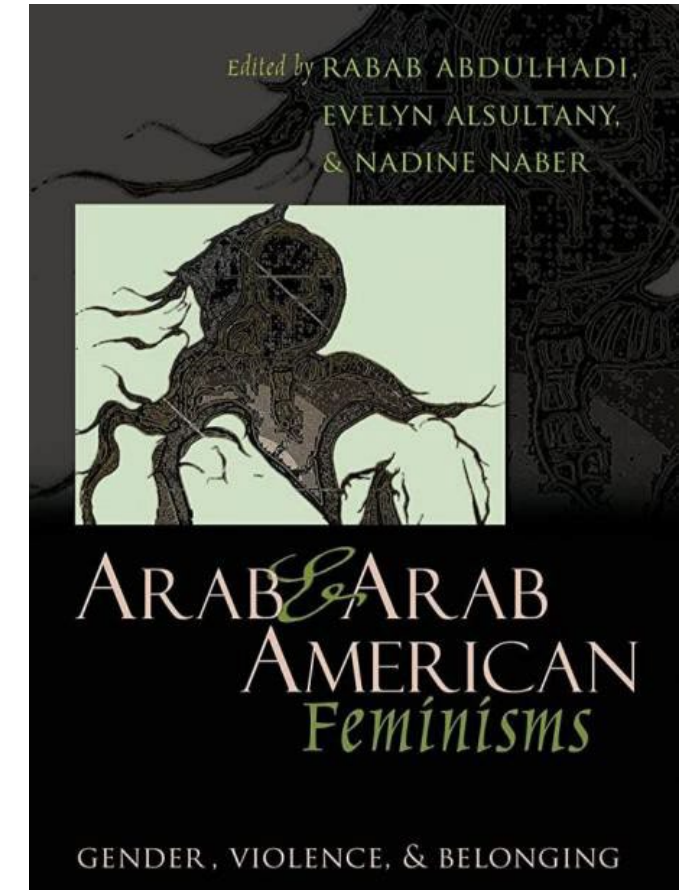
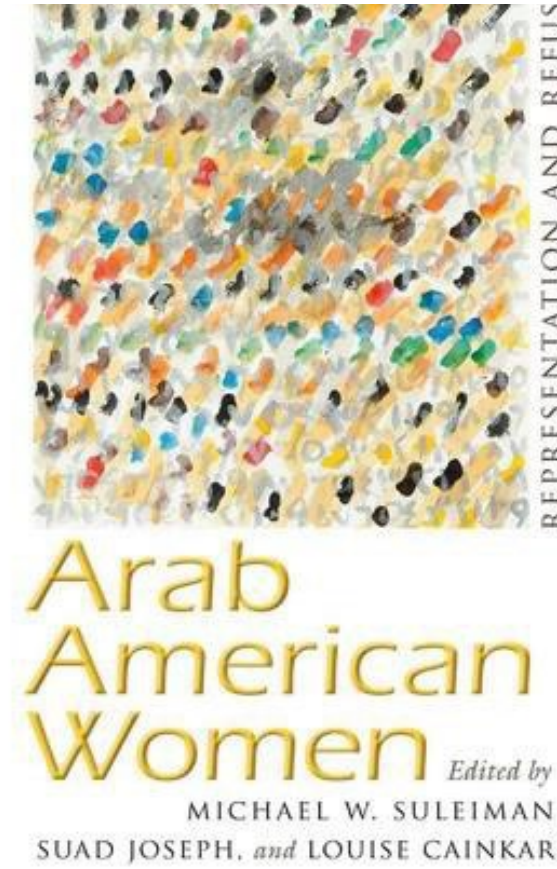
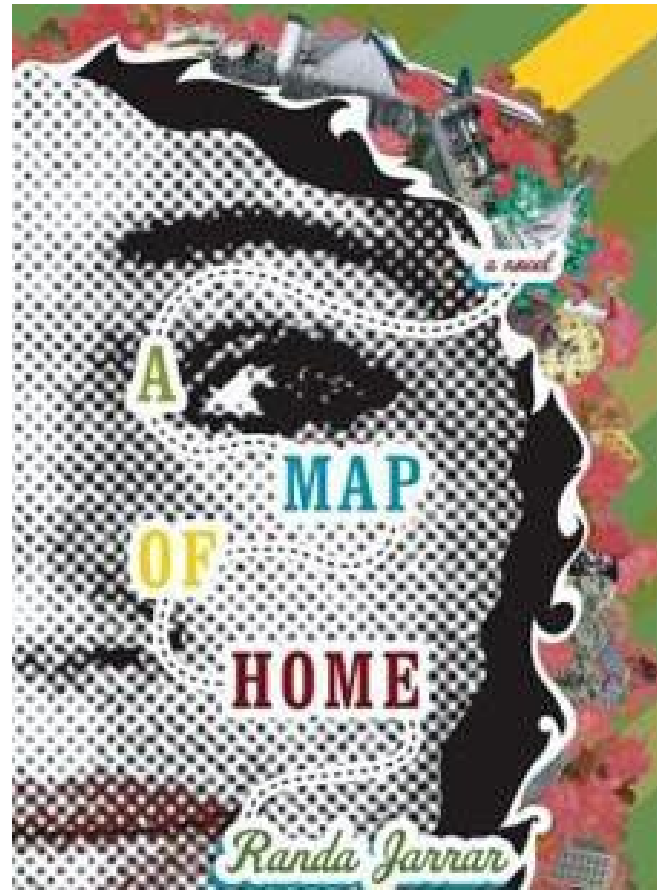
Arab American Labor Movements

- **1970: 1000 California Yemeni Farmworkers** attend a funeral march in Porterville, California, to mourn the death of Egyptian President and pan-Arab leader Gamal Abdel Nasser.
- **1973: Nagi Daifallah**, a Yemeni farmworker and union organizer is killed by police while protesting the arrest of Frank Quintana, picket captain for the UFW.
- **1974: UAW Local 1112 Detroit Arab Autoworkers Strike** to demand divestment from Israel and investment in worker wages, human rights, and social and racial justice.

[Source: Neama Alamri. Yemeni Farmworkers and the Politics of Arab Nationalism in the UFW. Boom California.](#)



UAW Pickets at Lordstown, Ohio in 1974. Source: Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University



Arab American Feminist Movements

- 1985: National Arab American Women's Association (NAAWA)
- 1986: Union of Palestinian Women's Associations (UPWA)
- 2001: Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA)
- 2005: Arab Movement of Women Arising for Justice (AMWAJ)
- 2020: Palestinian Feminist Collective (PFC)

Looking Back

Remembering Alex Odeh and the Los Angeles Eight

- All entered US on valid visas; students; activists; parents
- 1987 – “War on Terrorism Hits LA” – LA Herald Examiner
- “Secret Evidence” used to continuously detain and attempt to deport as “alien terrorists”



Forging Forward



- Support the MENA Category on the 2030 Census
- End support for authoritarian Arab regimes
- Halt US intervention, imperialism, and destruction in Arab countries
- Divest from Israel and invest in local Communities
- Affirm and uplift Palestinian truth and narratives
- Condemn the censorship of Palestinian activists, and reject the conflation of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism
- End deportations and imprisonment of Arab American activists
- Fund and support Arab CBO's and seek their direct input on policy matters that impact the Arab community.
- Defend the Arab American/Ethnic Studies curriculum, endorsed by UTLA, and implement it across K-12 schools in LA County
- Open doors to, welcome, and embrace Arab refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants and endorse sanctuary city initiatives that ban ICE policing of immigrants, and The Sanctuary Motion, which forbids information transfers from LA County to ICE
- End all racialized secret spying, surveillance, and criminalization programs including CVE which currently operates as PATHE and is a partnership between LAPD, DHS, and the Department of Mental Health in Los Angeles County
- Celebrate and make space for diverse Arab and Arab American identities and histories
- Support, listen to, and uplift young Arab and Arab American organizers



A Collective Praxis of *Sumoud*

Everything in this world can be robbed and stolen; except one thing. This one thing is the love that emanates from a human being towards a solid commitment to a conviction or cause.

- –Ghassan Kanafani



QUESTIONS?

Credit for content and slides due to Dr. Loubna Qutami
Asian American Studies, UCLA